

# **DEMOCRATIC PARTICIPATION FOR SERVICE DELIVERY IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN ZIMBABWE: HUMANISING STRUCTURAL CONFIGURATIONS AND LEGAL PROVISIONS**

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## **ABSTRACT**

**T**his paper explores democratic participation as a fundamental concept for improving service delivery in rural local government in Zimbabwe. The paper argues that it is vital to show commitment to the democratic process through implementable plans that compel councillors in Zimbabwe's rural district councils (RDCs) to involve communities in the service delivery process. The paper acknowledges that although Zimbabwe has arguably adopted commendable local government policies and has established appropriate structures for democratic participation, the practice does not justify the effort. The article also notes that RDCs tend to minimize or underplay the role of communities in service delivery and this has invariably led to uninformed communities and quasi-compliance. The article further posits that local effort and commitment to 'humanize' these policies and structures through mobilizing the ultimate beneficiaries of RDC action to participate in processes of service delivery has led to strategic policy designs, implementation and evaluation. It is also noted that RDCs should sensitize communities on the fundamental values of democratic participation and ensure that all council deliberations are premised on community input. Finally, it is argued in this article that councillors should be compelled to provide intelligible and timely reports to communities to keep the latter informed of council actions.

## **INTRODUCTION**

**R**ural district councils (RDCs) in Zimbabwe were established on 1 July 1993 during the Third Republic of Zimbabwe and thirteen years after independence in 1980. The RDCs represent all rural areas in Zimbabwe, a country which shares

its borders with South Africa in the south, Botswana in the west, Zambia in the north and Mozambique in the east. The 57 RDCs are expected to provide services of a local nature to communities within their areas of jurisdiction. They are expected to initiate and implement sustainable development projects for Zimbabwe's rural communities estimated at 65% of the total population. They are expected to ensure that the welfare of the rural people is improved to enjoy the good life which independent Zimbabwe should offer. Significantly, the RDCs are in charge of the grassroots people, characterized by poverty and all forms of socio-economic and political deprivation resulting from the colonial era, a situation that has not been addressed fully, twenty-five years after independence. The people have suffered through colonial marginalization where they were treated as reservoirs of cheap labour for colonial enterprises. This subsequently restricted them to the peasant mode of production. To make matters worse, rural people were denied access to fertile land, agricultural loans and full entry into the money economy. They were also denied participation in politics, access to education and health, and given an inferior citizen status, hence the continued existence of a dual economy whose integration to the mainstream economy offers major challenges for the country. The picture here is that of a dehumanized people at the mercy of the political powers of the day, even at the present, although there are policies and structures meant to humanise these communities.

RDCs are expected to take full responsibility for humanizing these people and enabling them to grow politically, socially and economically. The fundamental process of ensuring this is through democratic participation as an instrument for developing self-consciousness and enabling these people to take charge of their own development process. That government has adopted a policy of decentralization and subsequently established RDCs as devolved structures of local governance is insufficient. What is needed is, apart from national commitment, local effort by councillors and their officials to make these policies and structures work to emancipate local communities. It is for this reason that this article considers structural configurations and legal provisions and argues that these provisions are insufficient to enhance democratic participation and service delivery. Political commitment is required by both national and local politicians to involve communities in the process of service delivery in local government. This should be followed by the adoption of 'hands-on' action plans with clear time schedules to educate people on values of democratic participation and the need for the people to contribute throughout the service delivery process. Such plans should ensure that practice does not deviate from the intentions highlighted within policy parameters.

Democratic participation has become an important theme at both the national and local levels of governance in developing countries and Africa in particular. Its importance in Africa is highlighted by sweeping democratic reforms in most African states since the 1990s, the adoption of the Participation Charter, the reform of the Organisation for African Unity (OAU) to the African Union (AU), the adoption of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) and the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM). Both the NEPAD and the APRM are based on a number of fundamental principles and objectives. Two of these are particularly instructive for this work:

- the promotion and adherence to democracy, rule of law, good governance and accountable leadership; and
- broadening and deepening participation of all sectors of society in development.

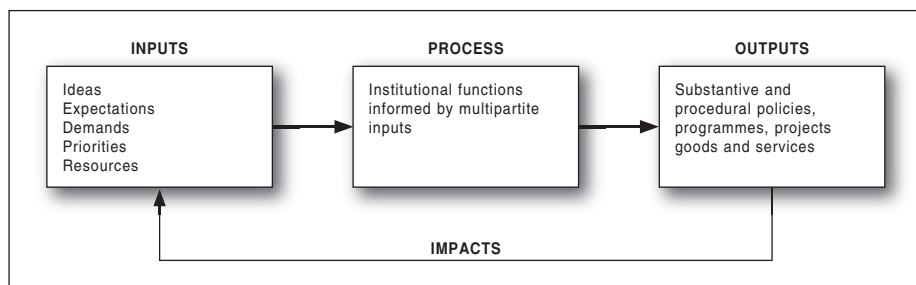
These principles are part of the driving force for astute local governance premised on self-determination. At the international level, donor agencies, international finance houses like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (WB), and governments of developed countries like the Group of Eight (G8) also emphasize among others, democracy and popular participation. Any developing country that does not convincingly apply the principles of democracy in its governance process may actually be denied such aid. The contention here is that African development cannot be achieved without adherence to democratic principles and deepening participation so that all communities are accommodated in designing a development roadmap and involvement in its implementation.

To facilitate these democratic sentiments many governments have adopted elaborate policies on decentralization. These policies have led to the institution of devolved local government structures to enhance local self-determination. Devolution, which essentially is democratic decentralization, is seen as the most extensive form of decentralization to enhance local initiatives and decision-making (Cameron, 2002:476). In fact, the overall thrust of decentralization is bottom-up development where communities dispersed within a national setting are given the opportunity to participate directly in matters that affect them. Thus, devolved local government is instituted to safeguard local decision-making and community empowerment. However, in spite of these legislative provisions, there is evidence that local government operations have not, in most cases, embraced the need to mobilize communities to take part in local policy formulation and programme design. Political and administrative local government actors have the tendency to go it alone with no regard for the need to bring communities on board so that decisions that are made are responsive to community demands. The result has been the adoption of policies and programmes insensitive to communities followed by an irrational and iniquitous implementation process. This has led to an unsatisfied clientele, resistance to local authority directives and actions (quasi compliance), and at worst, violent demonstrations.

## DEMOCRATIC PARTICIPATION

The concept of democratic participation as applied to both national and local government discourses has various meanings. In a more generic sense it can be understood to refer to the manner in which governmental institutions allow communities to take part in the decision making process intended to delineate their operations. It involves a multipartite approach to decision-making in the interest of all (Houston, Mpanyane, and Liebenberg, (1999:78). It is about incorporating the values of democracy in dealing with communities. It emphasizes institutional operations that are responsive to community needs thereby making sure that service delivery is consistent with community expectations. Thus, democratic participation involves going out to the communities to find out what their needs are and rationalizing these with institutional

objective conditions in terms of financial and technical capacity and then concocting a mixture of goods and services that have a community flavour. This analysis presupposes a systemic approach to understanding democratic participation. The following figure testifies to this.



## Defining democracy

The concept of democracy is explored briefly in order to enhance a full appreciation of democratic participation. As is evident, the term democratic participation is coined from 'democracy' and 'popular participation'. While many acknowledge the term 'democracy' to mean a form of government where the wishes and interests of the people are paramount, a more broader view suggests that democracy is a philosophy of life not only limited to governmental activity but that which guides humans and their relationship with others in the social, economic and political realms of life. It is an ideal which invokes tolerance of one another's ideas, acceptance of the capacity of individuals and groups to develop initiatives and to be innovative. It promotes the notion that acceptable action results from discussion, persuasion, bargaining and compromise to generate some modicum of mutuality and unanimity. This should not be taken as a one off incident but as a way of life to preserve the social contract of humans within any country or sub-national setting and even internationally for that matter.

Democracy is expected to promote rationality, morality, equality and liberty. Ramney (1971:76) reconfigures these basic principles of democracy to (1) popular sovereignty, (2) political equality, (3) popular consultation, and (4) majority rule. Thus, a democratic dispensation is expected to protect human rights and individual freedoms of which free expression and choice are critical components. It should also ensure regular and free elections and the promotion of public accountability (Thornhill, 2005:471). Above all, democracy should have a bearing on the rule of law, the equality of citizens and the sustenance of the principle of equality of opportunity (Kuye, 2005:3). All these become essential to protect humans and in order to enhance free interest articulation within societies full of diversities, be they ethnic, economic or socio-cultural in orientation. This means that local government institutions exist to promote the values of liberty, participation, responsiveness, equity and development (Blair, 1977:4-8; and Chandler, 1996:6-9). The values highlighted in legislative provisions, if internalized and acted upon, will ensure local democracy.

While it is highly essential to provide for democratic ideals in constitutions and acts of Parliament, the usefulness of the provision lies in political commitment to follow an extensive process of acculturation, to develop in people a culture of appreciation of democratic governance both at national and local government level. This is fundamental as a national priority because a country which is not sure of its political values and uses dictatorial tendencies in its governing processes is likely to find the same scenario spreading in its local institutions. This becomes a tradition of rule that would undermine democratic practices in that country inclusive of its local authorities. Democracy is also viewed as a value, process or practice.

## **Democracy as value, process and practice**

Nzongola Ntalaja's analytical approach to the concept of democracy is instructive in this article. In his analysis, Ntalaja (1997:5) indicates that democracy is a political concept premised on value, process, and practice. The value premise indicates that democracy is a moral value demanded by all freedom-loving human beings. It is an aspiration of all who want a better socio-political order that protects humanity and advances the interests of the latter. The thriving of individuals is to feel free and be able to strive towards a better life. Any regime that advances and protects this project is democratic. Democracy, as a value also encapsulates issues of tolerance of one another, acknowledging people's diversity and the ability of these people to coexist harmoniously amidst diversity. This is critical in rural local government in Zimbabwe where blacks and whites, the rich and the poor, and people of different ethnic groups are expected to coexist.

Democracy as a social process is viewed as the tendency of a political system to continuously promote equal access to fundamental human rights and liberties such as the freedom and right to engage in self-determining endeavours that raise one's consciousness to remake his/her world while acting within the confines of social parameters (Ntalaja, 1997:7). Thus, according to Ntalaja (1997:7), democracy becomes that social process through which people strive to expand these rights within a given political order and seek to promote and defend them effectively, in line with notions of the social contract of humans. It is acknowledged that most African countries have failed in this agenda. These countries have not managed to promote and expand human rights and freedoms. Economic development and social justice have remained an illusion. Self-determination is a far cry from being in place. People are inundated with programmes and projects emanating from political leaders. The communities are not given the opportunity to determine and pursue programmes related to their own priorities. Consequently, there has been a decline in the standard of living of the people, gross social inequities, and shoddy service delivery. The process of promoting the standard of living of people and addressing social inequities has now become a priority for democratic good governance and social stability both at the national and local levels.

Democracy as practice implies a way of organising and exercising power in a given polity. A democratic exercise of power hinges on legitimacy or authority emanating from the people; the rule of law where government power and authority are defined

to allow others space for socio-economic and political action; respect for other institutions of government like the judiciary; enhancing accountability; guarding the rights of citizens to participate in the management of public affairs; and protecting the rights of people to change a government that no longer serves their interest (Dye, 2001:13). The practice of democracy is expected to strengthen accountability and responsibility in service provision.

Combined, these three (value, process and practice) produce a holistic type of democracy cherished by all free nations. As can be seen from the definition, democracy as a form of government, a process, value, or as a way of life, encapsulates popular participation as one of its fundamental principles. This means that government action should be premised on policies preferred by members of society. As such, people should be given the opportunity to influence the nature and content of policy. All stakeholders in a policy issue should be mobilized or given discussion space to evaluate the issue at hand and provide policy options that they consider as suitable for dealing with the matter of concern. The legitimacy of a government is determined by the manner in which it reconfigures the decision space to generate popular input and use this to finalise both substantive and procedural policies.

## Popular participation

There can be no reference to democracy without reference to participation. The two are intricately intertwined, as a measure of freeing people and allowing them to determine their development process. Indeed, the heart of democracy lies in civil society. The words *participation*, *popular participation*, *community participation*, *people's participation*, and *democratic participation* are often used interchangeably in current development parlance. Popular participation is an active process through which beneficiary/client groups influence the direction and execution of a development project with a view to enhancing their well being in terms of income, personal growth, self-reliance or other values they cherish (Campbell and Marshall (2000:321). The focus of democratic participation is the benefit of users of services and acknowledging that 'those who feel it know it' and should be provided with the opportunity to make choices (Myers and Lacy, 1996:336). Popular participation involves a dynamic process of mobilizing communities to take part in the socio-economic and political activities of their locality or country, making them effective participants and beneficiaries of the collective decisions that have been made and implemented (Fitzgerald, McLennan and Munslow, 1997:120-121). This kind of participation focuses on involving people to contribute to the development process; involving communities in decision making in respect of goal-setting, policy formulation, planning, implementation of social programmes and projects and evaluating them; and allowing people to share equitably in the benefits derived from this development.

Popular participation requires an insightful infusion of its variants to the whole democratic process. These variants include information dissemination, consultation, involvement, collaboration and empowerment (Ababio, 2004:273-274). The World Bank (2003:20) forwards a more elaborate list of typologies, namely, persuasion, mobilization,

consultation, participation, collaboration, and collective action or empowerment. The next table explains each of these variants.

It is from these two (democracy and popular participation) that democratic participation is born. Democratic participation informs local government to accept democracy as a way of life for these local level institutions and that the participation of communities should be an indispensable phenomenon of this life. There is no room for manoeuvre. Both councillors and appointed local government officials should be aware of this and include such sentiments in their vision and mission statements. Acceptance of this humanizes and conscientises communities to be active participants in their own development. Thus, democratic participation implies active citizenship and ownership. It is part of civic engagement and citizenship, which is a major principle of good local governance. It captures the poor and marginalized to have interest in local affairs, to take control of local resources, and make decisions to utilize them in a sustainable manner (World Bank, 2003). Democratic participation should ensure a commitment to the provision of high quality services to the community; responsiveness to the needs of the community; representativeness of all sectors of the community; a commitment to the training and development of all public employees; and the entrenchment of democracy in the internal procedures of the institution and its relation with the community (Nel, 1996:7).

Democratic participation is expected to benefit all who are engaged in local government inclusive of communities, councillors, the local officials and ultimately, central government. However, this is not a fast process. It requires vigorous attempts by central government and local authorities to mobilise all forces of participation and gear them towards creating a conducive environment to ensure the attainment of this value.

Type of Participation	Action	Comment
Persuasion	ON – communities are informed and manipulated, but have no real input or power	A local authority (agency) tells people an idea/initiative to gain support. People are made to see reality the agency way. This is one way communication ( <b>information dissemination</b> ) where the agency manages or takes lead in the development process.
Mobilisation	FOR – others set the agenda and determine the process	The agency <b>involves</b> people in order to induce contribution of labour or funds to supplement agency resources and keep costs down. This is also done to increase people's sense of ownership and responsibility for maintenance.



Type of Participation	Action	Comment
Consultation	FOR/WITH – others analyse the information and decide the course of action	Communities are consulted to provide better information for decision makers. Account may or may not be taken of the views they present. Often consultation <b>increases decision input</b> and leads to more appropriate decisions being made.
Participation	FOR/WTH – citizens influence decisions and share responsibility for the outcomes but often the agenda is set by others	Communities have a say in decision making. All <b>share the responsibility</b> to make decisions but often councilors and public officials have more influence especially where expertise is needed and on strategic issues.
Collaboration	WITH – partnership, joint action, co-production: working with others to set priorities and participate in implementing on a basis of equality with other stakeholders	A local authority is bound by statutes and political commitment to give weight to the views of citizens, although so-called partnerships are often unequal. Participating communities are implicated in the outcomes and share risk that these might be different from those intended, thus they <b>share accountability</b> .
Collective action/Self management/ Empowerment	BY – being in control, little or no input by others	Communities decide for themselves and carry full responsibility. They are <b>empowered</b> . They may act without local authority input. The danger is that poor communities lack the resources to solve their problems without external support. This tends to compromise their power and autonomy.

*Reconfigured from World Bank, 2003:21. Decentralisation and local government support programme for Africa.*

## RURAL LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND DEMOCRATIC PARTICIPATION IN ZIMBABWE

It is significant to note that RDCs are third tier institutions in Zimbabwe lying below the national and provincial levels of government. However, they are the most significant and critical institutions for development from below. They are the engine of local development and hence, the heart of democratic participation. Trying to engage in Zimbabwe's development without mobilizing the local people to partner this process is to miss the point.



Historically local government in Zimbabwe was characterized by a two pyramid policy of separate development between blacks and whites. The polarization of local government was also reflected at government level where the two systems were assigned to different ministries. Rural local government for whites was under the Ministry of Local Government while that for blacks was under the Ministry of the Interior, also in charge of the police force. The reason is simple – putting rural local government for blacks next to the coercive instrument of the state for easy control. Rural local government for whites was participatory in nature while that for blacks was control oriented to make sure that blacks remain subjugated and subservient to colonial forces. Autonomy and participation were restricted to obviate assemblies for black resistance to colonial rule. Thus, the colonial legacy did not promote democratic participation and consequently it is independent Zimbabwe's duty to do so.

As can be observed, the arrangement was that each administrative district had two local authorities, one for blacks and the other for whites. It is noteworthy that this colonial set up prevailed for thirteen years after Zimbabwe's independence – 1980 up to 1993. The reasons for this are many but the main is a constitutional one. This period was part of the transitional phase of Zimbabwe's independence. The Lancaster House Constitution of 1980 (independent Zimbabwe's first Constitution), provided for a ten year transitional phase in which minimal change was to be effected on particular 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. Below is a diagram to highlight the evolution of Zimbabwe's rural local government system.

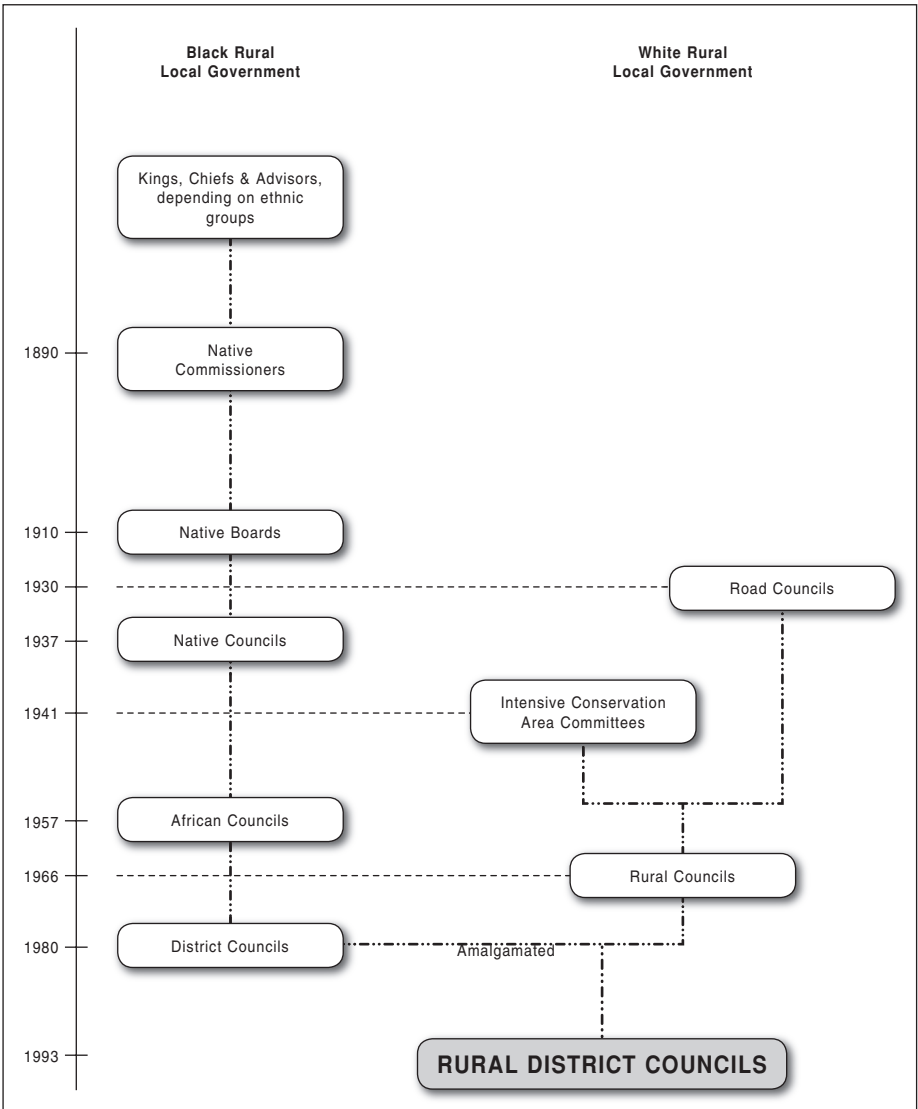
Democratic participation in Zimbabwe's local government system should be understood in the context of the first of the thirteen general principles of decentralization adopted by Zimbabwe. The principle states that:

- Decentralization is necessary and desirable in Zimbabwe since it promotes and strengthens democracy and civic responsibility, as it gives a chance to citizens to participate in their own governance and development (Nkomo, 1993:6).

The principle reaffirms the need to mobilize communities so that they can be partners in managing local affairs. This principle reaffirms the conviction that democratic participation is a critical component of the development process. It leads to community responsibility for poverty alleviation, rural restructuring and socio-economic growth. The involvement of different people in policy discussion can lead to the formulation and implementation of policies that are acceptable to all stakeholders. Democratic participation facilitates appropriate programme planning, project design and implementation. It enhances self reliance and self sustained development. Through participation people's confidence and self-esteem are raised. Power and government are also brought to the people.

The need to entrench democratic participation in Zimbabwe is amply illustrated by what is known as the Prime Minister's Directive. In 1984, the then Prime Minister of Zimbabwe, Robert Mugabe issued a directive to provide structural guidelines to Zimbabwe's development process. The directive stated that 'there was need for a comprehensive and more democratic system of involving people vertically and horizontally

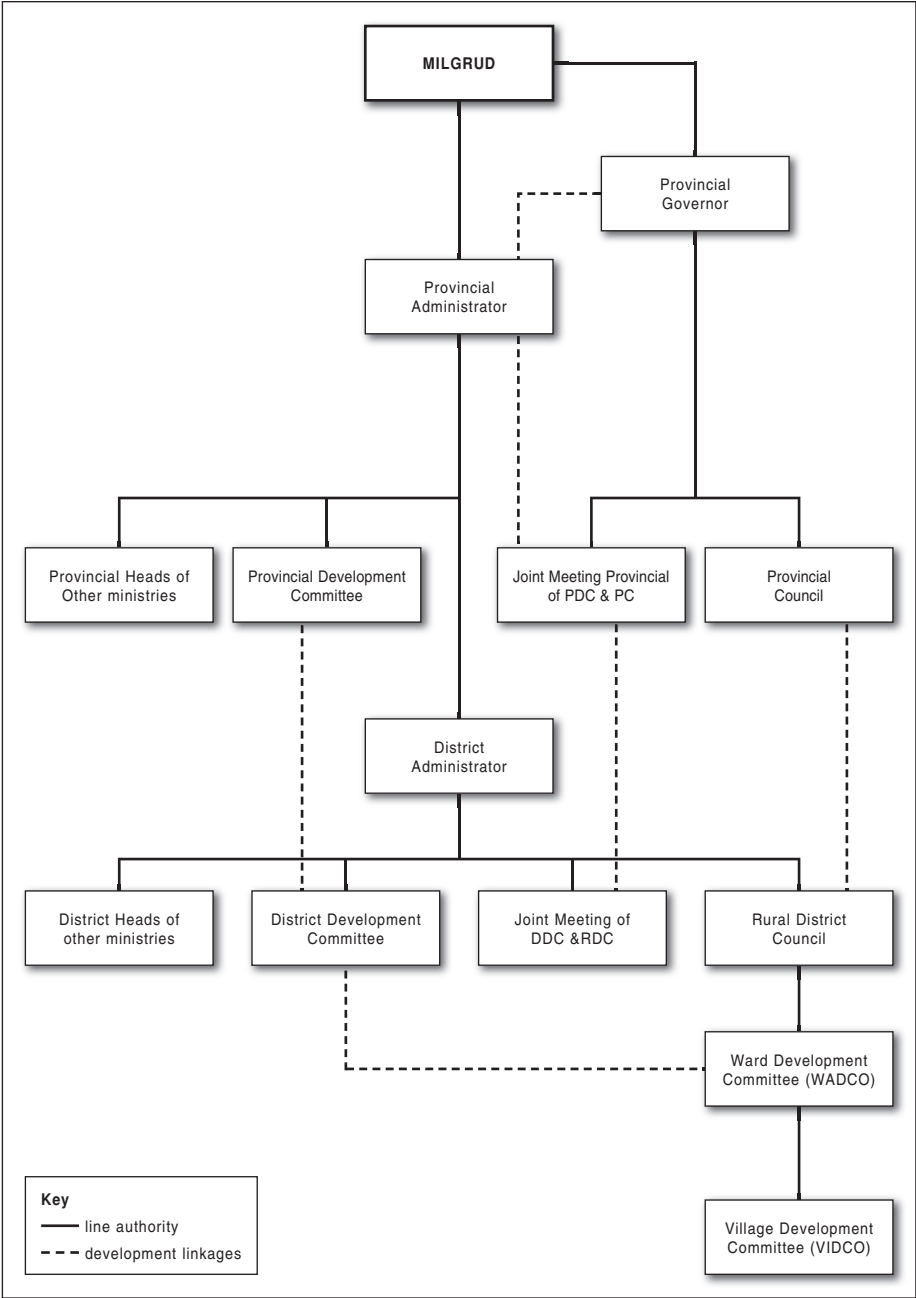
**Figure 1.1 Black and White Rural Local Government in Zimbabwe, 1890-1993**



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

in the process of planning and effecting their development, thus providing Government with a viable channel for receiving and assessing the developmental needs and priorities of the district, ward and village areas within the province' (Rambanapasi in Helmsing and Wekwete, 1993:123). This led to a local government structure as indicated in the following diagram.

Local Government Structure in Zimbabwe



Source: Nsingo, S. 2004:175. Assessing the performance of government institutions in Zimbabwe

As can be observed from the structure, Rambanapasi in Helmsing and Wekwete, (1993:123-124), indicates that the Prime Minister's Directive led to:

- The creation of the posts of provincial governors appointed by the Prime Minister from among MPs, but were raised to the level of Cabinet Ministers in order to give them the essential powers necessary for coordinating socio-economic, political and environmental development in the provinces;
- the creation of the Provincial Council to act as an engine room for the development of provincial policy; and
- the creation of development structures from village level upwards (Rambanapasi in Helmsing and Wekwete, 1993:123-124).

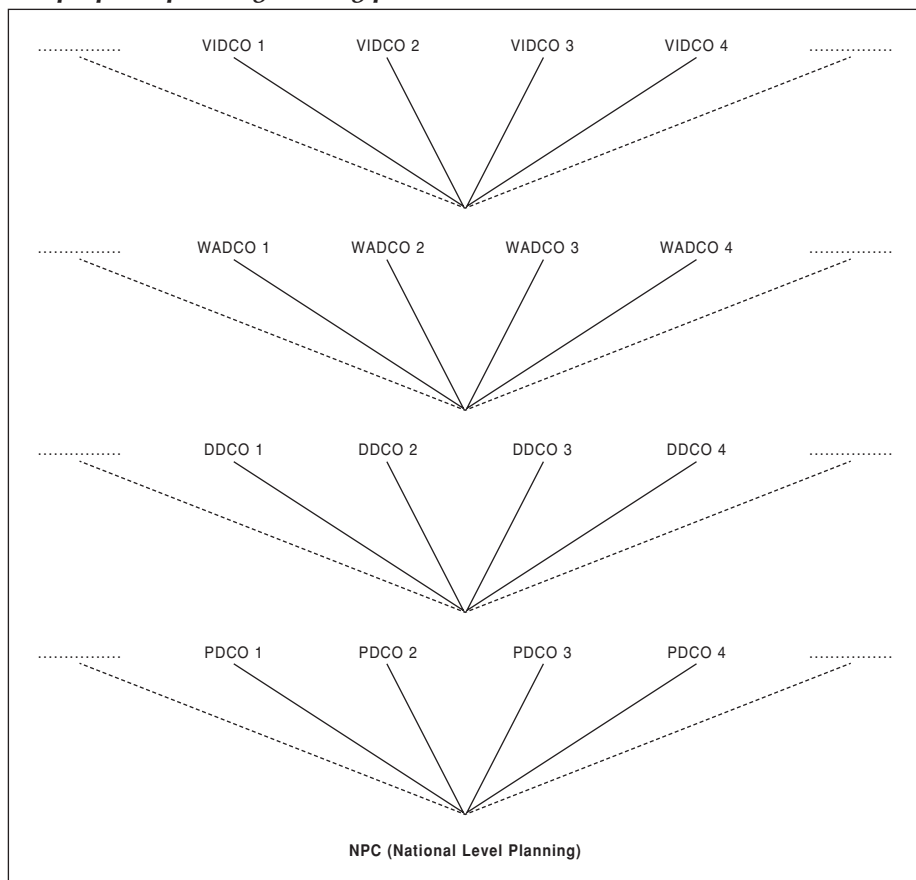
These structures are illustrated in the next illustration. It is significant to note that these structures provided government with a viable channel for receiving and assessing the development needs and priorities of the districts, wards and village areas within specific provinces. However, in spite of all this, it is common to find practices that minimize the role of communities in local governance. The argument is that communities are used to being dictated to and consequently, they have no interest in discourses that seek to get their views on matters of governance. Secondly, it is alleged that rural communities are ill informed and it would be a waste of time to try and mobilize them to participate in urgent decisions of service delivery. This has the effect of minimizing democratic participation in local affairs. Obviously, centralising structures cherishes such excuses in order to engage in power building for itself, which unfortunately exacerbates conflict between communities and the public officials and above all, undermines the rudiments of democratic participation.

The structure provides for the institution of comprehensive development structures from the village to the province. These are expected to facilitate grassroots participation and complement local authority effort. As can be seen in the diagram, the structures include Village Development Committees (VIDCOs), Ward Development Committees (WADCOs, District Development Committees) DDCOs and Provincial Development Committees (PDCOs). While the VIDCOs submit their community plans to the WADCOs, the latter submit them to the DDCOs and these are then sent to the PDCOs. Ultimately they are taken to the central planning agency, the National Planning Commission in the Ministry of Finance. A simple functional model of these structures shows that the GOZ made every attempt to establish structures for grass-root participation. Thus, decision-making on programmes and projects of a local nature are expected to originate from the grassroots. Grassroots proposals are expected to filter through the political system, being refined at each stage, until they get to the national level. This article illustrates this filtering process diagrammatically as shown below.

In this model, elected local structures are given the chance to participate in programme prioritization. Their functions include:

- identification and articulation of village needs
- coordination and forwarding village needs to the WADCO
- coordination and cooperating with government extension workers in the operations of development planning

## *The proposal/planning filtering process*



*Source: Nsingo, S. 2004: 225. Assessing the performance of government institutions in Zimbabwe.*

- coordination and supervision of all activities relating to production and general development of the village area and
- organising the people to undertake projects that require a considerable workforce.

The WADCOs are expected to be the central planning agencies for the VIDCOs. They are expected to consider critically the VIDCO proposals and to make appropriate recommendations to the DDCOs.

Apart from the structure that has been created and the decentralization policy framework with its democratic participation clauses, the RDC Act, 1996 (revised) provides for the election of councillors in each ward. The councillor becomes a representative in council for each ward (Part IV Section 28). Section 31(1) indicates that after RDC elections, the

Minister, by notice in writing addressed to the chief executive officer of the council concerned shall appoint such number of persons to be councillors as he/she may have fixed in terms of Section 11. Thus each council shall consist of:

- one elected councilor for each ward of the council area and
- such number of appointed councillors representing special interest, not exceeding one-quarter of the number of elected councillors, as the minister may fix in respect of the council by statutory instrument (part IV Section 31(11)).

This number may vary from time to time as long as it does not exceed one-quarter. Item (a) provides for democratic participation through the electoral process. However, this can be interfered with by those in higher echelons of political parties who may impose candidates of their choice. The result is a derailment of democratic participation. This is a common phenomenon in the politics of Africa.

The establishment of RDCs was a way of entrenching decentralisation principles and in particular, those of devolution in Zimbabwe's governmental system. This was intended to give people at the local level an opportunity to govern themselves and make decisions on the combination of goods and services that would enhance their welfare and make life good for them. Thus, RDCs were expected to raise the consciousness of local people so that they could realize that their socio-economic and political wellbeing lay in their hands, rather than those of central government officials and those at the sub-national levels. In fact, these officials were expected to respond to the needs of these communities and provide services in line with the demands, aspirations, and choices of these local people. As indicated earlier, this imperative humanizes communities, removes aspects of docility and hero-worshipping government officials and allows communities to take responsibility for their lives.

## CONCLUSION

Local development can only be meaningful to the local people if they are given the opportunity to participate in the determination of programmes and projects initiated to contribute to their development. This enhances compliance, legitimizes the programmes and projects and gives communities the opportunity to take responsibility for their own development. In spite of this, it is common to find councillors failing to mobilize communities for this imperative. Councillors also fail to provide the necessary political education to their people so that the latter can understand council functions and, the role of the community in the life of the council. Consequently, the RDCs should ensure that communities are conscientized and motivated to participate in the work of council through establishing and implementing programmes on the roles and functions of council. There should also be public education on these issues where discussions on democratic participation and community empowerment are highlighted. Communities should be encouraged to use the power of the vote in order to reward good performers and sanction bad performers (as far as councillors are concerned). This should be done in an enlightened and discriminating manner rather than selfish promotion of certain individuals at the expense of others.

During council meetings, councillors should always include an item on democratic participation and community empowerment on their agenda. This would give them a chance to debate on the issue and convince one another of its importance. Councillors would also feel duty bound to include such issues on their agenda when they address communities in their respective wards. Where council feels that it is incompetent to initiate such a programme, a consultant can be engaged to justify the advocacy of such an education and lay out concrete aspects that need to be focused upon. Needless to say that the success of this advocacy will require the cooperation and full commitment of all sections of the community (business groups, community based organisations, and those severely marginalized), council, central government and other stakeholders like NGOs who may assist in funding the programme.

Democratic participation in matters of policy can be strengthened by adopting policy discourse models. These make it imperative for official decision-makers to involve communities in what they do. These models would become a guiding or prescriptive frame where councillors would be asked to give evidence whether they have involved communities in arriving at decisions on issues they are presenting to council. For example, a councillor may be asked to indicate the ward or village meetings held to review particular problems; how decisions were made; how courses of action were prioritized as viable for dealing with a specific issue; and when these consultative meetings were held. Thus, rather than presenting a particular view as completely personal, the views of councillors should be rooted in the communities they are representing. The council can make follow ups through council committees to ensure that what councillors put forward is from communities rather than a mere fabrication.

Thus, for democratic participation to succeed in rural local government in Zimbabwe there must be local institutions such as CBOs and NGOs who actively encourage local self-determination. Democratic political parties operating at the local level and with a consciousness to educate the masses on human rights and fundamental freedoms rather than engaging in party promotion discourses all the time should also be present. There should be central government institutions that are responsive and accountable making it difficult for local authorities to act otherwise. Central government is also expected to empower RDCs through grants, loans and expertise. The onus is to build local capacity for RDC independence of action. There should be sustained councillor training to develop political leadership skills. This should enable councillors to have the conscience to mobilize communities for the development of a democratic culture in the wards and villages. This means that through democratic participation, RDCs should always try to satisfy the collective needs of communities, develop a mind set for accountability, social justice and quality service provision.

This article has argued that democratic participation is the core of good governance. This type of participation should not be assumed to be in practice at the national and local levels because of inherent constitutional and other legislative instruments. It should be seen to be practiced through overt action driven by governmental commitment to rudiments of democratic participation. This is also critical for NEPAD as it assesses progress on democracy and good governance at both the national and local levels. An assessment



of the structures and legal provisions would not be sufficient to make or even attempt to make remarks on the practice of democracy in any country that is being reviewed. What is needed is to check whether there is a vibrant society which scrutinizes government action, consults regularly and becomes progressively involved in matters of governance.

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