

Constraints in Implementing the Decentralization Policy of Zambia; A Case Study of Mambwe District.

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Abstract: The study investigated constraints in the implementation of the 2002 (revised 2013) national decentralization policy of Zambia. The overall research problem was constraints that caused delays in implementing the policy which was scheduled to end in 2010 from the time of its launch in 2002. The constraints that have caused implementation to go far beyond the scheduled time are not well established. This problem was tackled through identifying hinderances faced in implementing the policy. Constraints formed the independent variable which was measured to determine its relationship to the dependent variable which was implementation of the decentralization policy. The study is significant in that it provides in-depth knowledge on policy implementation, which may be useful in ensuring that policies are implemented fully and timely in Zambia and beyond.

The study findings were that there is lack of knowledge about policy contents and a weak legal framework. Furthermore, institutions are ill equipped and are therefore non-operational. There is a negative attitude by implementors (local government practitioners) towards the policy as major constraints in the implementation of the policy.

I. Literature review

Literature review included studies relevant to this research work drawn from within Zambia, other African countries and beyond. These included works by Sinjwala M and Malupande C, (2012) "Effort made to decentralize power and authority to local councils in Zambia", Bashaasha B, "Ugandan experience of decentralization" and Craig J, "Decentralization in India", among others.

Most of these studies made significant contribution to the understanding of some aspects of decentralization such as huddles, benefits, implementation procedures, role of donors, among others. The studies acted as points of references and comparison to this study.

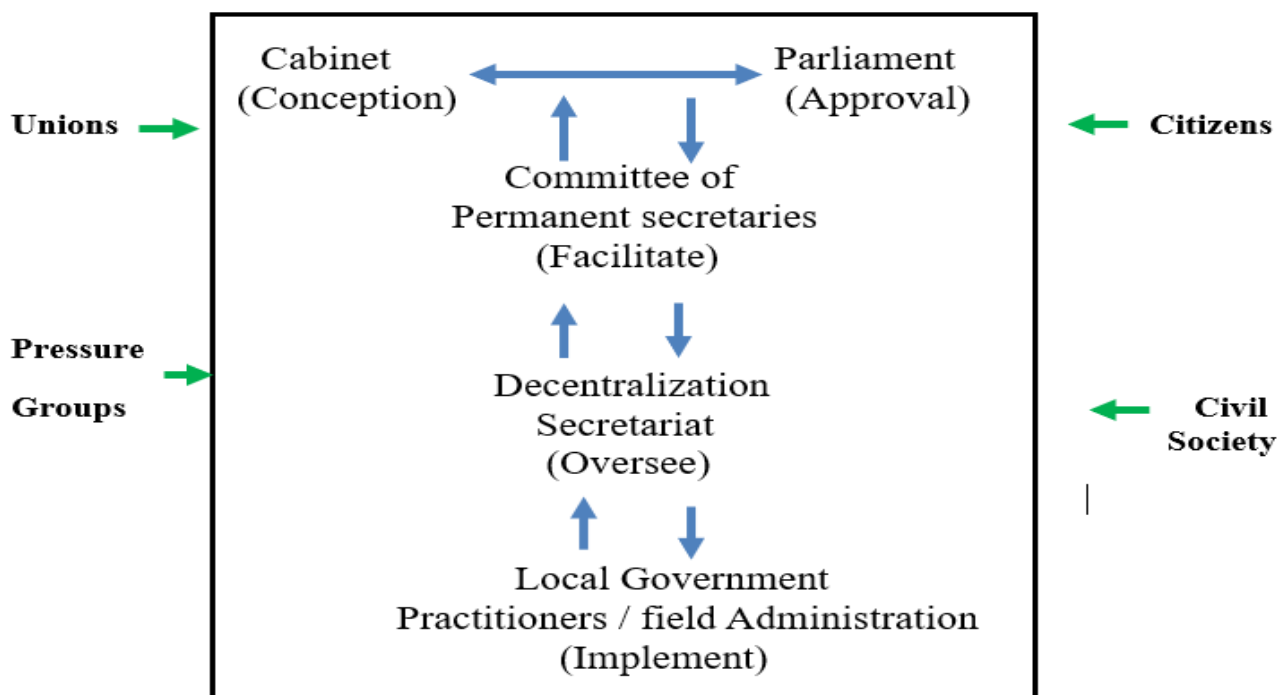
However, many of these works reviewed were cross sectional comparisons of several countries. They were thus too general and broad to be of specific use. They also lacked scientific methodologies of data collection and analysis. Others were conducted in an environment which was not neutral, as such, they lacked an in-depth search into the phenomena. Furthermore, many of the studies reviewed included samples that were either too small to be representative of the population or so large that they posed computation and analyzing challenges which may have affected results negatively.

II. Theoretical framework

The elitist approach was integrated in this study which is about finding out what constraints stakeholders face in the implementation of the decentralization policy to make devolution a reality in Zambia.

The interactions among stake holders in this regard are illustrated as shown below:

Elitist Model - Sketch Diagram



(Source: DIP, 2009)

In the conception and implementation of the decentralization policy in Zambia, the political and civil elite work as integral partners. Cabinet headed by the President conceived the decentralization policy through reviews of several Acts on governance.

Cabinet then came up with a committee of permanent secretaries from all sector ministries. The Cabinet represents political elites whereas permanent secretaries represent the civil elite.

The committee of permanent secretaries was put in place to initiate and facilitate the policy process of decentralization. The committee of permanent secretaries came up with a decentralization secretariat which had to do a revision of previous documents to come up with the current national decentralization policy.

The diagram shows that stakeholders outside the policy circle are affected or concerned with the policy process though not directly involved. The key implementers of the policy are local government practitioners, sector management officials, field civil servants and political leaders. These act under the instruction of central government. Other features of elitism in the decentralization policy process include the adoption of the policy document by Cabinet and the launching of the policy by the state President.

III. Methodology

The study sample included 115 respondents and 15 key informants, making a total of 130 subjects. Probability sampling methods used in selecting respondents included stratified random sampling and lottery methods. A non-probability sampling method used in selecting key informants was purposive or judgmental. The study adopted descriptive and explanatory study designs within a case study approach. This is because both qualitative and quantitative data were collected. Qualitative data were collected by desk research and oral, recorded interviews. It was analyzed manually by using narrative methods of deductive and inductive. Quantitative data were collected by self-administered semi-structured questionnaires and interview guides. It was analyzed by using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences and Microsoft excel soft wares.

IV. Results and discussion

Views of respondents on adequacy of the legal framework for implementing the decentralization policy

Findings

Responses	Respondents	Cumulative %
Adequate	60	53.00%

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Inadequate	43	37.00%
Not sure	12	10.00%
Total	115	100%

Source: Field data, 2023

Discussion

From the primary data presented in table 1.5 and figure 1.5 and contribution from various key informants, the legal framework for implementation of the national decentralization policy needs some reforms to make it conform to the implementation process. The five pieces of legislation, if properly amended, would be useful in facilitating devolution of power and authority from central government to local authorities and consequently to local communities. Some of these pieces of legislation, such as the village registration and development Act, need reinforcement. Some of the current policies and pieces of legislation were developed without devolution in mind. They are, therefore, at variance with the requirements of devolution, NDP (2013). Assessment of legal and regulatory framework for its compatibility with the policy needs to be done.

The legal framework for implementing the national decentralization policy in Zambia, though adequate, needs serious amendments, to strengthen it. In its present state, this legal framework is weaker and not able to support implementation of the policy.

Attitude of implementers

Views of respondents on attitude of local government practitioners towards the policy. **Findings**

Response	Respondents	Cumulative %
Very positive	35	27.91
Moderately positive	16	13.95
Less positive	14	12.09
Negative	47	40.8
Don't know	3	5.25
TOTAL	115	100

Source: Field data, 2023

Discussion

Data collected from

key informants and other individuals doing personal interviews revealed that the attitude of local government practitioners towards implementation of the national decentralization policy was negative. It was observed that most local government practitioners were not interested in the implementing of the policy. The district administrative officer for Mambwe noted that, most of the local government practitioners lacked seriousness in carrying out their roles pertaining to the implementation of the policy. Some local government practitioners interviewed explained that implementers were afraid of their portfolios due to low qualifications.

Others said the reason for their negative attitude was that they were not sure or did not know what they were supposed to do in their role of implementing the decentralization policy. In a one-on-one interview with some local government employees of Mambwe local authority, the district planning officer, agreed that there were some perceived fears among local government employees regarding implementation of the policy.

The fears included that the policy would fail and that there would be loss of employment, once the policy is fully implemented. Other fears included that the implementation of the policy may bring about unfavorable changes which may derail or waste resources. These fears have to be properly dealt with, so as to make the attitude of local government practitioners, who are the implementers of the decentralization policy, more positive.

Otherwise, the fears will affect implementation of the decentralization policy adversely. The negative attitude of local government practitioners is, therefore, a major constraint in the implementation of the decentralization policy in Zambia.

Other constraints in the implementation of the national decentralization policy in Zambia

Other constraints in implementing the decentralization policy.

Findings

Constraints	Total	Cumulative %
Lack of political will	30	25
Lack of training	5	3

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Lack of financial resources	21	18
Lack of human resource	5	6
Inadequate infrastructure	16	14
Asymmetric information	8	5
Change of governments	1	1
Creation of 'new' districts	1	1
Negative attitude of citizens	15	13
Lack of retention policies	10	8
Not sure	3	3
Total	115	100

Source: Field Data 2023

V. Discussion

In addition to the data from respondents, one key informant, an official at the directorate of decentralization at MLGH, disclosed that the delay in following the roadmap as stipulated in the decentralization implementation plan phases was due change of government. At the time when then DIP was finalized in 2009, the then ruling party, MMD, was relying on the (2002) national decentralization policy. However, in September 2011, MMD lost power to Patriotic Front.

It was the view of the new Patriotic Front government that, there should be a revision of the policy to take care of their manifesto and their vision for the country.

From 2011, therefore, the Decentralization Secretariat had to do a revision which was not part of the original plan. This caused a delay in the implementation of the policy.

A civil Society leader interviewed explained that there was lack of political will in the implementation of the national decentralization policy. He expressed concern that central government was not ready to let power go to the people at the grassroots through devolution. This is to safeguard the country's sovereignty and unitarianism. A parliamentarian interviewed cited failure by central government to adhere to calls to revise the decentralization implementation plan. Chipata central MP explained that the revision of the national decentralization policy makes it obvious that even the decentralization implementation plan should also be revised or else decentralization by devolution will not be realized, (Interview, January 2014). The Parliamentarian lamented that the newly created districts had no infrastructure and that many of them are not yet functional. All this has added to difficulties that central government is facing in making pronouncements on implementing decentralization, a reality.

VI. Recommendations

From the above findings and conclusions, the study recommends that central government should provide adequate information to all stakeholders on the implementation of the policy. Use of local languages in information dissemination on decentralization processes should be considered. Central Government should strengthen the legal framework that supports implementation of the policy. Adequate resources, human, financial and material should be provided to institutions involved in the implementation process to make them operational. The ministry of local government and housing should motivate, educate and train local government practitioners to make their attitude towards the policy, positive. The decentralization implementation plan needs to be followed strictly by all stakeholders.

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