

**DECENTRALIZATION WITHOUT DEVOLUTION AND ITS IMPACTS ON SERVICE
DELIVERY: THE CASE OF MASVINGO MUNICIPALITY IN ZIMBABWE**

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ABSTRACT

There has been a lot of talk about decentralization to lower tiers of the government as a means of allowing people to be involved in the day-day running of issues that affected them. The formation of local governments was a step toward this and it allowed local authorities to effectively run issues in their areas of jurisdiction. However, this process of decentralization created a lot anxiety among local authorities as they thought that this could allow them to make decisions that could allow them to effectively run their areas of jurisdiction. In Zimbabwe, the process had been heavily curtailed by the heavy presence of the government's hand in all sectors, as it continued to interfere with their day-to-day running of municipality affairs to the extent that there had been recentralization of authority in the central government. The local authorities had been reduced to mere technocrats who only come up with ways of running the local authorities and the central government had retained the authority. This severely curtailed the running of business in the local authorities reducing quality of service delivery they offer. Their services in waste management, social services, and other income-generating activities had been degenerating ever since and now they had reached unprecedented levels. This paper examines the impact of recentralization of authority in central government on service delivery in the municipality of Masvingo. The research utilized both the qualitative and quantitative methodologies.

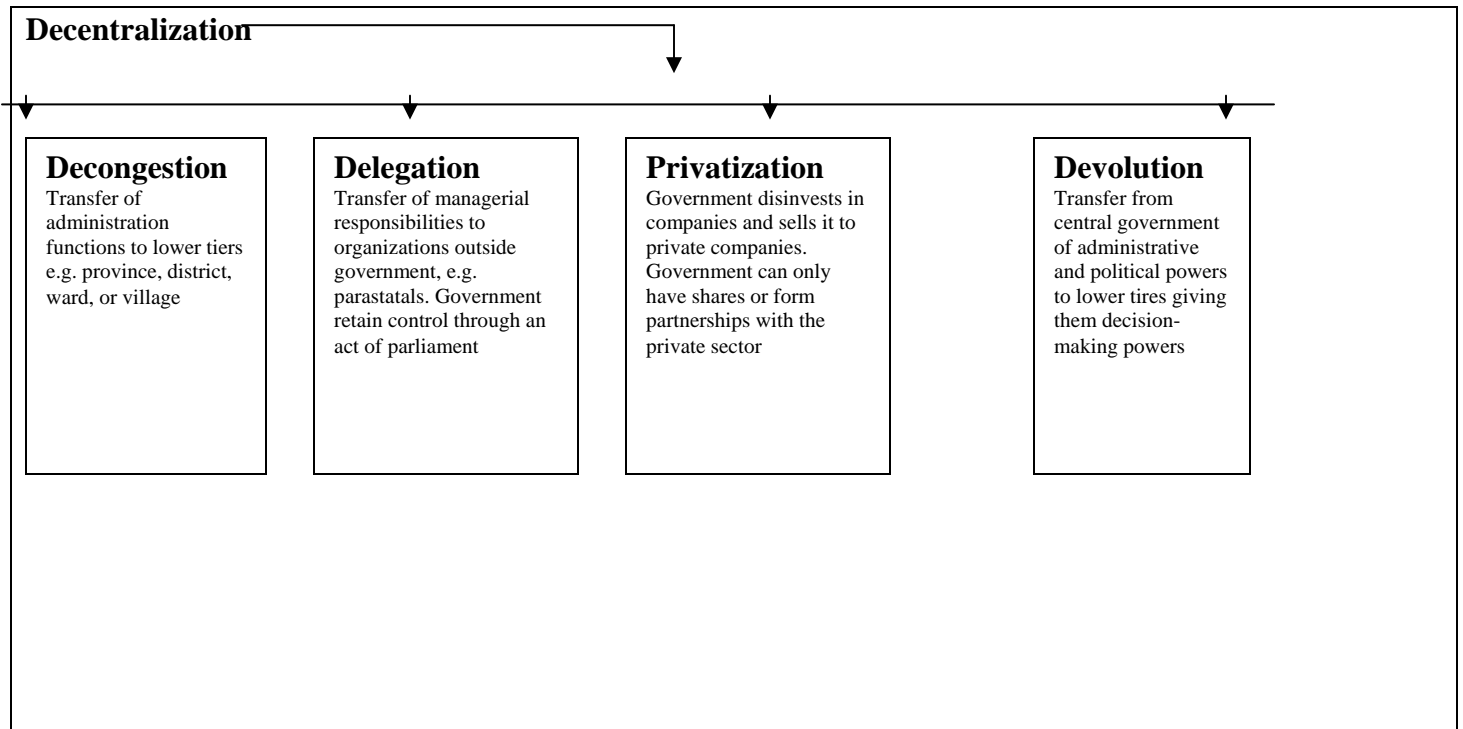
Keywords: urban management, decentralization, service delivery, urban development, local governance

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

The failure by most government, especially in developing countries, to offer public services to its citizens had forced them to introduce reforms in urban governance. The reforms such as decentralization and the concept of smart partnerships became the in thing in urban governance. These concepts were aimed to improve the coverage and range of services offered to urban councils. One of the integrated objectives was to improve the quality of services offered by local authorities. The concept was adopted after central governments were facing severe financial limitations and therefore prompted the downloading of some functions and responsibilities to local governments (Mathur and Prakash 1999).

The concept of decentralization can be understood as the transfer of legal, administrative and political authority to manage public functions from the central government to lower tiers of government, which can be at province, district, ward or village level. It takes various forms, which are decongestion, delegation, devolution or privatization. Decongestion is a form of decentralization, which refers to minimal transfer of administrative powers to the lower tiers of government while the central government retains the control of all the functions. Delegation is the transfer of managerial responsibilities to organizations outside the government ministries. These are semi autonomous organization in form of parastatals, which are controlled by the government through an act of parliament. Privatisation involves the shifting of powers and authority from the central government to the private sector. This can be done through selling of government shares in a company to private companies or can be done through forming joint venture between the government and the private sector. Devolution is the transfer of administrative and political powers from the central government to lower tiers. These organizations become semi autonomous but they have decision-making powers. In this context, decentralization is seen as the broader term, which can take either of the above-mentioned forms.

Figure 1: The Concept of Decentralization



Adapted from Kasere (1999)

The concept of decentralization rose out of the philosophy of rejection of the idea of elitism and is founded on belief of the important role of capacity of local people. Decentralization in Zimbabwe was adopted as a development strategy after the Priminister’s Directive of 1984. This pronouncement advocated for development plans to be developed from the village level through the ward, the district, province and then the national level. All these levels were recognized as important tiers of development.

This concept became the mode of governance after realization that centralized systems of governance were expensive, cumbersome, and inflexible. They slowly adapt to the new phenomenon of governance and most importantly are open to political abuse (Word Bank, 1997). There is very little space or no space in centralized governments for disadvantaged people to participate in governance of systems of the city. The option of decentralize was seen as the positive step towards poverty alleviation mainly because local authorities are closer to people hence are better placed to deal with the needs of their people. Their proximity to the people reduces the time to introduce interventions that are necessary to

alleviate the conditions people at the earliest convenient time. They can therefore give timeous and swift reaction to problems affecting their people.

Decentralization brings an important dimension of good governance i.e. accountability, and transparency. Their proximity to consumers of their services can easily make them accountable to them and compel them to be transparent. It is also important to note that decentralization can allow easy coordination between various government agencies, a process which is very difficult in centralized systems where agencies operate independently, which results in fragmented development (Mubvami and Nhekairo, 2006).

The concept of decentralization is a very important facet of development, which needs to be incorporated in the governance of local authorities. The thrust is a noble one and the only way of ensuring democratization and empowerment of people by their governments. It is an avenue to self-expression and if properly done can be the panacea for self-determination and the only way to ensure sustained growth to the people. It is the right step towards effective serve delivery. This efficiency can only be achieved if real power is devolved to the local governments (Usha, 1999). There should be relinquishing of power to them to achieve sustainable resource management and this can easy pressure from violent and frustrated citizens (Chirisa, 2008).

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The failure to give local authorities the required authority to run local authorities had severely curtailed the ability of local authorities to provide services to the people. The government had retained much of the power to run local authorities and this had adverse effects on the running of the affairs of the city. The central government had continued to interfere with the running city affairs and this had resulted in too much politicization of issues and this had resulted in deterioration of services in the city. Issues such as decay of infrastructure, reduction of range of services provided by the city and the reduction of quality of services are a potential disaster to the welfare of citizens of city. The government through the minister of local government and urban development had retained the power in all the dealings of local authorities. This had recentralized power again in the central government and this had reduced the

efficiency in delivery of its services. The research therefore seeks to find out the impact of recentralization of power in the central government on service delivery in the municipality of Masvingo.

Justification

The research is going to give information on the problems associated with partial decentralization. This information will help the central governments, local governments and other stakeholder in local governance. The problem of partial decentralization had made life difficult for local authorities that are finding it difficult to run their business because the central government continues to involve themselves in the day-to-day running of local authorities.

Aim and Objectives

The major aim of the study was to find out the impact on service delivery of continued involvement of central government in the affairs of the local governments.

Specific Objectives

- To find out areas where the central government still retains control in local governance.
- To assess the impact of this involvement in service delivery.
- To examine ways of alleviating the problem.

Research Methodology

The research utilized a multi-faceted approach to data collection in which both the qualitative and quantitative methodologies were employed. Semi-structures interviews and observation were the major qualitative methods employed in the research. The semi-structured interviews were done with key informants in the central government and local governments while observations were carried through transect walks around the city to find out the quality of service delivery on the municipality. Questionnaires were administered to the residents of the city to find out their perceptions on the quality of service delivery of the municipality of Masvingo. The data collected from questionnaires were analyzed using a computer package called SPSS and presented in frequency tables, cross tabulations and graphs. The data from interviews and observations was analyzed qualitatively and will be presented in descriptive analysis.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

History And Growth Of The City

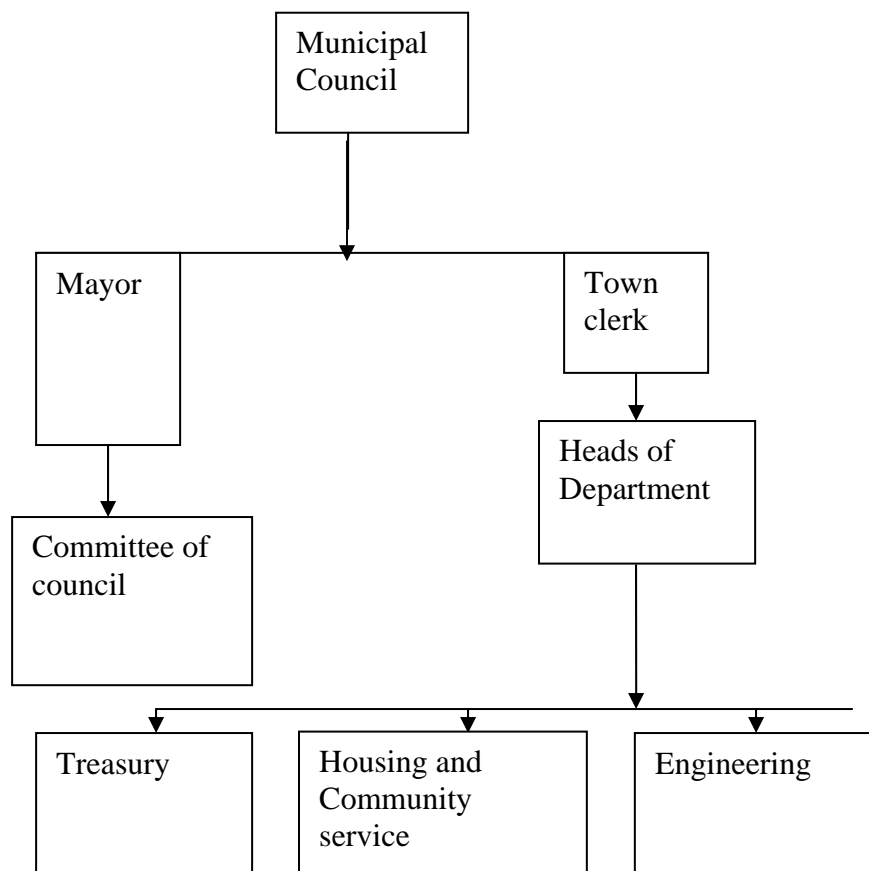
Masvingo is the oldest urban establishment in the country. It was established as a fort for the pioneer column during the occupation of Zimbabwe by the British in 1892. They named it Fort Victoria after Queen Victoria. The city had registered very slow growth rate mainly because poor resource endowment. The city is basically surrounded by primarily agricultural industries with a few mining ventures. The agro-ecological region is that which is characterized by poor rainfall and sandy soils which makes it not so productive agriculturally. The low veldt sugar plantations are the only meaningful agricultural activities that operate at commercial scale. After independence it was renamed Masvingo after the world heritage cultural center, the monuments of Great Zimbabwe. After independence the city registered some significant progress in development, which allowed it to be accorded municipal status in 1995. The city can now boast of expansive residential areas of close to 3000 0000 residential stands and its industrial areas had managed to attract very big industries such as Steel Makers, National Foods, Chibuku, Cold Storage Commission, Plate Glass, and several other small industries.

Space for Decentralization

The process of decentralization in Zimbabwe was made possible through the legislative framework which enabled the establishment of local authorities. The Urban council act (chapter 29:15) is the piece of legislation that allowed the establishment urban local authorities. It allowed the establishment of urban councils with statutory mandates to provide and operate public institution and services. These services include social service, economic, and certain latitude of political power. They can establish their own structures of governance, which principally have two arms: executive and the legislature. The executive is the technical arm while the legislature represented the political arm. The former is headed by the town clerk and it houses a cluster of departments which include the treasury, housing and community development and the engineering. The legislative arm is headed by the mayor and it consists of pool of elected councilors. The mayoral powers were changed from time to time from the executive to ceremonial this was mainly in respond to the prevailing political temperatures in the country. When the political environments are too volatile the power was easily changed to ceremonial, thereby reducing the powers of the mayor to make important decisions. However, the structure gives grounds for friction and clashed between the executive and the politicians with a potential of seriously affecting service delivery

in the city (Muhangi and Migusha, 2006). Figure 2 (below) shows the institutional framework in the running of the city of Masvingo.

Figure 2: Municipal Management Structure



The whole structure ensures that urban local authorities have both administrative and political powers. They can provide services such as housing, recreation, economic, and their ancillary services.

The Role Played by Central Government in Running of Local Authorities

The ideal role to be played by the central government from the decentralization frame is that of facilitator and enabler with very minimal supervisory role. This was done to give these local authorities their autonomy that could allow them to run local authorities more efficiently. The Urban Councils Act (Chapter 29:15) provided the legislative framework, which allowed the establishment and management of local authorities as semi-autonomous entities with both the administrative and political powers. The government, through the ministry of local government and urban development, can supervise them to

ensure that these local authorities are offering service to the standard set by the government. It was also supposed to provide through its fiscus an annual grant that would be used by these local authorities to run their affairs. The supervisory role of the government was of no major problem when there was only one political party ruling the country. The emergence of multiparty democracy and the subsequent gaining of seats in both house of assembly and local governments by opposition parties resulted in the need for central government to involve itself in the running of local authorities so as to ensure that they maintain their influence in urban areas.

The central government had moved away from its supervisory, enabling and facilitator roles to involve themselves in the day-to-day running of the city and this had changed the landscape of urban governance and had serious consequences of service provision in the city. The central government had requested all rates and levied charged by the city to be submitted to the minister for his scrutiny and subsequent approval. This was supposed to be preceded by wide raging consultation from the residents of the city. This was not only long but was also inappropriate for the time considering the economic environment prevailing in the country. The country was not only experiencing galloping inflation but was under an inflationary condition that had torn world records. At one time it had peaked over a quintillion thereby creating an economic environment that needs quick decision to be effected. On average, the whole process of consultation and getting the minister's approval will take three months and by the time the minister will have approved the rates they will have been superseded by the events and the rates will too sub-economic for any local authority to offer meaningful services.

The results of this were a severe curtailment of the provision of services by the city. The rates they were charging were always sub-economic and this compromised the quality of services they were giving to the city. The city had embarked on various capital projects which include the completion of Runyararo primary school, the water augmentation program, the construction of a trunk sewer to service Runyararo North residential areas. All these projects had been put to a stand still, some of them for more than 7 years now. The failure to construct the trunk sewer line had put to a standstill the expansion of Runyararo housing scheme, which was supposed to be allocated to more than 8 000 people. This was supposed to significantly reduce the housing waiting list, which is currently pegged at slightly over 12,000.

The water augmentation project was also put on hold due to the non-availability of funds to finance such a capital project. The sub-economic rates could not allow them to venture into any project. This was again exacerbated by the failure by central government to honor its payment of grants, which it used to and this money was used to supplement that collected from rates. Failure to carry out this project had resulted in water rationing, a thing that was never experienced in Masvingo except during the devastating 1992 drought. Water cuts are now the order of the day in the city and in some cases residents can go for more than 10-14 hours without water. The municipality had a very good reputation in the provision of water because at one time it received an international award for the best-run city, where its water and refuse collection systems were regarded as matching world standards. All this was thrown to waste because of the involvement of the central government in the running of the city. At present the city had tried to maintain the quality of water but the quantity had been severely reduced. Today water is cut in the evening and residents will get it in their pipes the following morning. The reduction of water had also resulted in a reduction in industrial production in some companies such as national breweries, a beer brewing company which is only managing to cover only 35% of its market share. The rural market is the one that is severely affected, as there are no more deliveries that are done.

The management of waste in the city has also deteriorated to unpleasant levels. There is no longer an available waste management system in the city, everything had crumbled. The city used to collect garbage on a weekly basis but at one time, the city went for three months without collecting garbage in the residential areas. Residents were resorting to throwing their refuse in all open spaces a system that was not characteristic of the city of Masvingo. The city's three refuse collection fleet was grounded for more than 4 months now because they could not afford to raise the foreign currency needed to buy their spare parts or to buy fuel to run the tractors donated by the Reserve Bank. This forced residents to dump refuse in all open spaces posing a health and environmental hazard to the city especially in light of outbreaks of deadly cholera disease. Now the situation has improved a bit they can afford to collect at least once a month. Some stakeholder who helped by providing fuel for the tractors to collect refuse and other who introduced waste management strategies at household level also helped the situation.

The government also introduced price controls throughout the country and this policy did not only have crippling effects on the national economy but also had disastrous effects on local authorities. The government started by controlling basic commodities (bread, meal-mealie, sugar, salt, cooking oil) and

then went on to control all consumables. Beer was also put under price control and the producers started to reduce production of the commodity due to viability problems. This severely affected the city council. This was the major cash cow of the municipality and the non-availability of the commodity severely strained their financial coffers. All the five outlets were virtually closed for some time because of none availability of beer in the city. This resulted in mushrooming of illicit brews in the city especially in old residential areas of Mucheke. Some unscrupulous rural people also tried to capture the market by bringing home brewed beer for sell in town. The result was to put the health of city at risk because all these brews were not done under no inspection of city health inspectors. Another city enterprise that was greatly affected by the government's price control was the brick molding project. The control of cement price led to many companies closing shops and this brought the brick molding project to a stand still. This was again one of the major city cash cow and the closing of the project meant another strain financially.

The government, after realizing that most local authorities were no longer able offer services to the people, decided to involve themselves in offering some of the services. The embarked on the project called "Garikai", which was a housing scheme aimed at providing low cost housing to the city. The built 90 two-roomed houses in Runyararo west and several trading shells around the city. This program created more problems for the city, mainly because government went on to allocate these houses before they were serviced; they were without water, electricity, and sewer services. This small residential area is not a potential health hazard, but poses a threat to the environment of the city because their only source of energy is wood.

The government also wanted to take the water provision function of the so that it will be run by a government department called Zimbabwe National Water Authority. This department had no capacity to offer such a service in urban areas. The department had failed to offer such service in district council. The attempt in Harare yielded disastrous effect as the city's water supply became riddled in so many problems. The impact of this in Masvingo was the shelving of major water augmentation programs that were supposed to improve the water situation in the city. No other city council was prepared to invest in any water projects because of the fear of this unplanned takeover which ad started in Harare.

CONCLUSION

The central government's involvement in the running of city affairs had brought in disastrous effect in the city of Masvingo. It had stretched its hand nearly all sectors of the city ranging from economic, housing and the political. The control of rates to be charged by the city resulted in dilapidation of services in the city; water, refuse and housing projects were severely affected. To compound the woes of the city the government went on to renege its responsibility to pay grants, which were used to run the city again this, crippled the city. All its capital projects were brought to a stand still and this had serious ramifications on the residents of the city. The city clinics reduced some of its services it was offering to the city. Some of the services such as maternity were no longer being offered by the city due to shortages of equipment to carry out such duties. Clients were therefore referred to private clinics or mission hospitals.

Government is not better placed to offer services to the city mainly because of its poor resource base, which is further complicated by the bureaucratic nature government systems. The local authorities are better placed to run their affairs because they are close to the people they should be allowed some greater autonomy so that they can effectively run their affairs. Government should stick to its statutory role of creating the enabling environment.

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