

A Drive Towards Decentralisation: Zambia's Success Story

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ABSTRACT

Zambia has been working towards decentralisation since gaining independence in 1964. Decentralisation involves the transfer of power and authority to local bodies separate from the central government. This has taken different forms - political, administrative (deconcentration, delegation, and devolution), fiscal and economic/market (privatisation and deregulation) - at various stages of the country's political history. These stages can be divided into three republics: the First Republic (1964-1972), the Second Republic (1973-1990), and the Third Republic (1991 to present). Each phase has contributed unique elements to Zambia's decentralisation success story. Political and administrative forms of decentralisation were first seen in the first and second republics. Political decentralisation was seen in the reform and development of the inherited provincial and district government system as part of the 1965 Local Government Reforms. Administrative forms of decentralisation were adopted after the introduction of the Mulungushi and Matero Economic Reforms of 1968 and 1969, respectively, through the creation of statutory boards to handle specific functions. In the second republic, the 1980 Local Government Reforms influenced the Zambian decentralisation project within the context of the one-party state, with minimal emphasis on devolution. The third republic was characterised by the enactment of the 1991 Local Government Act, with emphasis on fiscal decentralisation for effective and efficient delivery of services by local authorities. During the third republic, the path towards devolution is traced after strengthening the local government system. Economic/market decentralisation (privatisation and deregulation) was witnessed after a shift from nationalisation to the adoption of liberal policies in 1991. The decentralisation model in Zambia has seen, among other things, reduced central government involvement in carrying out certain functions, increased involvement of the private sector in the provision of public services, enhanced community participation in decision making and improved provision of services by local authorities.

Keywords: Decentralisation, Political Transition, Reform, policy effectiveness

INTRODUCTION

Decentralisation is one of the most important developmental policy strategies of our time. Countries throughout the world are implementing forms of decentralisation as they transfer decision-making authority,

responsibility, and resources from the central government to local and regional authorities. The importance of decentralisation in a country's development is undeniable. Decentralisation can significantly impact the entire aspect of life in the country concerned. According to Rondenelli (1981:137), decentralisation is the transfer or delegation of legal and political authority to plan, make decisions and manage decisions and manage public functions, from the central government and its agencies, to field organisations of those agencies, subordinate units of government, semi-autonomous public corporations, area-wide or regional development authorities, functional authorities, autonomous local governments, or non-governmental organisations. This article focuses on the implementation of decentralisation in Zambia.

Zambia has been working towards decentralisation since gaining independence in 1964. Since then, the country's decentralisation journey has taken different forms during the three political transitions marked by the three republics, the first republic from 1964 to 1972, the second republic from 1972 to 1990, and the third republic from 1991 to date. The varying forms of decentralisation witnessed during these phases include; political decentralisation, administrative decentralisation encompassing deconcentration, delegation, and devolution, fiscal and economic/market (privatisation and deregulation). The evolution of decentralisation in Zambia will be discussed taking into account how these decentralisation forms took shape and their implications on policy and governance. The analysis will also endeavour to transform the experiences into actionable policy lessons. The various forms of decentralisation adopted are as illustrated in the table below.

Table 1: Forms of Decentralisation in Zambia

	Political	Administrative	Devolution	Fiscal	Economic/market
First Republic					
Second Republic					
Third Republic					

Source: Authors own illustration

METHODOLOGY

This review article discusses the implementation of the decentralisation policy in Zambia, highlighting the major successes and challenges. The desk research methodology adopted involved analysing existing data from reputable sources like academic publications, independent consultancy and government reports, and reports from international organisations covering the period 1964 (when Zambia became an independent state) to 2025.

Theoretical Framework

The discussion in this article is guided by the assumptions of the localist theory which advocates for independent and autonomous elected local authorities (Wills, 2016; Ndukuwe & Ibietan, 2014). The first assumption of the theory is that for government to efficiently respond to diverse local needs and interests, it must itself evoke diverse responses (Wills, 2016). Based on this assumption, it is believed that independent and autonomous local authorities through devolution of power are critical to meeting local needs thereby inspiring local economic development. To achieve this therefore, there is need to transfer as many functions as possible from central government to autonomous local authorities.

Secondly, the theory argues for the extension of the influx of local decision makers and the deconcentration of political power. (Ndukuwe & Ibietan, 2014). Based on this assumption, the expectation is that local decision making must be enhanced if any meaningful local economic development is to be recorded. We expect

government to enhance mechanisms for community participation and empower them with adequate authority through deconcentration of political power.

Thirdly, the theory holds the view that, since the local level is closest to the citizen, this strategic placement makes it more responsive and accountable to the communities. (Wills, 2016; Ndukuwe & Ibietan, 2014). Based on this assumption, our expectation is that the local level, due to its proximity and ease of accountability, should be granted adequate autonomy through devolution to determine the local economic development of the areas under its jurisdiction. This theory therefore is generally oriented towards maximum decentralisation of functions and powers.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The literature shows that decentralisation is one mechanism which has been implemented globally. Decentralisation is, nowadays, a popular process worldwide (Brosio, 2000). Many countries around the world have been attempting for several reasons and with varying degrees of intention and success to create or strengthen sub-national governments in recent years (Smoke, 2003). Mudalige (2019) argues that various governments around the world have started decentralisation based on the principle of self-governance. Most governments have decided to use decentralisation to empower the local population for political, economic, social, management, administration and technology. Decentralisation of government and governance is an international phenomenon. As an international phenomenon, decentralisation has adopted many forms and been enacted at different spatial scales which are social and political constructs at national, regional/provincial and district/city levels serving primarily as avenues for national economic and social development.

International organisations such as the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, the OECD and the European Union generally strongly support the decentralisation of power, authority and resources from the centre to lower tiers of government. The rationale is that this process meets multiple objectives of increasing the efficiency of public services, improving legitimacy and accountability of political institutions and fostering the growth of local economies (Burki *et al.* 1999; World Bank, 2000; 2010; Ahmad, *et al.*, 2008). Internationally, we can identify a widespread, if heterogeneous trend towards decentralisation on the part of national government. While globalisation is frequently cited as a factor encouraging governments to decentralise authority, along with the growing complexity of the state and growing demands upon it, the variation of patterns of decentralisation reflects the variety of motivations and national conditions (historical, political, economic) in which it has been introduced (Rodriguez-Pose and Gill, 2005)

A large number of governments in developing countries have attempted to decentralise development planning and management responsibilities since 1970s. Decentralisation has taken a number of forms such as deconcentration of functions within the central bureaucracy, delegation of semi-autonomous or quasi-public corporations, devolution of local governments, and the transfer of functions to non-governmental organisations (Rondinelli *et al.*, 1983). The results have been mixed. In some countries, decentralisation has resulted in greater participation in development activities, more effective and efficient administration of local and rural development programmes, and expanded administrative capacity outside of the national capital (*ibid*). But nearly all countries where governments have attempted to decentralise, they have faced serious problems of implementation. Some problems arose from insufficient central political and bureaucratic support and others from ingrained centrist attitudes and behaviour on the part of political and administrative leaders. In some countries, decentralisation policies and programmes were inappropriately designed, organised and carried out. Nearly everywhere it was tried, decentralisation was weakened by the failure to transfer sufficient financial resources to those organisations to which responsibilities were shifted (Rondinelli *et al.*, 1983).

According to Cabral (2011), decentralisation reforms have been pursued throughout Africa over the last 30 years with the aim of improving governance efficiency and making policy more responsive to the needs of the local people, particularly, the poor. But behind these vocalised aims, political motivations are a major driving force as decentralisation has often been used to expand the power of the ruling elite to the local levels or to neutralise challenging forces emerging from below (Rondinelli *et al.*, 1983). Chaunga (2018), argues that the need for decentralisation in Africa has been attributed to the spread of multi-party-political systems that have

created demand for greater citizen voice and representation in decision-making. Major development donors have also pushed decentralisation as a pathway to improving governance and service delivery in African developing countries (World Bank, 2003).

According to Mufuzi (2019), Zambia's decentralisation process started as far back as 1964 when it had just gained its political independence. To counter the historically centralised nature of Zambian institutions and of political power being confined to narrow elite in Zambian society, the government has made decentralisation a key plank of its governance strategy (World Bank, 2019). This has taken different forms - political, administrative (deconcentration, delegation, and devolution), fiscal and economic/market (privatisation and deregulation) - at various stages of the country's political history. These stages can be divided into three republics: the first republic (1964-1972), the second republic (1973-1990) and the third republic (1991 to present). Each phase has contributed unique elements to Zambia's decentralisation and consequently to policy effectiveness.

Evolution of Decentralisation in Zambia from 1964 to 2021

Decentralisation in the First Republic (1964-1972)

Zambia gained independence from British colonial rule in 1964. At independence, the country inherited a governmental system whose structure existed mainly to serve the political, social, and economic interests of the minority colonial rulers and other white settlers. Siachisa (2020) argues that the policy framework for implementation was based on the colour-segregation ideology which was discriminatory since all institutions of governance were characterised by white dominance: hence even policies that were formulated and implemented were meant to champion the wellbeing of the whites and not the black people. This skewed administrative structure presented the first post-independence government of the United National Independence Party (UNIP) led by President Kenneth Kaunda with a daunting task of national-building through accelerated national development which could not be achieved without clear political, social, and economic policies and laws. Consequently, national development was to be pursued through various structural reforms on the political, social, and economic frontiers. One of the most important of these was the decentralisation reforms which were first birthed by the promulgation of the Local Government Act (No. 30) of 1965. Since then, the Zambian government has made several other attempts at decentralising various aspects of governance.

To realise the road to decentralisation, the post-independence administration changed the whole direction of the decentralisation effort to enhance the national spirit and move towards effective local government. Under the 1965 Local Government Act, Zambia witnessed political and administrative decentralisation. The Act provided for the abolishment of native authorities, accusing them of being instruments of the colonial past. This Act put in place a new system of local government at district and sub-district levels. In the new system, "three classes of councils were established: Municipal Councils, Township Councils, and Rural Councils" (Pelekamoyo, 1975:25). The differences between and among these council classes are that municipalities had a mayor and a town clerk, while the other two did not. Township Councils and Rural Councils had chairpersons and council secretaries, respectively. Mayors and chairpersons were elected political heads of municipal, township, and rural councils, respectively, while town clerks and council secretaries were administrative heads employed by respective councils. Municipal councils were, therefore, senior in administrative order to the other two counterparts. To further enhance local government and decentralisation, the Act provided for "democratically elected Councils based on universal adult suffrage" (Lolohih, 2008:3). The Act was also successful in establishing elected rural local councils out of the undemocratic tribal native authorities. In urban areas, the Act ended the colonial rule of tying voting rights in municipalities to a resident's possession of valuable property, which had effectively prevented Africans from participating in local elections as voters and/or candidates.

In anticipation of the rapid development of municipalities, the Act had a provision for transforming any municipality into a city council. Zambia witnessed some form of devolution when, under this Act, "67 local authorities were established: 24 were urban authorities, and 43 were rural councils" (Chikulo, 2009:99). These

local authorities were given several anti-concentrated functions that they were expected to perform under the watchful eye of the centre which reflects deconcentration as a form of decentralisation. Therefore, the Act gave local authorities some additional functions for them to deliver public services for local development.

The deconcentration of functions under this Act also introduced structural changes in the governance structure adding impetus to the drive towards decentralisation. The 1964 Act provided for the formation of Provincial Development Committees (PDC) and District Development Committees (DDC) in each province and district, respectively. The committees were given the task of coordinating the implementation of various development initiatives in their respective jurisdictions. For instance, the committees became agents for implementing and coordinating the country's First National Development Plan within their respective jurisdictions (FNDP) (1966-1971). This was done with the spirit of decentralising the coordination function where national development was concerned. In order to fill the void left by the abolished native authorities at the sub-district level, Ward Development Committees (WDCs) and Village Productivity Committees (VPCs) were formed in 1971 (Bwalya, 1984:73-87).

Village productivity committees, ward councils, and ward development committees were established under the Village Registration and Development Act (No. 30) of 1971. This made the village the primary focus at the district level. Under the provisions of the Act, a Village Productivity Committee (VPC) was established in each village, sitting under the chairmanship of the village headman (Bwalya, 1984: 100). The traditional structures of chiefs and senior chiefs reverted to what they were before the introduction of indirect rule. This meant the power to make decisions on development matters was given to the local governance structures and that there was now a clear separation between traditional establishments and government establishments. However, the two structures were expected to coexist to ensure speedy local development. The establishment of local level structures like the VPC and WDCs enhanced community participation in development at the local level.

The Local Government Act (No. 30) of 1965 was not the only tool driving the country towards decentralisation in the first republic, the local government reforms of 1965 an offshoot of the Act became a critical channel for decentralisation. During the 1965 reforms, the government came up with the policy of nationalisation, which was justified on the premise of locals' participation in the administration of their newly founded country. During the same phase, there was a rise of state intervention in the economy by the establishment of public enterprises as an effort by the Zambian government to decentralise through delegation. State intervention in the economy began in 1968 with what was commonly referred to as the Mulungushi Reforms after the nationalisation of the economy. The Mulungushi reforms were quickly followed by another series of reforms the following year (1969) known as the Matero reforms, which led to the nationalisation of the mining companies. Banda et al. (1994) observe that by the end of 1969, parastatal activities covered all aspects of business, including mining, agriculture, hotels and tourism, milling, brewing, housing provision, and construction; transportation, including airlines and passenger bus services; electricity and water; timber and wood products; and bakeries. Establishing the parastatal sector enabled the delegation of functions that would traditionally have been performed by the central government to bodies that were better placed to execute them. The delegation of these functions to parastatals that were present in almost all parts of the country played a critical role in spurring equitable national development through employment creation and enhancing citizen participation in economic development. The parastatal sector was also critical in creating an egalitarian society for the newly independent Zambia.

Decentralisation in the Second Republic (1972-1991)

Zambia entered a new era in its decentralisation drive when the country was declared a one-party participatory democracy on 13th December 1972. The Constitution was amended banning all political parties except UNIP. This granted the ruling party constitutional paramountcy over the entire state administrative apparatus (Chikulo, 2009). This change had far-reaching implications on the country's decentralisation agenda. The most defining of these changes was the enhanced collaboration between the party and government at both national and local levels the ruling party (UNIP) structures were merged with the government creating an integrated district administration. These changes were encapsulated in the Local Government Administration Act No. 15

a replacement of the Local Government Act of 1965. The major objective of the 1980 Act was to ensure the effective integration of the primary organs of the party and other local administration units in the district.

This change in legal framework resulted in a paradigm shift in Zambia's drive towards decentralisation. The newly enacted Local Administration Act No. 15 of 1980 had three principal objectives each having unique implications on the decentralisation agenda. "The first objective embodied the publicly expressed desire of the government and the ruling UNIP to decentralise power to the people" (Lolojih, 2008:4). Following the country's new political outlook as a mono-party system, the government had as its second objective the need to: "...ensure effective integration of the primary organs of local administration in the district. As a result, district party and council structures were fused. The third objective was to enable district councils to play a more direct and substantial role in the development process than they had been expected to undertake in the past" (Zambia, 1980: 127 and Mukwena, 1992, cited in Lolojih, 2008).

The actualisation of the second objective was attained through a fusion of all structures of the party and the local government system at the sub-district level (i.e. from the constituency down to the section). Effectively, the village productivity committees, ward councils, and ward development committees were fused with structures of UNIP at those levels to form district council structures. The district councils were, therefore, to perform two sets of functions: those assigned to them by the party and those assigned to them by the Village Registration and Development Act of 1971 (Chikulo, 2009). The third objective was particularly sparkly as it sought to convert councils into effective local government structures that could be used as an engine of local development, it envisaged that field staff of central ministries would work at the local level under the supervision of the district governors. The 1980 Act empowered the District Governor, a presidential political appointee to become chairperson of councils, with the responsibility for the overall administration of the council supervising all day-to-day functions of the council, the efficient and proper operation of all public institutions and parastatal organisations in the district (Zambia, 1980:106).

The second republic also witnessed the government's retaliation of commitment to 'decentralisation', when it renamed the existing Ministry of Local Government to the Ministry of Decentralisation, the new Ministry fell under the Office of the Prime Minister as opposed to being under a Cabinet Minister like its predecessor. This structural change in the implementing ministry had far-reaching consequences on the drive towards decentralisation. The Central, Local Government Administration, and Party Administration were fused through this Act. In this trinity, UNIP was supreme. The Governor, a political appointee of President Kenneth Kaunda, headed the integrated local government, performing political, administrative, and party functions. Following the recommendations of the Simmance Working Party of 1972, the governor was also the district council chairperson following the integration of the rural and township councils. The Act maintained the post of District Secretary as field head of central government at the district level. "The District Council was supported by Party Ward, Branch, and Section Committees. Local Government elections were [abolished and] replaced by party elections" (Zambia, 2002:4). The enhanced collaboration between the party and government translated to efficiency gains in policy implementation and monitoring.

Decentralisation in the Third Republic (1991 to date)

Zambia was ushered into the third republic following a constitutional amendment that lifted the ban on the formation of political parties. Following the reintroduction of multi-party democracy, a new Local Government Act of 1991 replaced the 1980 Local Administration Act in December 1991. The 1980 Act was incompatible with a multi-party system of government, hence its replacement with a more compatible 1991 Act. (Mukwena, 2001: 46). The new Act set the tone for what would be the most ambitious decentralisation taken in the evolution of decentralisation thus far, the Act was more democratic than its predecessor. The Act re-introduced democratically elected councils with local government elections introduced for the Mayor / Council Chairperson to replace a political appointee in the District Governor as political head of the Council. On the professional side, the Town Clerk/Council Secretary replaced the District Executive Secretary.

The third republic witnessed political decentralisation through the re-introduction of the democratic principle of universal adult suffrage affording every citizen who is a registered voter, an opportunity to stand for, or vote for the candidate of his/her choice, irrespective of political affiliation (Zambia, 1991b). The 1991 Act was a complete departure from the 1980 Act, since it brought major changes to both local government and provincial and district government. These changes had implications for the country's decentralisation drive due to the effects they had on the operations of field administration. Unlike the trinity witnessed in the second republic, the 1991 Act created a clear institutional divorce of the party structures from the council. The integrated role of district councils was abandoned in preference for a representative local representative government based on universal adult suffrage (Mukwena and Lolojih, 2002:218).

Other changes that came with the 1991 Local Government reforms included renaming the Ministry of Decentralisation as the Ministry of Local Government and Housing. Local government (i.e. local authorities) now fell under the new Ministry as opposed to the Office of the Prime Minister, while Field Administration remained under the direct control of the Cabinet Office. "At the provincial level, the Deputy Minister was appointed head of provincial administration and assisted by the Permanent Secretary" (GRZ, 2002:4). Additional structural changes were introduced through Cabinet Circular No. 1 of 1995 in the government introduced District Development Coordinating Committees (DDCCs) and Provincial Development Coordinating Committees (PDCCs) to coordinate development activities in the districts and provinces. The key function of the DDCCs was to "provide a forum for dialogue and coordinate development issues between the local authority, line departments, donors and NGOs in the district (Cabinet Circular No. 1 of 1995), while the PDCC was charged with the responsibility of coordinating development activities and preparing a development plan for the province based on the district plans.

Perhaps one of the most dominant features in Zambia's third republic in the 1990s was the implementation of the economic or market dimension of decentralisation through privatisation and deregulation. This was a paradigm shift from an increased role played by the state through nationalisation and establishment of state-owned enterprises to economic liberalisation giving the private sector a more prominent role in the running of the economy. Following the adoption of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) in 1992, the country introduced the Public Service Reform Programme (PSRP) in 1993, which primarily aimed to improve the quality, delivery, efficiency, and effectiveness of public services. Through delegation, the central government transferred responsibility for decision-making and administration of public functions to semi-autonomous organisations not wholly controlled by the central government but ultimately accountable to it. The delegated responsibilities were given to public enterprises or corporations, housing authorities, transportation authorities, regional development corporations, and special project implementation units. The policy implications were that there was reduced central government involvement in carrying out certain functions and enhanced autonomy in the operations of the parastatal organisations.

During the first and second Republics, Zambian state-owned enterprises failed to perform for a variety of reasons, including the: application of inappropriate technology; total dependence on the processing of imported raw materials; inexperienced management; misappropriation of resources by officials appointed by governments to run them, and; operation in monopolistic environments with no competition. The implication was that public enterprises were typically inefficient, which affected their financial viability, requiring the government to subsidise their operations. It should, however, be noted that state participation in economies at that time was widely accepted as the way forward. Most countries were nationalising some aspect of their economic activity, and even the World Bank looked at this approach favourably (Siachisa *et al.*, 2023). The failure of the parastatal strategy led the Movement for Multi-Party Democracy (MMD), under President Frederick T.J. Chiluba in 1992, to privatise many public enterprises.

Zambia was one of the countries that had earlier embarked on a major privatisation exercise as part of its economic reform program, which started in 1992. Although progress was initially slow, mainly due to the inertia associated with start-up activities and general opposition from interested parties, the programmes picked up momentum in the late 1990s, culminating in the rapid divestiture of public enterprises that many have compared only to privatisation programs in Eastern Europe. Siachisa *et al.* (2023) argue that the Zambian government implemented the privatisation programme to relieve itself of the pressures associated with service

delivery. The idea behind this was to bring in other economic players (private sector) to improve efficiency and effectiveness in delivering goods and services.

So far, the privatisation programme has been effectively implemented from its complete form in the 1990s to various forms of privatisation like contracts, government vending, franchises, grants, free markets, voluntary service, etc. This has contributed to the country's economic development by creating employment and providing quality public services and goods. Privatisation, as one form of decentralisation, has certainly been the driving force behind the changes and increased flow of huge foreign investments into the country. It is argued that foreign participation is often used to measure the success of the privatisation programme. The overall picture has emerged in Zambia, where foreign investors have moved into all aspects of the Zambian business. Privatisation has been coupled with deregulation by revising and passing various pieces of legislation by the government to create an enabling environment for foreign and local investors. Deregulation has reduced the legal constraints on private participation in service provision. It has allowed competition among private suppliers for services that previously had been provided by the government or regulated monopolies.

Decentralisation also took the fiscal dimension through the introduction of the Constituency Development Fund (CDF) in 1995. The fund was aimed at not only enhancing the fiscal capabilities of local authorities but also ensuring community participation in local development initiatives. The rationale for introducing CDF was to ensure that there is a shift of power, expenditure responsibility, and resources from the central government to lower levels of government.

Despite all the strides made towards decentralisation up to this point, Zambia operated without an official decentralisation policy until the first National Decentralisation Policy was formulated in 2002 under the theme, 'Towards Empowering the People'. The government identified the District as the focal point of development planning and service delivery. Pursuing eight objects, the policy was guided by a vision:

“to achieve a fully decentralised and democratically elected system of local governance characterised by open, predictable, and transparent policy-making and implementation processes, effective community participation in decision-making, development, and administration of their local affairs while maintaining sufficient linkages between the centre and the periphery” (Siachisa *et al.*, 2023: 18).

The policy sought to significantly devolve government to the districts through a new legal framework because the Local Government Act of 1991 envisaged a decentralisation model based on anti-concentration. According to the initial plan, the policy objectives were to be achieved by the end of 2012. To effectively implement the policy, the country came up with a Decentralisation Implementation Plan (DIP) in 2009. This pushed the policy's implementation deadline to 2013. Although its implementation was still underway, preliminary observations showed that its objectives were not going to be realised. There were two major challenges to the implementation of the DIP. Firstly, as of 2012, the Government had not yet made any significant amendments to the Local Government Act of 1991, meaning that the policy was being implemented without strong legal backing.

Note that the provisions of the Local Government Act of 1991, which was the existing legal framework for the National Decentralisation Policy of 2002, were inconsistent with the objectives of the policy. Secondly, the policy was nine years behind schedule, yet only one year had been added to compensate for the lost time. This was done without ignoring the policy's internal weaknesses, such as its silence on the organisational structure of the country's future local government system. The most explicit objective on this matter was to “provide a legal and institutional framework to promote autonomy in decision making at the local level” (Siachisa *et al.*, 2023:18). Since structures perform functions, it was hard to guess how Zambia would attain devolution without the necessary organisational reforms at provincial, district, and sub-district levels. To deal with all these lacunas, Zambia came up with the Local Government Act of 2019, NO. 2. Under this Act, Zambia has seen the devolution of Provincial and Central functions to the councils, enhancement of fiscal decentralisation, and strengthening of Ward Development Committees (WDCs) as instruments of community participation and employment of qualified manpower in local government.

Following the general elections of September 2011, which saw the MMD lose power to the Patriotic Front (PF), the Minister of Local Government announced a Revised National Decentralisation Policy in April 2013. The revised policy reemphasised the government's resolve to empower provinces and districts [to] manage their affairs for effective social, economic development ... [and to] promote the participation of chiefs and other traditional leaders in local governance and preservation of cultural and heritage, whilst respecting cultural diversity (<https://www.lusakatimes.com/2013/04/10/>).

There was also the creation of one new province and several districts by President Michael C. Sata, as it was observed that some districts were so vast that it was difficult to effectively and efficiently deliver goods and services in periphery areas. The creation of new districts was an effort to enhance deconcentration since it meant that the government would redistribute decision-making authority and financial and management responsibilities among different levels of the central government. So, in this case, there was a shifting of responsibilities from central government officials in the capital city to those working in regions/provinces and districts, and it created strong field administration or local administrative capacity under the supervision of central government ministries.

The country continued on the decentralisation path under the leadership of President Edgar C. Lungu from 2015 after the death of President Sata. Decentralisation took varying forms under the new leadership, while the creation of new districts continued, the major development of this period was legal reforms. For the first time in the country's history, decentralisation was entrenched in the constitution. The Constitutional Amendment Act. No. 2 of 2016; Part IX, Articles 147 and 148 gave full legal mandate to the implementation of the National Decentralisation Policy by devolution. This was critical in ensuring that the differences between the legal framework and the Decentralisation policy were harmonised thereby increasing the prospects for achieving the decentralisation agenda.

This era was also characterised by political decentralisation through the establishment of a fundamental change in the local government management model. The strong mayor-council model was introduced in September 2016, this model had a popularly elected full time mayor and elected councillors. The model has been critical in providing clear local leadership at district level, and it has enhanced the leadership accountability for lack of development in the entire city, town or district (Mukwena, 2020).

In 2021, there was a change of government from the PF to the United Party of National Development (UPND), which propelled a shift in the decentralisation process in Zambia. The devolution of power to the lower organs was a key governance approach. The UPND-led government, dubbed the "New Dawn Administration", aimed to operationalise the constitutional clause on decentralisation through the devolution of power and resources to the lower organs of government, the local authorities (UPND, 2021)

In 2023, the UPND Administration launched a revised National Decentralisation Policy. For the UPND Administration, the revised National Decentralisation Policy in Zambia was premised on the aspiration to attain the status of a prosperous middle-income nation by 2030. Through this revised Policy, the Government envisions "citizen-driven local governance within a unitary State for sustainable development" (GRZ, 2023:1). The policy was last reviewed in 2013. Since then, many developments have taken place that necessitated the revision of the policy. These developments included the amendment of the constitution of Zambia in 2016 to provide for a devolved system of governance and the expanded Constituency Development Fund in 2022 to enhance community participation in local development. The current UPND Administration's vision is founded on the Government's firm conviction that citizen and community participation in local governance is a key pillar for the country's socio-economic transformation agenda. This is evidenced in the government's efforts to strengthen fiscal decentralisation by increasing the Constituency Development Fund (CDF) allocation. Fiscal decentralisation has been actualised through a substantial increase in the Constituency Development Fund from K1.4 million in 2021 to K25.7 million in 2022 and K28.3 million in 2023, and further to more to K30.6 million in 2024 and to K36.1 million in 2025 (GRZ, 2024). This has demonstrated that the path towards the goal of a complete socio-economic transformation agenda of broad-based citizen participation is surely being achieved through this one key bold policy direction taken on by the New Dawn Administration under the leadership of President Hakainde Hichilema.

Chisala (2021) argues that fiscal, administrative, and political decentralisation enhances Local Economic Development through empowerment and better livelihoods. Various stakeholders have reported several success stories. For instance, the CDF has been used to implement the free educational policy through secondary boarding schools and skills development training bursaries. CDF has seen the construction of health, education, and water and sanitation facilities in most constituencies. In addition, roads, bridges, and police posts have been constructed and rehabilitated. Local communities have driven all these projects.

The implementation of the 2023 revised National Decentralisation Policy has endeavoured to build on the successes of the past implementation and seeks to address the challenges encountered. There has been an emphasis on community engagement, citizen-driven local development, inclusiveness in the implementation of programmes, and the empowerment of citizens to hold their representatives accountable for service delivery and local development. Siachisa (2023) observes that in Zambia, effective health service delivery at the local level can only be enhanced if there is sufficient decentralisation of central government powers, functions and resources to the lower levels of government administrative units and agencies. The Government's major strategy for strengthening devolution has revolved around enhancing the institutional capabilities of the local authorities to deliver services. This has been done by continued employment of qualified manpower in local authorities through the Local Government Service Commission (LGSC) and capacity building of human resources with cooperating partners. Due to the exhibited political will to actualise decentralisation, there has been continued financial and technical support from various cooperating partners like the German government and the World Bank.

CONCLUSION

The article has provided a detailed discussion on the success story of Zambia's drive towards decentralisation. The genesis of the story dates back to the post-independence era in 1964 to date. The decentralisation project has been driven in different forms, including political, administrative (deconcentration, delegation and devolution), fiscal, and economic. All these forms of decentralisation have been manifested at various phases of the country's political history. Political and administrative forms of decentralisation were first witnessed in the first and second republics. Political decentralisation is seen in the reformation and development of the inherited provincial and district government system as part of the 1965 Local Government Reforms. Administrative forms of decentralisation were adopted after the introduction of the Mulungushi and Matero Economic Reforms of 1968 and 1969, respectively, through the creation of statutory boards to handle specific functions. However, the 1980 Local Government Reforms in the Second Republic influenced the Zambian decentralisation project within the context of the one-party state with minimal emphasis on devolution but integrated the party, local and central government structures for effective implementation and monitoring of policies.

The third republic was characterised by the enactment of the 1991 Local Government Act, with emphasis on fiscal decentralisation for effective and efficient delivery of services by local authorities. During the third republic, the path towards devolution was traced after the local government system had been strengthened. Economic/market decentralisation (privatisation and deregulation) was witnessed after a shift from nationalisation to the adoption of liberal policies in 1991. This led to increased local and foreign investment in the economy since market decentralisation promoted private sector involvement in service delivery.

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