

Effort in Implementing the Decentralization Policy of Zambia: A Case Study of Mambwe District

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ABSTRACT

The study investigated effort in the implementation of the 2002 (revised 2013) national decentralization policy of Zambia. Mambwe District Township was used as a case for the study. In the background, consequences of delays in implementing the policy formed the problem situation. The overall research problem was determining effort made by stakeholder in ensuring that the decentralization policy is implemented. This implementation was scheduled to end in 2010 from the time of its launch in 2002. However, the process remained far from completion even way beyond 2010. The course for the delay and measures that were being taken to ensure implementation is completed are not yet well established. This problem was tackled through identifying measures taken in implementing the policy. Effort formed the independent variable which was measured to determine its relationship to the dependent variable which was measures taken in the implementation of the decentralization policy. The specific focus of the research was to identify measures taken to ensure implementation of the decentralization policy in Mambwe district.

The study showed that very little effort is being made to counter the constraints in implementing the policy. This is due to lack of central government commitment to provide resources to local institutions. Failure to follow the implementation process as outlined in the Decentralization Implementation Plan and weak political will towards implementation of the policy, among others. Measures taken include putting in place an implementation plan and relevant institutions.

Keywords: Decentralization, Policy, Local authority, Effort, Devolution, Constituency Development Fund.

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, “Effort made to decentralize power and authority to local councils in Zambia”, Bashaasha B, “Ugandan experience of decentralization” and Craig J, “Decentralisation 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.

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.

RESULTS

Political will:

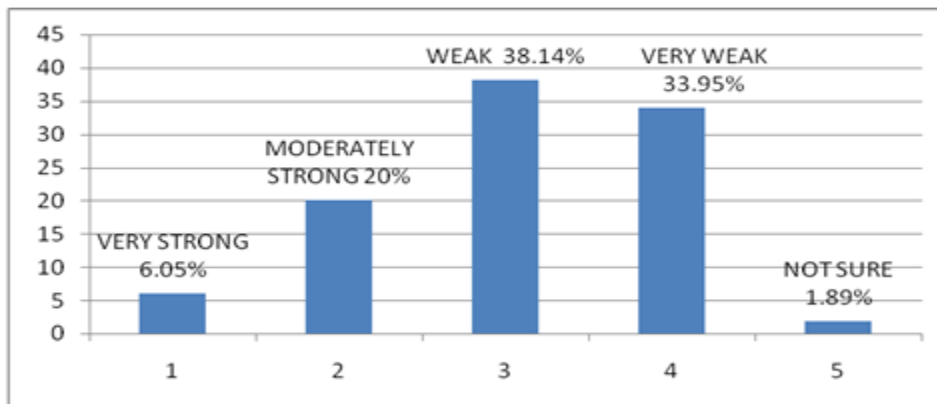


Figure 1: Rating strength of political will towards implementing the policy

Presence of a plan:

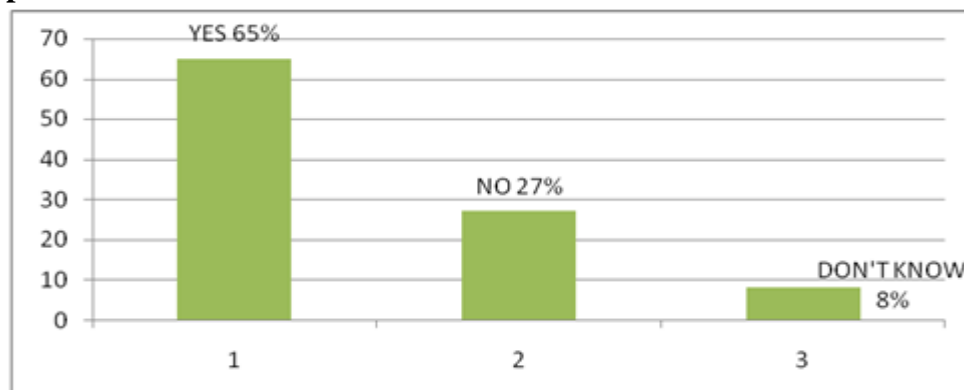


Figure 2: Rating of presence of decentralization plan

Sufficiency of institutions:

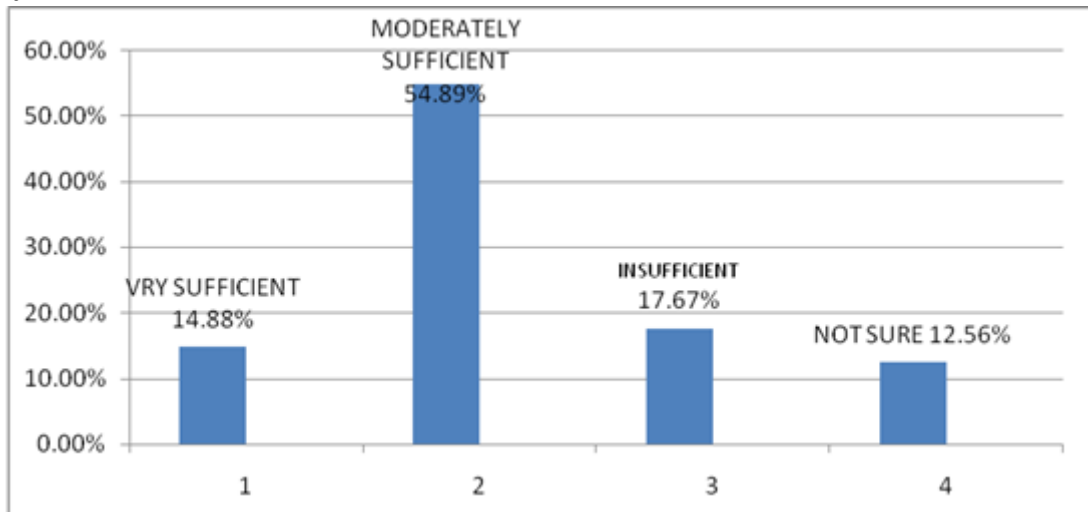


FIGURE 3: Ratings on sufficiency of institutions for implementing the policy

Resource allocation:

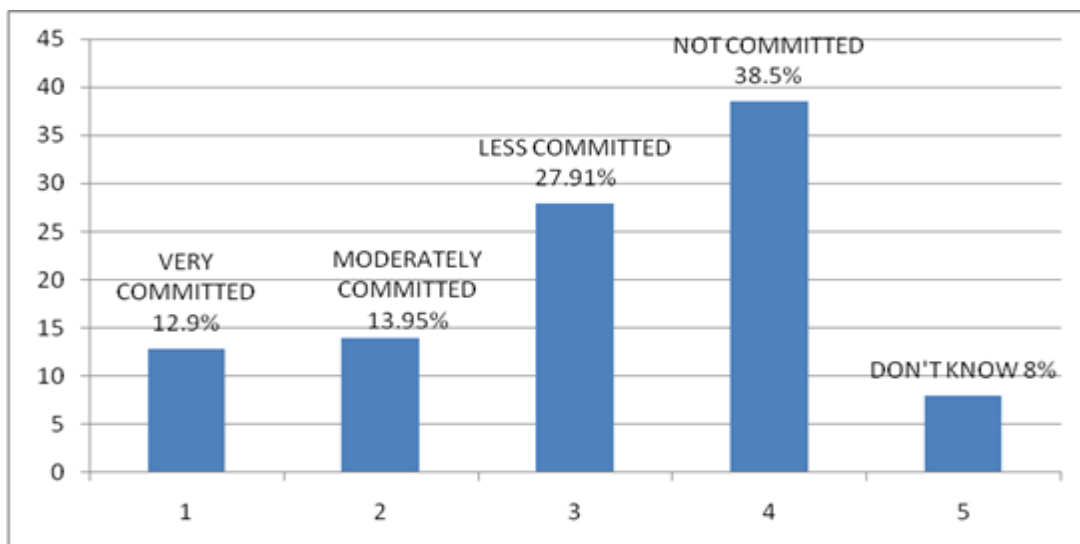


FIGURE 4: Ratings on government commitment in allocating resources to local authorities towards decentralization.

DISCUSSION

The research revealed that government has put in place a plan or roadmap for the implementation of the policy. Though clearly divided into three phases, movement from one phase of the plan to the next has not been smooth.

Even at the lapse of the 10-year implementation period (2002 to 2012), some components of the three phases are not yet attained. The major element yet to be tackled is fiscal decentralization. On the adequacy of the roadmap, 56% of the respondents said the plan was adequate and that if it is correctly followed, it can lead to a well decentralized governance.

On the strength of political will towards implementation of the decentralization policy, majority of respondents said it ranged from weak to very weak. Indeed despite the utterances by government officials,

there is very little on the ground to show that government is politically willing to decentralize power and authority to the level of devolution in Zambia.

This is evidenced by central government control of local authorities through the ministry of local government and housing and failure to do away with the office of the District Commissioner at district level. Decentralization has, therefore, been played as a political phenomenon, rather than a developmental tool.

On ratings of central government commitment to provide required human, financial and material resources to local authorities for the implementation of the decentralization policy, many responses were that government is either less committed or not committed at all. The evidence of this is the failure of sectoral devolution task forces to operate to full capacity due to lack of human, financial and material resources. These technical units do not have resources to carry out technical functions at district and provincial levels. Central government is not providing adequate financial resources at local levels so as to enhance implementation of the policy. It appears that instead of providing resources, government has been disorienting itself from councils and has been taking away some sources of council revenue.

Though effort has been made to provide information, there are a lot of grey areas that need to be clarified if functions must be devolved successfully from sector ministries to local authorities. It can be concluded that central government has made moderate effort to ensure implementation of the decentralization policy by providing an implementation plan, though it is not followed strictly. However, there has been very little effort made to sensitise the general public on the implementation process of the policy.

In the same vein training of existing staff on the implementation exercise has not been done and implementing institutions such as the devolution task forces are not empowered to do their work. The provision of required resources which is key to implementing the policy is not done. This omission has greatly undermined all plans and efforts at implementing the policy.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommends that central government should provide adequate information to all stakeholders on the implementation of the policy. Use of major local languages in information dissemination on decentralization processes should be considered. 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 implementation of the policy positive. The decentralization implementation plan needs to be followed strictly by all stakeholders.

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