Decentralisation and Rural Development: Is it a Policy of Empowering or Disempowering Rural Communities in Zimbabwe?

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Abstract:
The participation and active involvement of rural communities in their own development process is an essential ingredient in the realisation of sustainable development. The key is the empowerment of these rural communities through the policy of decentralisation in order to achieve desired social and economic goals. In Zimbabwe, the policy of decentralisation was introduced in 1984 through the Minister's Directive on Decentralisation and Development in order to bolster rural development projects amongst the local communities. This policy is a sharp contrast to the popular 'top-down' approach which emphasises on putting people first (people centred or oriented). In essence, decentralisation is a policy that seeks to reach the lowest or grassroots levels to ensure that their community needs are met or catered for in all spheres of life. This paper thus sought to evaluate the effectiveness of this policy in empowering communities to be actively involved in the development process of their own areas in Izimnyama and Empandeni wards in Mangwe District, Zimbabwe. A qualitative research methodology was used to get a deeper understanding of this phenomenon and get people's views and opinions on this policy and its subsequent impact on the empowerment of communities. 50 respondents were used as units of analysis and probability sampling was used to sample the population. The study found out that local structures such as VIDCOs and WADCOs were weak and did not represent the views of the people. Communities were not consulted by both the government and NGOs prior to the implementation of projects. Challenges such as economic stagnation, over-reliance on donor aid, poverty, undemocratic practices and political interference wee inhibiting factors in the empowerment of communities. This paper concludes that there is lack of participation and involvement of local communities in development projects in Mangwe District due to state interference and the influence of NGOs; making it difficult for local people to be empowered to take responsibility of their own development.

Keywords: Decentralisation, participation, empowerment, community, participatory development

1. Introduction

The concept of decentralisation emerged in the developing world since the 1980s as a policy geared towards addressing economic and political goals (Ribot, 1999). Several developing countries claim to be using decentralisation in facilitating and transferring political power to the grassroots level (Dillinger, 1994). Proponents and advocates of this concept believe that proper implementation of decentralisation can bring out the desired goals of efficiency, equity/ greater participation and the government's responsiveness to its own citizens (Agrawal et al, 1999). On paper, decentralisation has been deemed as an authentic tool that ensures communities to plan implement and lead the decision making processes of their respective areas. Crook and Manor (1994) on the other hand critic this policy by noting that it does not increase the powers of local authorities or peoples due to the lack or will to fully implement this concept on the part of many governments in the developing countries. This paper seeks to explore the effectiveness of the policy of decentralisation in empowering rural communities to participate and take responsibility of their own development process in Mangwe District in Zimbabwe.

2. Conceptualisation of Decentralisation

There are several definitions that have been brought forth by different schools of thought with regard to the understanding of the concept of decentralisation. The United Nations (1996) defines decentralisation as:

- the transfer of authority on a geographic basis whether by de-concentration of administrative authority to field units of the same department or level of government or by political devolution of authority to local government units, or by delegation to special statutory bodies (United Nations, 1996)

The main characteristic of decentralisation is the transfer of power from the periphery (government) to the centre (local communities) (Rondinelli, 1989). This process simply involves the empowerment of local communities to actively participate in the political and economic domains so as to develop their communities.

In his definition of decentralisation, Walker (2000) notes that this concept does not only involve the transfer of power but also resources and decision making capacity from the government to the grassroots level. In a majority of the cases in developing countries, resources remain in the hands of the elite and those with political connections at the expense of the local communities. Karanikolas and Hadjipanteli (2006) reiterate that the policy of decentralisation is a hotly debated issue in developing and developed countries. Rural development policies can be influenced by this concept as it involves various and numerous policy making areas (Karanikolas and Hadjipanteli, 2006). In addition, White (2011) argues that it can influence local governance and development through the active participation and involvement of the local communities. Such a notion is supported by KIT Development Policy and Practice (2013) which suggests that decentralisation encourages transparency and inclusiveness, enhances citizens' active involvement in local governance and allows the communities to be responsible for the development their own communities.

3. Literature Review

In many developing countries, development strategies and approaches were merely focused on a top-down approach ignoring the contribution and participation of the intended beneficiaries who in this case are the local communities (Wijayaratna, 2004). Many of the projects and programmes implemented by both the government and NGOs (third sector); were constantly failing to take into consideration the voices and opinions of the local populations. Wijayaratna (2004) further argues that there is a need to adopt the policy of decentralisation when the voices of the local people are not heard. In his opinion, decentralisation provides the leeway for local people's grievances and opinions to be heard. The latter is also echoed by De Visser (2005), who states that decentralisation has a number of facets which take different forms in different context and as such, it has been described as an ambiguous concept. This depicts that there has been a vast number of definitions ascribed by institutions and academics.

The main tenants or objectives of decentralisation include; transparency, efficiency, accountability and participation. White (2011) contends that decentralisation can be used to achieve sustainable development especially the involvement of local people in identifying solutions to address problems such as poverty. For instance, using Zimbabwe as a case study, decentralisation was introduced soon after independence, after the realization that the colonial administration had no community oriented mechanisms to reach the grassroots, projects were simply imposed on people they were not given any opportunities to plan or implement their preferences. In essence, decentralisation ensures that the local people are empowered and are brought together through one common goal, aim and voice.

The African continent still remains rural as reiterated by Neba (2011) despite various efforts to expand the urban areas and such a scenario calls for the proper implementation of decentralisation. In Zimbabwe, the majority of the population (more than 60%) is located in the rural areas as compared to the urban areas. Local governance in terms of accountability and efficiency should at the top of the agenda of many governments in Less Developed Countries (LDCs) so as to benefit the poorly disadvantaged rural communities. During colonialism, most of the rural areas where not developed due to the discriminatory and segregatory policies implemented by the colonial governments. For example, in Zimbabwe rural populations were settled in poor lands with poor soils where extensive agricultural could not take place and these areas were known as communal lands. In South Africa, apartheid abandoned the development of rural areas by pouring out resources that were aimed at developing the urban areas. Such initiatives are the major cause of the underdevelopment of rural areas during colonialism. Even after the attainment of independence in both countries, not much has been done to develop the areas and thus decentralisation is a vital and critical element in the development of the rural areas.

Ahmad et al (2010) contends that there are many development benefits that come along with the proper implementation of decentralisation. The provision of public services can be improved under decentralisation in areas such as health, water, agricultural extension and education (Ahmad et al, 2010). On the contrary Dabla-Norris (2006) over the past decade it has proven difficult to reform intergovernmental relations. This is due to the continuous political and economic reforms in most developing countries that are bent towards benefiting a few people at the expense of the majority of the population. The effectiveness of the policy of decentralisation relies on a number of factors, however, the most important and prudent one is based on political transparency and accountability to enable the transfer of power from government to the grassroots level.

The Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) (2006) argues that decentralisation should recognise the existence of other actors and structures so as to fully utilise on the benefits of this policy in terms of developing the grassroots levels. Too often than not many development projects in the local communities tend to benefit the elite instead of the local populations. Many projects are hijacked by the elite who assume representation of the local communities so as to have the control of the development projects for their own benefit (FAO, 2006). Therefore, there is a need for the local population to be in charge and take over their development projects.

Decentralisation policies in Africa, according to Rosnick (2012) are largely supported by foreign or international donors. The policies are aimed at giving the sub-national structures the power and autonomy to be heavily involved and participate in the development programmes or initiatives done in their own communities (Rosnick, 2012). On the contrary, Olowu (2001) is of the view that the decentralisation policies in Africa have by and large failed to empower the sub-national structures. Politics, the state and the market have been inhibiting factors in the realisation of decentralisation goals.

Decentralisation can be a panacea to rural underdevelopment. Through this policy local communities can be able to participate in local development projects which are aimed at reducing poverty. Subsequently such initiatives can be able to improve the standard of living amongst many rural households in Africa (Parker, 1995). Policy makers need to adopt sound decentralisation policies that can address the socio-economic conditions of the people residing in rural areas. Parker (1995) further argues that a successful program under decentralisation must include just the right combination of political, fiscal and institutional elements to improve rural development outcomes.

One of the main features that are an essential ingredient in the implementation of decentralisation is the existence and practice of democratic governance (Ministry of Regional, Local Government and Housing-Namibia, 1997). Democracy enables the participation of local people in development projects at grassroots level which goes a long way in achieving sustainable development. It is the prerogative of the state under democratic governance to share political with its own people at the sub-national level. This process makes it easy to identify the developmental needs of the local communities. However, most African governments do not practice democratic governance which has made it difficult for decentralisation to be fully implemented. Rural communities are abandoned developmentally at the expense of urbanisation or rapid urbanisation. Thus, decentralisation is monopolised at the national level which is a contradiction against democratic values that put the interests of the people first.

4. Forms of Decentralisation
The policy of decentralization carries within various forms of which upon analysis all conclude to the transferring of power from the top to the grassroots politically, socially and economically. This type of exercise encourages participation from the grassroots as well as making decisions regarding their communities respectively. Similar to the participatory development theory echoed by proponents such as Chambers (2002), Mohan (2008) and Oakley and Marsden (1987), decentralization has become an influential concept in planning of rural development projects as well as assuring that communities have received adequate resources for purposes of community development (Ozmen, 2014). According to Schneider (2003), there are multiple definitions that have been given by researchers but one critic is that they have all ignored the dynamism and different dimensions of the concept of decentralisation. The World Bank Group (2003) echoes the same sentiments about the multiple dimensions of decentralisation and that each country before it launches a development program or project has to put into perspective service delivery, administrative and financial systems. There are four main forms of decentralisation, namely; deconcentration, delegation, devolution and privatisation. Countries which have adopted decentralisation have not entirely all the forms but either two or three forms.

4.1. Deconcentration
Eryilmaz (2011) is of the view that, administrators in sub-national level have the power and authority to make decisions due to the transfer of power to them by the state or central government. In essence, power is still retained in government which has only transferred some of its authority to its officers in district and ward levels for the ease of administration. Using the case of Zimbabwe and South Africa as an example district councils or municipalities are the local administrators of an area acting on behalf of the central government. However, scholars have largely asserted that deconcentration simply transfers power from the state to its sub-national levels which constitutes of government officers in the provincial and district structures. It is the weakest of all forms of decentralisation (Rondinelli 1999).

4.2. Delegation
According to Schneider (2003), delegation transfers power from the government or state to local government structures which are not under its control but these semi-autonomous institutions are accountable to the state. The decision-making rests on the wide discretion of these local government structures and the state has minimal autonomy and influence.

4.3. Devolution
This is the transfer of authority from decision making, finance, and management to quasi-autonomous units of local government with corporate status (Rondinelli, 1999). Local government and municipalities in this case independently exercise their authority to elect their own leaders such as mayors and councils, exercise economic freedom by raising their own revenues and make investment decisions (Rondinelli 1999). This is usually the case in some developing countries i.e. Africa and Asia. Devolution when compared with deconcentration and delegation, allows the exercise of autonomy and influence of local structures over their own governance even though they remain accountable to the state or central government.

4.4. Privatising
Privatising according to Tatar (1993) involves the process of transferring some degree of public functions to non-profit organisations, private profit and voluntary organisations often through retaining them. Meanwhile, Manor (1999) views privatising from a bureaucratic notion; where power has to be transferred from bureaucratic entity to another or in some cases two colossal entities. It is

under this form or type of decentralisation that the government extends power to organisations that are beyond its influence and autonomy but indirectly controls the activities of the same entities. There is no direct influence of the central government.

5. The policy of Decentralisation in Zimbabwe: A historical perspective

The distribution of political power from the centre to the periphery is very vital in the development process of rural communities as eluded by Makumbe (1996). This is the simplest definition of understanding decentralisation. This concept is geared towards improving the livelihoods of rural households and subsequently rural development. Since the 1980s in Zimbabwe, the policy of decentralisation has been at the helm of development planning and management by the Government and other various actors with regards to improving the human and living conditions of local communities. All this can be achieved through reducing the power of national politicians as argued by Makumbe (1996). In Africa, most national politicians tend to be power hungry and corrupt which is a major challenge in the implementation of decentralisation policies.

Countries like Zimbabwe since the 1980s have introduced the decentralisation policy with the aim of promoting community participation and democratic governance in development projects and programmes (Hussein, 2004). The attainment of independence in Zimbabwe in 1980 was marked with several challenges which mainly included the ills done by colonialism that segregated and discriminated a majority of the Africans that were located in the rural areas. Thus, the government adopted a socialist ideology which put the people first in all facets of development planning and decision making (Makumbe, 1996). This was done through the enactment of the Prime Minister's Directive in 1984. Political power was distributed from the national to the sub-national levels through structures such as Ward Development Committees (WADCOs) and Village Development Committees (VIDCOs), Rural District Councils (RDCs) and Provincial Councils. The main purpose of these structures was to democratically govern local communities and ensure the participation of the local population in sustainable development projects.

Zimbabwe during the colonial and post-colonial period has experienced different ideologies and notions with regards to decentralisation and rural development. During the 1960s, the colonial government lacked serious community development planning especially amongst the areas where the Africans resided. These areas were known as native reserves which were created soon after the arrival of the colonialists in the country. Native reserves or Tribal Trust Lands which were later known after 1967 as Communal Lands or Areas (PlanAfric, 2000); did not offer any form of alternative livelihood due to the rocky, poor and infertile soils it possessed which were not conducive for farming (Malinga et al, 2017). Africans were not self-reliant and thus were forced to in the mines and farms of the colonialists to earn income to pay taxes and fend for their families. These areas did not offer Africans any form of self-government. In addition, Africans were not allowed to participate in their own development process.

The coming in of the Unilateral Declaration of Independence worsened the situation for the African rural areas. Mutizwa-Mangizwa (1985) argues that these areas became authoritarian and centralised during this period especially the power shown and dictatorial tendencies employed by the commissioners who were in charge of those particular areas. Local development was not at the forefront of the agenda of the colonialists as reiterated by Stonemen and Cliffe (1989). The main agenda was to keep central control of all resources, development projects and decision making. Major resources such as land continued under the hands of a few (whites) at the expense of the majority of the population (blacks). African councils that were created during this period were not united and geographically fragmented and Chiefs were highly recognised as the representatives of Africans and were paid officials (Mutizwa-Mangizwa, 1985). Thus, the 1960s posed a big challenge for rural based Africans who continued to be sidelined and excluded from development projects under the banner of colonialism.

The 1970s in Zimbabwe were marred with violence, war and conflict between the Africans and the white settlers. It is during this period that Africans were fighting for their liberation and independence from the oppressive rule of the colonialists. The liberation struggle as it is ideologically known in Zimbabwe mainly involved two liberation fronts; the ZANLA led military front by ZANU PF and ZIPRA led military front PF ZAPU. It is during this period that the guerrillas gained control some parts of the country that were under the influence of the white settlers. This militaristic approach by the black nationalists forced the colonial government to increase security in the widely dominated black rural areas. In its efforts to win the support of the black peasantry, the colonial government in 1976 introduced acts of parliament which were more inclusive in the development planning process by introducing the regional, master and local planning in rural areas (PlanAfric, 2000). This however did not yield with the continued and intensifying struggle for independence. This period just like in the 1960s continued to ignore the input and role of local communities in development initiatives although several steps were done by the whites to address this deficiency.

The 1980s witnessed Zimbabwe attaining its independence on the 18th of April in 1980. The new government declared its commitment to participation and decentralisation and restructuring of government at the local level. Engel (1997) reiterates that the first stance or steps taken by the government was the creation of new ministries such as the Ministry of Local Government and Rural and Urban Development (MLGRUD) and the Ministry of Community and Co-operative Development (MC & CD). The views and opinions of the villagers were supposed to be taken into consideration and development planning was supposed to start at that level as part of the efforts to ensure a deconcentration of central government activities (Engel, 1997). The government inherited by the new government of Zimbabwe was highly centralised and built on racial lines. Thus, the main agenda of the new government was to restructure the centralised governance system by catering for the needs of the sub-national levels in the local communities. This was also the period when the Prime Minister's Directive on Decentralisation was introduced in 1984 as reiterated earlier.

African Councils were transformed into District Councils and all local government structures became the responsibility of the Ministry of Local Government, Rural and Urban Development (Mapedza, 2008). In addition the communal lands which were under District Councils and the largely white commercial farming areas under the Rural Councils were amalgamated after 1993 into the Rural District Councils through the RDC Act No. 8 of 1988. The creation of RDCs ensured the transfer of power from the state to the

local levels of governance; a major characteristic of decentralisation (Mapedza, 2008). In addition, the role of RDCs included public service delivery to the local communities in the form of transport, water, housing, health and sanitation (Mapedza, 2008). The 1980s ushered in a period where the participation of local communities was vital in the development process of rural communities.

The 1990s witnessed major social and economic changes. Firstly, the government abandoned the socialist command economy and adopted the liberalised market economy (PlanAfric, 2000). This type of economic policy allowed the private sector to dominate the economy in favour of the public sector. Such a scenario was caused by the adoption and implementation of the IMF and World Bank led Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) in the 1990s (Mapedza, 2008). This policy triggered negative economic growth, high inflation, corruption, unemployment and reduced government spending on social services. This meant that local communities were deeply engulfed and entrenched in high poverty levels due to the cut in government subsidies which greatly assisted in the provision of social services such as health and education. Development planning was merely impossible and under threat during this period as the government abandoned the socialist ideology that had been dominant in the 1980s.

Economic stagnation in the 1990s paved way for International Non-governmental organisations (INGOs) to start operating and implementing development projects in the rural areas in Zimbabwe. NGOs operating in the various local communities across the country simply intervened to fill in the loopholes left by the government which could no longer provide social services for its own people. However, one critic of these NGOs was that they implemented projects prior to the consultation of the local people. In simply words, a top-down approach was used by NGOs in the implementation of projects. This was contrary to the work already done by the Government in terms of involving the grassroots level in their own development. It is during this period in the 1990s that the terms such as empowerment, decision making, participation and involvement started to become prominent in decentralisation literature in Zimbabwe. Consequently, decentralisation is mainly premised on the active involvement of rural folks in their own development. Basically it is a bottom-up approach concept that involves communities in their own development.

6. Study area, Research Methodology and Data Collection

Mangwe is located in the Matabeleland South Province in Zimbabwe and it is bordered by Bulilima District to the North and West, Matobo to the South East and Botswana to the West. The map below (Figure 1) shows the geographical location of Mangwe District and its subsequent division of the wards within the district. The district is part of the formerly known district Bulilimamangwe which was later split into Bulilima and Mangwe Districts respectively. There are 12 wards in the district and according to ZimStats (2012) the population of Mangwe District is 66 218 with males constituting 31 159 and Females 35 059. The district falls under regions 4 and 5 in Zimbabwe which is the driest part of the country and it is not conducive for farming but for drought resistant crops, conservation farming, wildlife and livestock rearing. It is a rural district with the nearest town being Plumtree which is popularly known as a border town since it is a few kms away from the Zimbabwe-Botswana border. The district is largely dominated by the Kalanga speaking people while the Ndebele language is also common due to the migration of people to these areas. The research was done in the two wards of Izimnyama and Empandeni wards within the district.
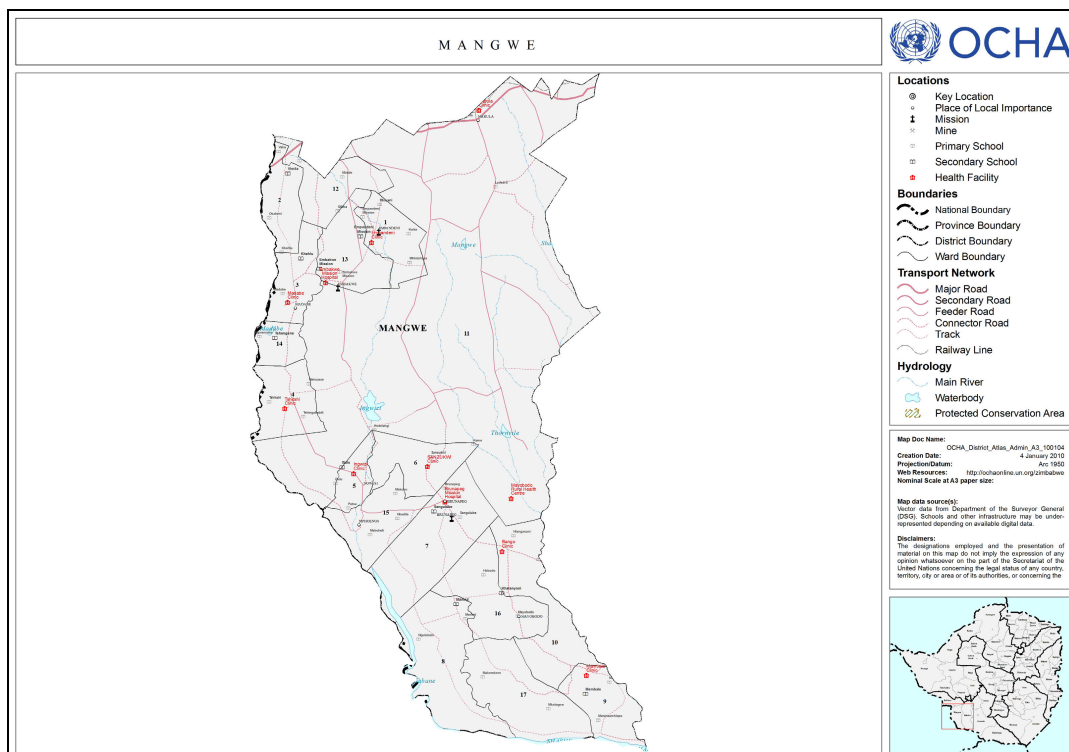

Figure 1: Map of Mangwe District
Source: Office of the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), (2008)

This was a case study research and used a qualitative research methodology through the use and collection of various empirical materials. This particular methodology is important because it involves a naturalistic and interpretative approach to its subject matter. Primary sources such as semi-structured interviews, in-depth interviews, focus group discussions and observation were used to collect data from people and relevant organisations in Mangwe District. The research was not be able to cover the whole population and hence purposive sampling was used to find research participants from the local leadership, community members, government departments, non-governmental organisations that work within the area. To corroborate and verify information collected from primary sources, the research used secondary sources such as government reports, NGO reports, district council reports, archival materials, journals and newspaper articles.

7. Results and Discussions

7.1. Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents
The demographic characteristic of the respondents or participants is summarised in Table 1 below. The study constituted of 50 respondents and the units of analysis mainly involved; the community (20), Rural District Council (4), local leadership (2), NGO officials (8), Government officials (9), ward committee representatives (3) and village committee representatives (3). The study as reiterated earlier was carried out in Izimnyama and Empandeni wards in Mangwe District in Matabeleland South Province in Zimbabwe.

Gender	Male (37%) Female (63%)
Age	18-24 (17%), 25-30 (13%), 31-40 (15%), 41-50 (35%), 51-60 (12%), 60+ (8%)
Marital status	Married (37%), Single (19%), Divorced (13%), Widowed (11%), Co-habitation (20%)
Education level	Primary (41%), Secondary (33), Certificate (9%), Diploma (7%), Degree (10%)
Size of household	1-4 (47%), 5-8 (34%), 8+ (19%)
Source of income	Government (12%), Pension (7%), Farm (21%), Remittances (27%), Self-employment (13%)

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of the respondents

Respondents were largely represented by females (63%) as compared to the males (37%). This paper observed that migration is one of the major reasons for the difference in terms of numbers between the males and females. Mangwe district is located to the border of Botswana and South Africa and a majority of the males migrate to these neighbouring countries to seek for wage employment and 'greener pastures'. Thus females are left behind to be the head of households in the absence of the males. In the age category, a large proportion of the respondents were between the age of 41-50 (35%), while the 18-24 groups had 17% representation, 25-30 (13%), 31-40 (15%) and the elderly groups in the range of 51-60 had 12% representation and the 60+ had 8%. In terms of the marital status, 37% of the respondents were married, 19% were single, 13% divorced, 11% widowed and 20% were co-habitating. It is imperative to note that co-habitating takes precedence when a male and female decide to stay together as a couple without being formally married. This is a common practice amongst many households in rural communities in Zimbabwe and in other parts of Africa.

A large number of respondents had gone through primary education (41%) and the number slightly dropped to 33% for those who went through secondary education. 9% attained certificates, 7% diplomas and 10% managed to go as far as attaining degrees in tertiary institutions. A majority of the households (47%) were between the numbers of 1-4, with 35% between 5-8 members and 19% above 8 members. Respondents indicated that the number of members in households had trickled down due to the failure of the Zimbabwean economy to fail over the years forcing males and the youth to migrate to urban centres (towns and cities) and neighbouring countries such as Botswana and South Africa. Respondents mainly rely on migrant remittances (27%) as their main source of income and 21% rely on farming or agricultural activities even though the district is located on the driest parts of Zimbabwe which are not conducive for agriculture. 13% of the respondents are self-employed due to the high unemployment levels in Zimbabwe. 12% and 7% of the respondents rely on government and pensions respectively.

7.2. Respondents' Understanding of Decentralisation
In this survey respondents were asked to indicate what they knew and understood about decentralisation; particularly the meaning of the concept. 74% of the respondents reiterated that they did not understand what decentralisation entailed and 26% had an idea about the concept as shown in Figure 2 below.
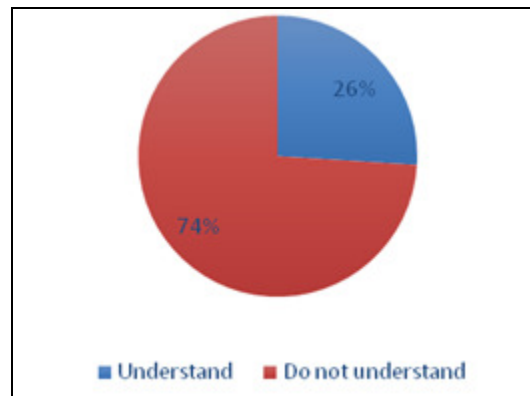
Figure 2: Respondents' understanding of decentralisation

The concept of decentralisation is a crucial and valuable policy to the development of rural areas in Zimbabwe. It creates opportunities for community members to participate in development projects for the betterment of their households and communities. Interviews done with the respondents echoed different sentiments with regards to their understanding of the concept of decentralisation as indicated by the following responses:

- I am not sure what that concept is but what l know is that it is a policy that is supposed to help us work hand in hand with the Rural District Council in projects that are geared towards developing our communities
- I have never heard of such a term in my life
- I have no idea what the term decentralisation means

Respondents had different views with regards about decentralisation and the paper observed that a majority of the community members were not well aware of the existence of such a policy in Zimbabwe. The paper observed that community members have not been conscientised about this policy which is geared towards empowering and enabling them to participate in development initiatives and programmes within their surrounding communities.

7.3. Participation of Respondents in Government Projects
The Government of Zimbabwe engages in different projects in the rural areas such as road infrastructure development, water provisions, agricultural projects, income generating projects, electricity infrastructure and overall infrastructure development for the establishment of businesses to mention a few. However, the main question that still remains despite the existence of such initiatives that are inclined towards the development of rural areas is whether community members are actively involved in these projects or not.
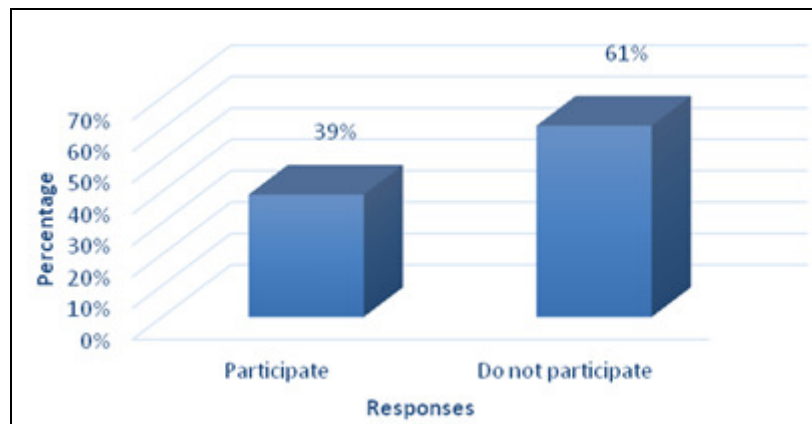

Figure 3: Participation of respondents in government projects

A large proportion (61%) of the respondents indicated that they were not involved or did not participate in government projects while 39% did participate. This is an indication that the government is implementing a top-down approach in the implementation of development projects in the rural areas in Mangwe District through the side-lining of rural households and communities to participate and be actively involved in socio-economic development initiatives.

7.4. Participation of Respondents in NGO projects
Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) over the past two decades have played a critical role in filling the void left by the Government due to its inability to develop rural areas by addressing poverty and unemployment. As such there are several NGOs that work within the two wards of Izimnyama and Empandeni. Development projects done by these organisations normally include

agricultural activities (livestock keeping and conservation farming), water provisions (drilling of boreholes), food aid relief, feeding schemes and health provisions to mention a few.
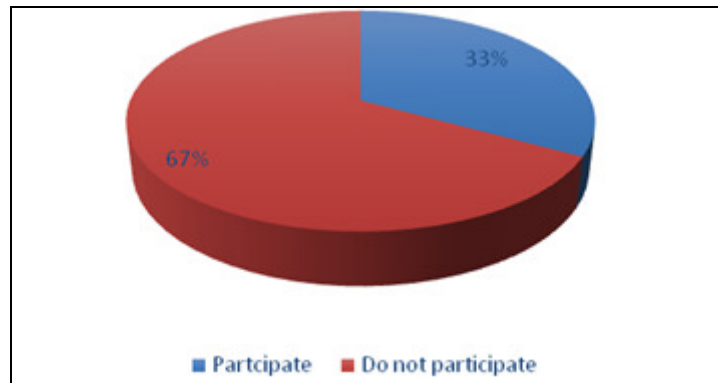

Figure 4: Participation of respondents in NGO programmes

As indicated in Figure 4 above, 67% of the respondents reiterated that they did not participate in NGO development programmes in their communities and 33% did participate in the programmes. Respondents emphasised that NGOs normally came with the projects to their communities without extensive consultation and approval of the communities on what projects they needed and were a priority in their areas. The paper observed that there is a gap when it comes to the feasibility studies done prior to a project. A few individuals who work in the Rural District Councils are consulted at the expense of the entire communities in the two wards. Communities are made aware of the projects during the implementation phase and this is a cause for great concern with regards to the success of the project.

8. Decentralisation, Participation and Empowerment of Local Communities in Mangwe District
There is undoubtedly a relationship between the three concepts of empowerment, participation and decentralisation as argued by Cornwall (2011). Decentralisation is forms the basic foundation for the realisation of participation and empowerment so as to enable the grassroots to take charge of their own development. This paper explored the relationship of these three fundamental principles in Mangwe District and whether they were intertwined and played a crucial role in the development projects that took place within Izimnyama and Empandeni wards. When asked about the concept of community participation, respondents within these wards echoed the following sentiments:
- I think community participation is about the people being actively involved in development projects
- This is when we seat down as a community and deliberate on development issues so as to have a hand in all the activities taking place within our community
- Participation is a process whereby all members of the community are well aware of activities within their communities because they will be actively involved

Respondents within these two wards in Mangwe District have an understanding of the concept of community participation. However, respondents emphasised that they just had a basic understanding of the concept due to their inability to put into practice the notion of participation in development projects. Thus, rural development in Izimnyama and Empandeni wards does not involve or put the people first in terms of planning of the projects prior to implementation. The top-down development approach still persists; hence communities do not have a voice or say in their own development. However, 'people's participation' is at the forefront of development initiatives by development institutions (UN, 1993).

Friedmann (1992) argues that community participation over the years has been viewed or seen as a people centred or oriented concept. However, community participation can only be achieved through the empowerment of community members themselves; so as to enable them to partake in the development process of their own communities. Munslow and Ekoko (1995) contend that empowerment has only remained stronger in rhetoric than in reality. Policy makers and other stakeholders involved in rural development have strongly focused on putting so much talk into the concept than actually practising it on the ground. This has had detrimental effects on the achievement of social and economic goals around rural communities. In a focus group discussion held with community members, several conjectures were raised by the respondents with regards to empowerment. They echoed these sentiments:
- Empowerment is all about having the power to make decisions on your own for your own betterment
- I think empowerment involves the community being able to own resources   and have the capacity to develop on its own

Community members had a slight understanding of the concept of empowerment. They were able to point out that they did not have the capacity to make their own informed decisions. Several of the respondents reiterated that even in community meetings they were not able to voice out their concerns due to fear of intimidation and victimisation especially amongst the women. Thus, lack of empowerment of communities dealt a heavy blow on the political participation of local people as reiterated by Munslow and Ekoko (1995). The World Bank (2011) on the other hand argues that empowerment enables individuals or groups to increase their capacity to make choices which they can act upon to achieve the desired goals and outcomes. Therefore, respondents indicated the importance of NGOs and Governments to hold consultative forums to enable them to increase their capacity to participate in the development

process of their own communities. Such an action can increase efficiency and fairness on the part of these organisations and institutions (World Bank, 2011); especially in the implementation of development projects.

Participation and empowerment has not been fully realised amongst the communities of Izimnyama and Empandeni wards in Mangwe District. These two concepts are essential ingredients in the decentralisation process in Mangwe District. Failure of the communities to be involved in the development projects taking place in their areas is a clear indication of the monopolisation and hijacking of these projects by the Government and NGOs. The policy of decentralisation is greatly threatened; especially if the grassroots level or sub-national levels are not able to have any form of power over their own development.

9. Is the Policy of Decentralisation Effective in Mangwe District?

As reiterated earlier, the Prime Minister's Directive on Decentralisation and Development in 1984 laid the foundation for the establishment and formulation of the decentralisation instrument and statutory in Zimbabwe. Makumbe (1996) vividly notes that the policy's main objective was to:

- To define the administrative structures at provincial and district level and the relationships and channels of communication between all the participants at development in provincial and district level in order to achieve the co-ordinated development of provinces and districts of Zimbabwe (Makumbe, 1996)

Respondents were asked to indicate whether the policy of decentralisation was effective within their wards and subsequently the district. The interviewed participants had different views and opinions on the effectiveness of this policy through displaying mixed feelings. Rural District Council Officials echoed different sentiments as shown below:

- The policy of decentralisation is a sound and good policy on paper but its implementation part causes a lot of problems. Rural communities are actually side-lined from their own development and their voices are not heard even though there is the existence of structures such as VIDCOs and WADCOs
- The coming in of some of these NGOs has actually made these communities more vulnerable and dependant as most of them implement top-down approaches which is a contrast to the ideals of the policy of decentralisation. I think one factor that has led to the ineffectiveness of this policy is the issue of lack of financial support on the part of the government

Respondents painted a gloomy picture with regards to the effectiveness of the policy of decentralisation in the district. This policy had many loopholes as it failed to empower communities to participate in their own development projects. Structures such as Village Development Committees (VIDCOs) and Ward Development Committees (WADCOs) which are supposed to be the mouthpiece of the local people have failed to live to their expectations. Community members noted with great concern how these structures failed to regularly call and convene meetings amongst villagers and their village committee representatives. To further expand on this issue, respondents noted that:

- In Mangwe district VIDCOs and WADCOs lack the necessary training so as to make them efficient local structures to spearhead developmental plans of their communities. There is also the need for financial support for these structures so that such activities do take place. In some cases when meetings are called some members of these structures actually do not attend and that poses a lot of problems

Community members are vulnerable to manipulation due to their disempowerment and ineffectiveness to participate in any development initiatives in their own communities. The two structures formulated to lead their developmental plans are failing to operate due to financial difficulties. This has led to some community members to abscond any meetings called by VIDCOs and WADCOs. There is no form of unity and purpose amongst these structures. This means that opinions and views of the local people are not represented by these two important structures (meant to represent the opinions and views of the people) in the decentralisation policy in rural communities.

Respondents reiterated that the policy of decentralisation in their community offered more problems for them than solutions. This is especially with regards to VIDCOs and WADCOs as noted below by some of the respondents:

- We are not involved in meetings that are called by the VIDCOs and WADCOs and therefore some development plans forwarded to the RDC are not a true reflection of what we want as the community
- Our local structures tend to have advisers in the form of Civil Servants for example; Teachers, Police, some Government workers and this tends to affect the effectiveness of these structures

Great concern was raised by the community members on the effectiveness of their VIDCOs and WADCOs. Initially, VIDCOs and WADCOs are supposed to have a consolidated report that is handed over to the Rural District Council (RDC) on the problems and challenges faced by villages and wards and respondents indicated that those reports were not a true reflection of the developmental challenges they were facing. This paper noted that most RDCs run the risk of implementing policies that come from the top mainly from the Provincial and Government structures instead of the views and opinions of the grassroots structures through VIDCOs and WADCOS. In some cases proper VIDCO and WADCO structures were not visible due to the monopolisation of positions by powerful individuals. Thus, participation and empowerment of local communities in the development process is compromised.

10. Factors affecting the policy of decentralisation in addressing community development and empowering local communities

The challenges or factors affecting the policy of decentralisation in addressing community development and empowering local communities is divided into the following sub-headings: economic stagnation, dependence syndrome from donor aid, poverty, influence of NGOS, CBOs and Community Trusts, state-imposed enforcement mechanisms, political interference, weakness of the RDC and weakness of the VIDCOs and WADCOs.

10.1. Economic Stagnation

Over the past few years, Zimbabwe has faced economic turmoil resulting in hyperinflation, cash crisis and escalating unemployment levels. Respondents indicated that these harsh economic conditions have made it impossible to achieve their economic and social goals. Individuals and groups do not have the capacity to influence any decisions pertaining to their desired goals due to the current economic misfortunes. Matondi (2008) concurs with this notion by asserting that families and individuals have found it difficult to determine their fate because of Zimbabwe's current economic woes and this has made a majority of the rural people to learn and master the art of survival. In a focus group discussion respondents indicated that they survived on migrant remittances (relatives working in neighbouring countries such as Botswana and South Africa), self-employment, agricultural production (conservation farming) and livestock keeping (mainly cattle and goats). Such initiatives are survival strategies employed by the local people in the wake of economic stagnation in the country. Failure to achieve the desired social and economic goals has made it difficult for communities to achieve community development and at the same time to be empowered to participate in their own development process.

10.2. Dependence Syndrome from Donor Aid

The failure of the government to come up with concrete and resolute development plans and policies has left a loophole for NGOs to intervene by coming up with development projects to assist the disadvantaged communities. However, as reiterated by respondents this has had both a positive and negative impact. Positively, rural communities have been able to gain from projects such as vegetable gardens, livestock keeping, conservation farming, food relief, health programmes, water and hygiene programmes. This somehow creates a dependence syndrome on the part of local people. Communities no longer engage in any meaningful social and economic development because of the heavy reliance on donor aid through NGOs. This paper argues that the sustainability of these programmes is in doubt. NGO projects fail to exist for a long period of time in rural communities and this raises a lot of questions on their sustainability. One of the main reasons that can be attributed for such a scenario is that local communities are not empowered enough to take control of the projects once the NGOs are done. Lack of participation and empowerment as indicated by a majority of the respondents has crippled NGO projects' viability. These projects simply die a natural death after the end of the tenure of NGOs to continue working in the local communities.

10.3. Poverty

Even though poverty has been at the forefront of the Government's rural development agenda, it still continues to be on the rise. Part of the introduction of the decentralisation policy in Zimbabwe was to reduce poverty amongst rural communities as reiterated by Matondi (2008). In Mangwe District, respondents indicated that they have been engulfed in poverty for a long time. Most of the households are faced with food crisis, unemployment, poor healthcare facilities, lack of education, lack of water and sanitation. They are trapped in a vicious cycle of poverty which has made it impossible to achieve the desired economic and social goals. One of the main reasons that can be attributed to high poverty levels in these two wards is lack of innovation as argued by Matondi (2008). Current local governance lacks the will power to incorporate local people in development initiatives so as to induce their creativity in tackling poverty. Empowerment remains the key to building confidence amongst rural communities to actively participate in their own development process.

10.4. Lack of Accountability and Transparency

One important statute that guides the concept of decentralisation is accountability and transparency. Respondents raised mixed feelings on this issue with a majority of them indicating that local authorities in the form of the Rural District Council lacked any form of accountability and transparency for the management of pool resources. Most development projects taking place within the two wards do not reflect the wishes of the people. VIDCOs and WADCOs, the arms of the local people fail to be the voice of the voiceless. As such the RDC lacks any form of accountability and transparency in its operations. In addition, RDCs and NGOs are embroiled in conflict over the control of rural space. This makes it difficult for participation and empowerment to take as local communities are prescribed development projects without their consultation and decision making prowess. The weakness of VIDCOs and WADCOs makes it difficult for the RDC to be accountable to them.

10.5. Lack of Democratic Practices

Democratic participation is enshrined in the decentralisation policy since power has to be shared from the national level to the sub-national level to enable the active involvement of grassroots levels in the development process. However, in the case of Mangwe District the state still has autonomy and power in the area which has adversely affected the political participation of the local people. The local people have no free will to partake in any socio-economic and political initiatives geared towards addressing rural underdevelopment. Mukamuri (2008) purports that; this kind of decentralisation provided by the state provides a leeway for powerful and politically connected individuals to abuse their power, thus, leading to the malfunction of institutions such as Rural District Councils. The decentralisation policy implemented in Mangwe District should be people centred or oriented so as to enable the empowerment of communities to take and make informed decisions on the development process of their local areas. There should be minimal interference of the state to allow democratic participation and practice to take place.

10.6. Political Interference

Political interference by some powerful individuals has been an impediment in the decentralisation process in Mangwe District. Interviewed respondents indicated that politics had an influence in the implementation of development projects within the two wards of Izimnyama and Empandeni. The politically elite within these areas used these projects to gunner up support for their political ambitions and careers at the expense of the development of these areas. Consequently, many of the projects in the district are hijacked by politicians and this is a sharp contrast to the ideals of democratic participation and empowerment as enshrined in the decentralisation policy.

11. Conclusion

Participatory development provides a leeway for the impoverished, disadvantaged and powerless communities to be actively involved in the development of their own local areas. This can only be achieved or done through the empowerment of communities through the sharing of power and pool resources from the centre to the periphery. The paper observed that the policy of decentralisation is a sound and clear policy on paper but in reality communities have not benefitted anything from this policy. In Mangwe District, the local people are sidelined from any development planning of projects by both the Government and NGOs. They do not have any voice in projects implemented in their areas. The top-down approach is still a common approach by development agents and the state in Izimnyama and Empandeni wards. Communities are disempowered as they are left powerless and hopeless to take charge of projects to better their lives. Another very important aspect to point out is the issue of 'power' or 'authority', even so the implementation of decentralisation is spread from central government to provincial offices of the central government; it does not trickle down to the communities. Local communities are still restricted to planning and these plans are then taken to the Provincial government authorities for Government approval as it is scribed in the Prime Ministers Directive of 1984. Decision making is left at the helm of the central government based on the resources other Ministries would have accorded them. Therefore, power is still retained by the central government.

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