

The Political Economy of Devolution and Post-2013 Service Delivery in Urban Zimbabwe

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Abstract

Advocates of devolution make much of its supposed urban services delivery ‘dividends,’ a stance that is often narrowly founded but untroubled. Critics of this argument, while acknowledging the potential benefits, suggest that attention to the political economy under which devolution operates is crucial. Precisely, the political economy critique is that urban service delivery outcomes are contingent on the political economy context. Zimbabwe's devolution and decentralisation policy identifies improved service delivery in urban settlements as one of its objectives, but this has not been testified by realities on the ground post-2013 Constitution. The article applies a political economy framework to understanding the dynamics of devolution in Zimbabwe. Using literature and government documents review, as well as key informant interviews; the political economy of contemporary Zimbabwe devolution, as well as urban services delivery outcomes, are analysed in this article. Our findings indicate that politics, misallocation of economic resources, graft and corruption have largely conspired to stunt urban councils’ ability to deliver services. Devolution has been characterised by the control of resources and decision making by the central government that has often usurped urban councils’ role in service delivery. The article recommends needed political and public sector reforms for

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improvement in service delivery in urban Zimbabwe, as part and parcel of a redesign of the devolution model in use.

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INTRODUCTION

Since 1990, there has been a wave of constitutional democracy spreading over Africa notably in South Africa, Kenya and Zimbabwe Constitutions (Fombad, 2018). The Constitutions provide a framework whereby democratisation is expected to be accompanied by good governance and respect for the rule of law. A key feature has been the entrenchment of devolution in national constitutions, and in Zimbabwe, devolution of governmental power and functions constitutes one of the founding values and principles of the supreme law (Government of Zimbabwe, 2013; Chigwata, 2019). In policy frameworks for the implementation of devolution, one of its main objectives is given as the improvement of service delivery at the local level (Government of Zimbabwe, 2020a, 2020b). The Foreword to Devolution and Decentralisation Policy says “The objective for devolving power to sub-national structures of a reconfigured Zimbabwean State is to enable a faster, efficient and effective response to challenges of the delivery of public services, development, democracy, as well as the imperative of sustaining national unity and peace” (Government of Zimbabwe, 2020a, vi). The public services that are mentioned include potable water, sanitation facilities, energy, roads and Information Communication Technology (ICT).

There exists much literature on devolution and service delivery in urban areas (e.g., Nyikadzino and Nhema, 2015; Muchadenyika and Williams, 2018) that has identified various challenges in this area, particularly the implementation of decentralisation in Africa has been half-hearted (UN-Habitat, 2016). Such literature has looked at centre-local relations and their effect on service delivery but without a political economy lens to devolution, it would seem that there has been too much optimism about its expected outcomes in the African context. When applied to devolution,

a political economy analytical framework improves understanding of its political and economic aspects and how the two combine to affect service delivery. Thus, this article addresses the following question: How has the political economy of devolution affected service delivery outcomes in urban Zimbabwe? To answer this, we first present a political economy framework. This is followed by a review of the literature on political economy and delivery of urban services. The methodology that was used in the study is presented followed by the presentation of findings that are discussed in the following section. The last section presents the conclusion and recommendations.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Politics is concerned with contestation and bargaining between interest groups that have competing claims for power and resources (Kanyenze, 2021). It is also concerned with economic processes that generate wealth as well as influence how political choices are made. Economics focuses on the production, distribution, and consumption of goods and services, and analysis of the choices that individuals, businesses, governments, and nations make to allocate resources. Political economy has to do with how political forces influence the economy and economic outcomes. “Political economy analysis is concerned with the interaction of political and economic processes within a society: the distribution of power and wealth between different groups and individuals, and the processes that create, sustain and transform these relationships over time” (Collinson, 2003, p. 3).

Political economy analysis entails the comprehension of the power and authority of groups in society, the role of formal and informal institutions in the allocation of scarce resources and the influence that values and ideas, including culture, ideologies, and religion, have on shaping human relations and interaction (Collinson, 2003; Drazen, 2008; Jenkins, 1997; Serrat, 2017; Urrutia *et al.*, 1989). Figure 1 shows the wheels of political economy analysis (Serrat, 2017).

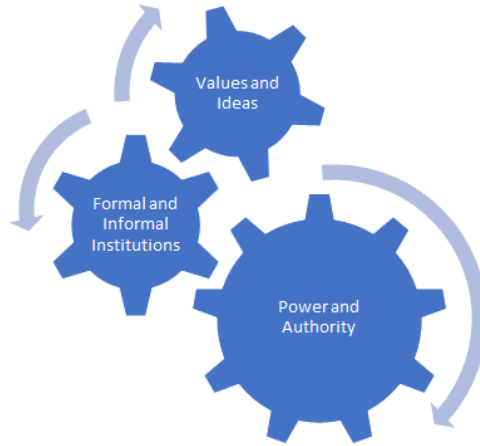


Figure 1: *The wheels of political economy analysis* (Serrat, 2017)

The interaction of political and economic processes in a society is investigated in the context of geography and historical legacies. Political behaviour is shaped by the power and authority of groups in society, the interests they hold and the incentives that drive them in bringing about particular outcomes. Thus, the policy is implemented in a society that should accommodate the vested interests of various pressure or interest groups. The influence of these non-economic factors tends to be more important and non-systematic in developing than developed countries.

Institutions in the form of rules and norms of behaviour have a strong influence on policy implementation and outcomes. It is important to identify who participates, gains and loses; and the amount of freedom that the system allows in decision making. The main elements of political economy analysis are political actors, their objectives and the mechanism by which political decisions are made (that is, institutions), and four groups of actors can be distinguished in a political economy system (Drazen, 2008). The four groups are: policy-makers, citizenry, selectorate and coalition. Policy-makers include elected and non-elected members and those tasked with policy implementation like civil servants. They are expected to take citizen preferences into account when developing policy. The selectorate tends to be groups that control the instruments of power

that enable a leader to remain in office, for example, media barons and powerful interest groups. The coalition is the electoral majority required to vote for the leader in, the interest groups and financiers of the election campaign. It is argued that it is the interests and objectives of the selectorate that drive policy outcomes (Kanyenze, 2021). The presumption is that political leaders have to keep enough of the selectorate happy to retain power.

Based on political economy analysis, a national economy has a structure that cannot be changed in the short term. Devolution and other policies are implemented within a given structure. The structure can embrace many things, such as the legal framework, political parties, sector ministries, state enterprises, and institutions. It is important to pay attention to opportunities, constraints, resistance and inertia posed by the political environment. In the process, there is a need to get a sense of what is achievable as that provides the knowledge to expand the feasible space for reform (Serrat, 2017). Hence, political economy analysis can inform more realistic expectations for policy outcomes and the risks involved. Further, it can contribute to better results by identifying where the main opportunities and barriers for policy reform exist (DFID, 2009).

When applied to devolution, political economy analysis seeks to understand both the political and economic aspects of devolution and how the two combine to affect service delivery. For instance, who are the ‘winners’ and ‘losers’ from devolution, and how is this affecting service delivery in urban areas? How is patronage being used in devolution?

LITERATURE REVIEW

In devolution “the central government transfers political, administrative, and fiscal responsibilities to autonomous subnational jurisdictions that elect their own representatives and raise their own, usually limited, revenues” (Fessha and Kirkby, 2008, p. 249). Although some African countries embarked on devolution, it has not fulfilled the espoused promise of improved service delivery (Chigwata, 2019). Useful insights into the dilemma can be obtained from an analysis of ideological, power, and institutional forces at play in many developing countries.

In Zimbabwe, ideology has, since independence a big influence on public policy. In the 1980s following the coming together of the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) and the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) to form the Zimbabwe African National Union (Patriotic Front) – ZANU (PF) and the signing of the Unity Accord, the term national unity became associated with one-party rule (Jenkins, 1997). The ruling party had a strong ideological belief in centralisation of power and authority (Muchadenyika and Williams, 2018). The formulation of national economic policy has always been centralised in the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development. As a result of the history of centralisation of power, the Preamble to Chapter 14 of the Constitution which refers to “the preservation of national unity in Zimbabwe and the prevention of all forms of disunity and secessionism” has sometimes been given the nuanced interpretation of nation building that has the legacy of one-party rule (Mandaza, 2016). Since the Unity Accord of 1987, there has been increasing conflation of political party and state as well as a system of patronage borne out of a feeling of entitlement that creates avenues for corruption (*ibid.*). Bringing devolution into this power complex requires political reform of all national institutions to ensure the required separation of party and state to render them non-partisan in adherence with the Constitution.

Critics of devolution have highlighted some of its devious purposes, in that it can be a cynical ploy to deflect or dilute criticism of central government failures (Fessha and Kirkby, 2008). That means, it can be used to rebuild discredited central governments' legitimacy through democratising local governments that then reap the benefits of devolution. From another perspective, devolution can be used as a strategy to contain secessionist regions in the rhetoric of democracy and development. In their survey of Nigeria, Senegal, Ethiopia, Uganda, South Africa and Malawi; Fessha and Kirkby (2008) found that the rhetoric of devolution and its promise of democracy, development, and accommodating diversity has not matched practice. In many African countries, devolution has paradoxically reinforced central authority at the expense of democracy, development and management of diversity.

In post-independence Zimbabwe, the central government has been preoccupied with centralisation of local authority functions such as electricity, water supply, vehicle licensing in return for political control, resources and maintaining power (Muchadenyika and Williams, 2018). In a bid to make mostly opposition-controlled urban councils subservient, the central government controls financial resources generated from towns and cities through the use of state enterprises like the Zimbabwe Electricity Supply Authority (ZESA), the Zimbabwe National Water Authority (ZINWA), and the Zimbabwe National Road Authority (ZINARA) for electricity, water and vehicle license revenue collection respectively. Centralisation of revenue deprives urban councils of sources of funds for delivering services such as roads, sanitation facilities and water supply.

In practice, devolution encounters institutions that confound its ability to deliver urban services. In unitary systems of African governments such as Zimbabwe, a unified civil service can tighten central control over urban councils by dividing the loyalty of local administrators. The governments have a Local Government Board that is responsible for approving the hiring of senior council officials like Finance Directors, Town Engineers, Chamber Secretaries and Town Clerks. Such officials are directed from the centre, and have less incentive to respond to the directives of urban councils. At the same time, some legislative frameworks and policies empower the National Minister responsible for local government to reverse council resolutions and require his approval before a council can implement certain decisions. Other institutions relate to the making of by-laws and the council budget process. Council by-laws and annual budgets require approval by the Minister responsible for local government, a procedure that can not only delay service delivery but limits decision making by urban councils.

One of the drawbacks to effective service delivery has been polarised politics. In Zimbabwe, more than 90% of urban councils are under the control of the main opposition Citizens Coalition for Change (CCC), formerly the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). Central Government has used centralisation as a strategy to defuse opposition rule in urban areas, and this destroys the institutional foundations of service

delivery. In Africa, opposition-held governments at the subnational level have often not been tolerated with negative consequences on service delivery (Fombad, 2018).

Evidence from the political economy analysis shows that African governments have paradoxically reinforced central authority at the expense of democracy, development, and management of diversity. The Zimbabwean experience has been of ideological and control-driven centralisation partly to subdue urban opposition. The evidence resonates with Fombad's statement that "It is worth remembering that while most of the governance systems that African countries inherited at independence were decentralised in one form or another, these were progressively centralised for a variety of reasons as governments become more authoritarian (Fombad, 2018, p. 2-3).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This writing is informed by data collected at the Devolution Implementation Matrix Workshop conducted by the Development Governance Institute in September 2021. The Workshop was attended by members of the Association of Rural District Councils, Zimbabwe (ARDCZ) and Urban Councils Association, Zimbabwe (UCAZ). Participants included mayors, town clerks, council chairpersons, Chief Executive Officers, finance directors, engineers, planners and chamber secretaries. The evidence is complemented with data from key informants, being senior officials in urban councils (4), UCAZ (1), Labour & Economic Development Research Institute, Zimbabwe (LEDRI) (1), Ministry of Finance and Economic Development (2), land developer (1), and a Harare City Council retired Director of Planning (1). The key informants were selected on the basis of their involvement in devolution as directors of finance, researchers, developers and planners.

RESULTS

The results presented in this section are mostly based on the evidence presented by key informants and participants at the Devolution Implementation Matrix Workshop convened in September 2021. Zimbabwe is still operating in liberation mode which gives a feeling of entitlement to those who participated in the struggle. The concern is with

consolidating rule hence politicians operate more in election cycles rather than a long-term horizon. Most urban councils are under the control of the opposition and this stretches the political commitment to devolution of the government. Devolution is a political issue as was shown in the case of an urban council that engaged the Ministry of Local Government and Public Works about the meaning of the concept and was advised that its interpretation resides in central government. It is a political issue because, in engagements between the polarised ruling and main opposition parties, it has been noticed that someone may not support a seemingly good idea for the welfare of citizens because the ruling party policy may have a different perspective. Overall, the practice of exclusive politics by the ruling party and the culture of centralisation was found to overarch devolution in Zimbabwe.

The national government has gradually been taking away powers from local authorities in ways that have reduced the capacity of urban councils to deliver services. In the post-2000 era, local authorities lost vehicle licensing powers to a state enterprise, that is, the Zimbabwe National Road Authority (ZINARA). It is believed that the centre wants to hold certain funds to enable control of local authorities. Centralisation is not only a post-2000 phenomenon as in 1985 the independence government formed the Zimbabwe Electricity Supply Authority (ZESA) that took over the production, distribution and regulation of electricity from the Central Africa Power Corporation (CAPCO) and local authorities. Again, in 2000, the government formed a state enterprise, the Zimbabwe National Water Authority (ZINWA) to supply water on a commercial basis. Prior to the formation of ZINWA, the supply of bulk water and its distribution to consumers had been the responsibility of urban local authorities.

The 2013 Constitution provides the legal framework for devolution but it has been partially implemented as no law has been passed to enable the disbursement of devolution funds to local authorities. In the absence of a devolution law, there is no legislation for enforcing accountability and transparency in the use of devolution funds. Structures and procedures for devolution have not been pronounced in law. No wonder Section 301 of the Constitution provides for devolution but in the absence of

operationalising legislation, there have been numerous complaints about government interference in how local authorities are using devolution funds. On their part, local authorities do not have a law that guides and restrains their behaviour in the use of devolution funds. This has been found to open opportunities for abuse of devolution funds and rent-seeking at all levels of governance.

A big institutional barrier is that existing legislation that impinges on urban service delivery has yet to be aligned with the 2013 Constitution. Key legislation in need of reform is the Urban Councils Act as it has the legacy of centralising powers in the Minister responsible for local government. As a representative of the Urban Councils Association, Zimbabwe said “Existing legislation contradicts devolution and decentralisation.” The Minister responsible for local government has overwhelming powers to issue directives and vary or rescind council resolutions in ways that reduce the powers of local authorities. This structural legacy led a Finance Director of an urban council to retort that the devolution model gives power to the centre, primarily because the Ministry of Local Government and Public Works controls the use of devolution funds by local authorities. The Urban Councils Act is the antithesis of devolution partly because it provides for the Local Government Board which is responsible for approving the hiring and dismissal of senior council staff in ways that impair service delivery. In a related observation, the Urban Councils Association, Zimbabwe indicates that sometimes it takes up to 5 years for the Local Government Board to finalise the dismissal of an official who, in the meantime, remains on the payroll with an impact on the finances of local authorities. These institutions of control remove administrative decision-making powers from urban councils with a negative effect on service delivery. As would be expected, Local Government Board appointees owe their allegiance to the centre rather than the urban council where service delivery is most needed.

Finance Directors informed that the centre decides on the amount of devolution funds allocated to an urban council. The funds are tied, meaning they can only be used for pre-determined purposes. Thus, one of

the Finance Directors had this to say: “If it is devolution then the government cannot come back and tell how to spend the money.” The question of centralisation is interwoven with interference, directives and control. A senior government official explained local authorities’ lack of capacity to plan, implement and coordinate projects. Local authorities were said to lack tools for the trade – hence their weak service delivery mechanisms. There is some truth in these insinuations. For example, in Bulawayo works are contracted out due to lack of plant and equipment. Council’s fleet and equipment is obsolete and it constantly breaks down. Given these realities on the ground, it is surprising why local authorities’ capacity development is not part of the devolution programme.

Besides that, the government gives capacity limitations to local authorities as the reason for taking over the maintenance of roads under the Emergency Roads Rehabilitation Programme (ERRP). A former Director of Planning reckons that the takeover of local roads by the central government creates room for corruption through the introduction of third parties. In the case of the Bulawayo roads rehabilitation programme, it was reported that the local road network had been taken over by central government agencies and funding was disbursed directly to contractors without council input (CITE, 2022). ZINARA funds and a percentage of devolution funds that were due to the city were used to pay contractors. From the way it is implemented, Council felt that emergency road rehabilitation was a central government programme imposed on it. There was a sense that centralisation of procurement worsened corruption in the public sector. Most companies awarded road rehabilitation contracts came from outside Bulawayo and did not employ local people. It was felt that engaging local contractors and residents would have contributed more to local economic development than the centralisation approach. The problem of centralised control and interference with the use of devolution funds is not confined to Bulawayo. In Harare, there has been contestation between the government and the Harare City Council over the payment of the latter’s ZWL\$2bn devolution allocation towards the waste-to-energy Pomona deal by the former (Matenga, 2022). The Council would have preferred to use the devolution funds for the purchase of the refuse collection, water supply and drain cleaning equipment. A devolution procurement that affected all local authorities is

one where the Ministry of Local Government and Public Works ordered them to pay for government-procured fire tenders from Belarus using devolution funds (Gatsi, 2022). Local authorities had not made an input to the procurement process and prices of the fire tenders were allegedly inflated. The few examples of government interference in the procurement process have led many to believe that devolution funds are open to abuse in the absence of a law.

At provincial and district levels, there are authority and institutional overlaps that sub-optimize service delivery. The Provincial Councils and Administration Amendment Bill is a work in progress suggesting the absence of Provincial and Metropolitan Councils established in terms of the 2013 Constitution. But there are Provincial Councils that are operating in terms of the 1985 Provincial Councils and Administration Act. Pending the passing of the Provincial Councils and Administration Amendment Bill into law, to multiple authorities at the subnational level, including sector ministries, state enterprises, local authorities, civil society and the private sector; devolution and service delivery is business as usual. Provinces were found to be a weak link with most devolution implementation being undertaken by urban councils and central government. The way forward requires a clear structure for the management of the devolution programme.

Tables 1 and 2 summarise our findings with respect to the functionality of organisations, legislative and policy frameworks under the impact of political economy. The summary shows that the National Development Strategy 1 and the Devolution and Decentralisation Policy are well framed; however, much work is required in the structural transformation that addresses colonial centralisation legacies to pave the way for devolution of power to sub-national levels. The findings identified the need for political reforms that engender non-partisan politics, devolution law and reform of key legislation like the Urban Councils Act that are not sufficiently aligned with the 2013 Constitution. There is evident central government commitment to devolution but evidence shows the lack of a whole of government approach to implementation.

Table 1: *Organisational Functionality under the Impact of Political Economy*

Organisation/Institution	Functionality under Political Economy
Ministry of Local Government and Public Works	Provides an enabling or facilitative framework for devolution but exercises excessive control over urban councils
Local Government Board (Established in terms of Section 116 of the Urban Councils Act)	Interferes with administrative powers of urban councils through its role in the approval of hiring and dismissal of senior council staff.
State Enterprises (ZESA, ZINWA, and ZINARA)	Centralised the collection of electricity, water supply and vehicular licensing sources of urban local authorities' revenue.
Minister of State for Provincial Affairs and Devolution	This is an appointed rather than an elected position. The challenge to devolution is that legislation paves the way for "return of the jettisoned" as the President can legally appoint individuals who have been rejected by the electorate in parliamentary elections.
Sector Ministries (for example responsible for health, housing, lands, environment, education, sport and recreation)	Pending public sector reform to inform their new role under devolution has interfered with urban councils as the former has a line ministry mandate to provide certain urban services.
District Development Coordinators	A colonial relic that stymies horizontal intergovernmental relations as they perpetuate structures of and for control and interference in local affairs.
Civil Society (for example political parties, Residents and Ratepayers Associations, and the Urban Councils Association, Zimbabwe)	Exclusive politics has resulted in polarisation of political party positions and at times 'toxic' politics with negative effects on the delivery of urban services.
Private Sector	The private sector forges coalitions with politicians and the democratic process can be compromised when it caters to privileged actors.

Table 2: *Legislative and Policy Instruments under the Impact of Political Economy*

Legislative and Policy Instruments	Impact of Political Economy
The 2013 Constitution of Zimbabwe (Chapter 14, Section 264 on devolution of governmental powers and responsibilities)	“Whenever appropriate, governmental powers and responsibilities must be devolved to provincial and metropolitan councils and local authorities which are competent to carry out those responsibilities efficiently and effectively.” The statement gives the discretion to implement devolution to the central government. It is important to note that devolution in terms of the 2013 Constitution has been partially implemented because work on developing a Devolution Bill is ongoing and key centralist legislation like the Urban Councils Act, the Provincial Councils and Administration Act, and the Regional, Town and Country Planning Act are yet to be aligned with the Supreme Law.
Urban Councils Act (Chapter 29:15)	The basic role of councils is the provision of services to the urban population but the Urban Councils Act gives the Minister responsible for local government excessive powers to interfere in the decisions of urban local authorities.
Provincial Councils and Administration Act (Chapter 29:11)	The legislation enables Provincial Ministers of State and Devolution to foster centrally driven objectives in local authorities. Work is ongoing on the development of the Provincial Councils and Administration Amendment Bill that will align Chapter 29:11 with the 2013 Constitution.
Regional, Town and Country Planning Act (Chapter 29:12)	Gives urban local governments local planning authority status save for local boards. Local planning authorities are empowered to carry out planning functions, but the legislation has a bias towards development control and provides for tokenistic public participation in planning.
Devolution and Decentralisation Policy, 2020	Paragraph 179: “Devolution policy recognises the need to amend the current Local Government Acts in order to provide a greater level of Local Authorities’ autonomy and minimise interference in the local affairs of sub-national tiers of Government by the Central Government.
National Development Strategy 1, 2020 (Chapter 11: Devolution and Decentralisation)	Guides the implementation of the Devolution and Decentralisation process whose objective is to devolve power to the sub-national structures to enable a faster efficient and effective response to challenges of the delivery of public services, development, democracy as well as the imperative of sustaining national unity and peace.

DISCUSSION

The political economy of devolution and service delivery in urban Zimbabwe is complex. There are issues of the ideology of state intervention, actually, a legacy issue as it dates back to the colonial era (Jenkins, 19997; Collinson, 2003; Mandaza, 2016; Muchadenyika and Williams, 2018). It is an ideology of centralisation that in recent years has become handy to the ruling party in dealing with opposition politics. The idea is that if one controls finance that has the effect of depriving the opposition that governs most urban areas of power. This has been vividly illustrated by cases of centralisation of revenue from water supply and vehicle licensing in government-run entities. The colonial state may have been centralised but it had a very strong system of local government. It gave political power to local authorities. In the post-2000 era, devolution centralised control of finances that are allocated to urban councils in the form of inter-governmental transfers. Centralisation is premised on power, control and rent-seeking (Muchadenyika and Williams, 2018). Centralisation in Zimbabwe reminds me of the one-party state debate of the 1980s, where the government wanted to be paternalistic (Muchadenyika and Williams, 2018; Mandaza, 2016). Urban service delivery is constrained by contradictions inherent in the Zimbabwe version of devolution and contentious politics. The examples of Harare and Bulawayo highlighted the lack of transparency and accountability in the procurement and award of road rehabilitation contracts. Devolution practice in Zimbabwe defies devolution theory. In devolution theory, “the central government transfers political, administrative, and fiscal responsibilities to autonomous subnational jurisdictions that elect their own representatives and raise their own, usually limited, revenues (Fessha and Kirkby, 2008, p. 249). But in Zimbabwean devolution, the central government transfers functions and duties while retaining decision making and financial control.

Devolution is a national priority and a Cabinet Committee on Devolution that is chaired by the President is in existence. It has become an important political process as a Finance Director described it as the ‘new government financing model.’ The importance attached to devolution has seen the renaming of Provincial Ministers of State to Ministers of Provincial Affairs and Devolution, served by a Permanent Secretary. The Urban Councils

Association Zimbabwe finds this as a move by the government into the development mode. But analysts have found provincial institutions in need of separation of security and administrative structures (Chatiza and Zivhave, 2020). In structure changes made to the provincial level, the Provincial Office of the President and Cabinet became part and parcel of the Minister of Provincial Affairs and Devolution Office. Before elevation to the post of Permanent Secretary, Provincial Development Coordinators reported to the Ministry responsible for local government while Provincial Ministers of State reported to the President. The coming together of the former Minister of Provincial Affairs and Provincial Office of the President and Cabinet created an administration complex representing the centralisation of power. In some jurisdictions, a standalone Ministry responsible for devolution has been created while in others, the devolution implementation function has been assigned to a Secretariat overseen by the Ministry responsible for local government. The essence of these structures established outside the Presidency is to ensure separation of powers and free the Presidency (or other structure of the Head of State) from directly overseeing the administration of devolution. The political and administrative structures at the provincial level need to be streamlined to avoid making devolution an overly political and security issue. It is a complicated setup because Provincial Councils continue to function in terms of the 1985 Provincial Councils and Administration Act, pending its amendment. Effective devolution to urban councils requires the reduction of the role of the provincial level as Ministers for Provincial Affairs and Devolution are supported by District Development Coordinators who have a legacy of control as arms of the central government.

The devolution debate in Zimbabwe has not engaged much with the role of sector ministries and yet they have immense influence at all levels of governance. A review of devolution projects under implementation finds urban councils rightly leading the process. Sector ministries are mentioned where they provide information, for example, District Education Offices have been providing data on schools' distribution and pupil enrolment, but there has been no clear articulation of how sectoral functions are going to be redefined in a territorial/jurisdictional approach to devolution.

Despite the political economy realities of devolution that the central government earnestly needs to take into account in programming, overall, the programme has improved the welfare of urban communities. Urban councils have used devolution funds to procure new equipment and vehicles such as fire tenders, refuse removal trucks and compactors; and a significant proportion of urban roads have been rehabilitated with much improvement in mobility. Communities that lack infrastructure and services have benefited from the potable water supply, schools, clinics and waste disposal facilities. The question that remains is about how the gains that have been made can be sustainably improved through attending to political economy opportunities and barriers?

CONCLUSION

In closing, we note that a centralisation culture has constrained the potential delivery of services in urban Zimbabwe. The political economy analysis was effective in informing issues of service delivery, that is, how those in power make choices. Devolution received impetus from the coming of the post-Mugabe new dispensation. However, decisions about resource allocation and use are made at the centre with the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development and the Ministry of Local Government and Public Works responsible for deciding the amount, use and allocation of devolution funds. This finding confirms the fact that in Africa, central governments often constrain devolution through less visible financial manipulation (Fessha and Kirkby, 2008).

In Africa, devolution has been used to lend legitimacy to poorly performing governments. As well, it has been used, through disbursement of funds to manage secessionist voices in regions. In Zimbabwe, there has been no strategic approach to devolution. Moreso, inadequate articulation of the role of sector ministries seems simplistic in its consideration of existing structures of governance and potential risks arising from the lack of a holistic approach to devolution. Here, the political economy approach has reminded of the importance of considering history and culture in devolution design. Further, evidence has shown capacity weaknesses at all levels of governance for implementing devolution and service delivery. Over the years, central and local governments have lost the capacity for policy, implementation and maintenance of services.

Based on the findings, we offer some policy recommendations for the way forward. Firstly, it is important to implement the 2013 Constitution in full (Mandaza, 2016; Chigwata, 2018). This will require the alignment of devolution-related legislation particularly the Urban Councils Act and the Provincial Councils and Administration Act with the Constitution. The revised statutory framework should reflect the spirit of the Constitution with respect to multi-level governance and devolution of power. It is important to reform all national institutions to ensure the separation of a political party and government (in addition to the separation of powers) so as to render them truly non-partisan in adherence with the Constitution. This recommendation addresses the problem of the conflation of political party and government.

In place of the current implementation arrangement, we recommend the establishment of a Devolution Secretariat in the Ministry responsible for local government. The Secretariat would communicate directly with urban councils. In this proposed setup, provincial and district administration staff would only have a monitoring and support role to urban councils through a mechanism such as a provincial monitoring and advisory team. The team would have the additional responsibility of providing technical support to much-needed capacity development at the subnational level.

Implementation of the above recommendations in addition to putting in place a precise devolution strategy, adopting a holistic and bottom-up approach would drive the process toward sustainable outcomes. The opportunities offered by the political environment is the central government's relatively clear commitment to deliver on devolution regardless of the agenda. Despite its potential promise, devolution and service delivery in urban Zimbabwe should avoid the danger of unrealistic expectations. Some words calling for patience are as follows: "In the best scenario, any political program to devolve power to subnational governments will take many years to deliver even basic services efficiently and matched to local needs (Fessha and Kirkby, 2008, p. 252). It is only four years since the first tranche of devolution funds were disbursed to urban councils and attention to constraints and opportunities in the political environment would improve prospects for success.

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