

The Intersection Between Local Economic Development and Devolution: Some Insights for Urban Resilience Building in Zimbabwe

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Abstract

Devolution is emphasised as a crucial policy for local economic development in the national development roadmap of the Zimbabwean government, which addresses local inequities and is required to reduce poverty in society. The study engages a desk review to explore the relationship between the two concepts. The study makes the case that if fundamentals such as effective political systems, accountability mechanisms, regulatory framework on intergovernmental relations, and capacity building are in place, devolution may be able to yield the desired positive results of resilient local economic development. However, for the successful implementation of devolution to achieve local economic development, the article recommends that policy makers, in an effort of easing the transition from a unitary to a devolved government system, must appreciate that institutional, political, financial, and legislative measures are complementary and mutually reinforcing.

Keywords: *poverty; local endowments; competitive advantage; livelihood strategies; politics*

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INTRODUCTION

The Lancaster House Constitution vested excessive power in the central authority, with the local government Minister having unrestricted financial, political, and administrative control over local governments under the prevailing local government statutes (Madhekeni & Zhou, 2012). As such, Chigwata (2018) argues that although the legislative instruments that govern local authorities are effective in regulating local authorities, they were mostly dependent on the willingness and dedication of the Minister in charge of local governance, to the point that the Minister's competence defined that of local governments. In other words, local authorities are in some cases reduced to being simply implementing agencies of the central authority (Jonga & Chirisa, 2009). Devolution may therefore lead to the accomplishment of local economic development (LED). However, given the political wrangling in Zimbabwe, the issue of how to properly plan and implement devolution becomes crucial (Chilunjika and Chilunjika, 2021). As such, Chigwata (2018) stressed the need for a decentralised government structure in considering the practical and contextual requirements of LED.

The Zimbabwean government denotes devolution and LED as critical components towards achieving upper middle-income status by 2030 (Government of Zimbabwe, 2020). Section 264 of the Zimbabwean Constitution establishes the framework for devolution, and other ancillary laws like the Urban Council Act (Chapter 29:15), Rural District Councils Act (Chapter 29:13), Regional and Town and Country Planning Act (Chapter 29:12), and the Provincial Councils and Administration Act (Chapter 29:11) need to be reviewed and updated to be consistent with the Constitution. The Provincial Councils and Administrative Act (Chapter 29:11) is being amended to conform to the Constitution. The devolution agenda will be carried out by three tiers of government, as specified in Section 5 of the Zimbabwean Constitution. The process will build upon and refine the decentralised administrative frameworks already in place. According to Section 301 of the Constitution, the intergovernmental fiscal transfer (IGFT) goal of at least 5% of national revenue in any fiscal year must be met to finance the devolution agenda.

It is depicted that the local governance system of Zimbabwe is unitary (Simba *et al.*, 2015). This alludes to Burger (1997) who describes a unitary local governance system as subservient to the central authority. However, the subservience of local authorities within the Zimbabwean context is inherited from the governance structure. Jonga & Chirisa, (2009), assert that the local governance structure in independent Zimbabwe was inherited from the colonial era whose main objective was to thwart dissent and discontent from native Africans. Therefore, inheriting and upholding such a system in independent Zimbabwe constricts the democratic rights of residents in Zimbabwean urban areas. As such, the dissatisfaction born out of the constricted democratic space petitioned for devolution, and this was granted in the 2013 new Constitution. Although supporting legislative instruments are yet to be crafted into law, the incumbent government is already making headway in the right direction, although the pace is subject to contestation. Nonetheless, with devolution comes the need to explore the resultant effect it may have on the welfare of urban residents in Zimbabwe. Therefore, the main prerogative of the article is to explore the synergies between devolution and local economic development.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

MULTI-LEVEL GOVERNANCE THEORY

This study is well suited to the multi-level governance (MLG) theory as a framework. MLG, according to Marks (1993), is a continuing negotiation mechanism between multilayer administrations at the national, regional, and local levels. It is a legally obligatory structure for decision-making that Schmitter (2004) claims involve several independent but related public and private players at various levels. This statement supports the idea that the MLG theory considers the importance of both public and private players in the creation of public policy. The idea also considers how authority is distributed horizontally, upward, and downward.

While admitting the involvement of several levels of government in the decision-making process, Hooghe and Marks (2004) endorse the division of decision-making authority among those levels of government. Awesti (2007) asserts that the MLG theory emphasises links between different

branches of government and collaboration among local governments. It is thought that distributing power among the various levels of government is more effective than concentrating it at the centre. The state is still a major participant in creating and carrying out policies, despite what this might imply. According to the argument, devolution was included in the 2013 Zimbabwean Constitution and the most effective kind of government is therefore thought to be decentralised. According to Schmitter (2004), one other aspect that adds to the MLG theory's influence is its potential to broaden the theoretical scope of political science to include the multiple governmental levels involved in decision-making. Hooghe and Marks (2004) have summarised the benefits of the MLG theory as follows: diverse jurisdictions generate a strong commitment to policy processes, and more devolved entities are better suited to address the heterogeneity of citizens' desires.

MICHAEL PORTER'S COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE THEORY

According to Porter (2000), the local population's standard of living and ultimately their quality of life are two key factors that affect prosperity and wealth creation. This viewpoint is following LED's purpose, which focuses on boosting the quality of life for the local population through economic empowerment (Nel, 2001). The notion advanced by Malecki (2007) is that regions are important spatial units for attracting investment since it is at the local level that knowledge and resources circulate and this is essential when it comes to adopting LED. The key tenets of LED include participation by the community, utilising indigenous knowledge, and using resources that are readily available locally (Mandisvika, 2015).

The competitive advantage theory also emphasises how important government regulations are to the formulation and execution of sector choices. Government priorities and policies have a significant impact since they determine the concerns that should be given top priority by local governments, businesses, and other organisations. According to Nel (2001), the government establishes the framework for LED programmes to succeed, determines that problems should be handled locally first, makes financial transfers, and—most importantly—determines how much autonomy local authorities are allowed to exercise, that can only be achieved through the implementation of devolution.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Figure 2 shows the intersection between LED and devolution. Devolution is regarded as a key component of the achievement of LED. This is only possible under the guidance of an effective political system in the country that promotes the smooth decentralisation of resources and authorities needed for LED to be realised. Incentives including loans, taxes, and physical infrastructure can only be available from LED to local and foreign investors. Figure 2 shows that efforts are redirected to promote the expansion of indigenous enterprises through entrepreneurship promotion, and SMEs technical support among other key fundamentals (Friedman, 2005).

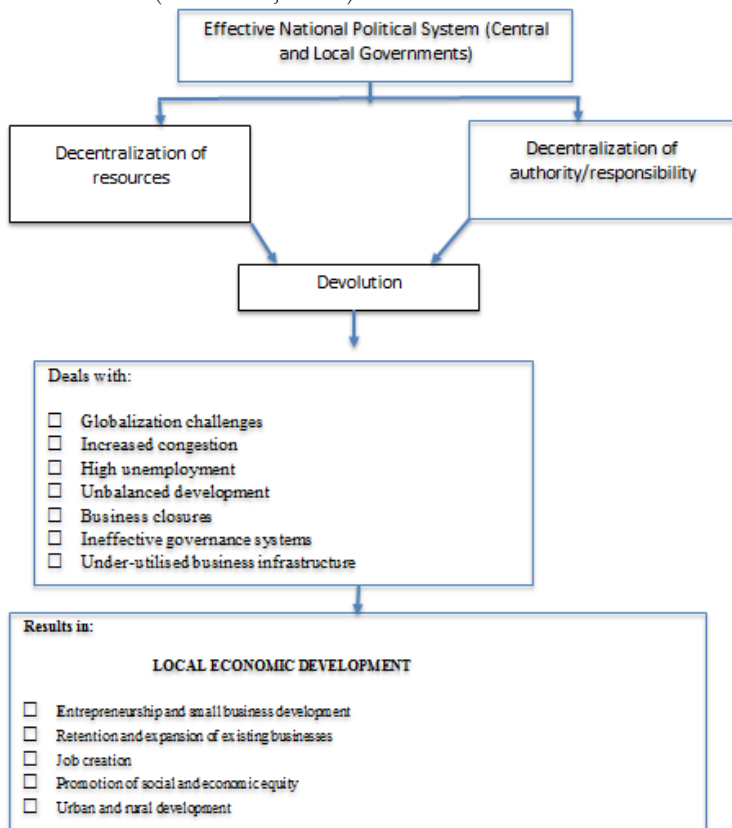


Figure 2: *The Intersection between LED and Devolution* (Authors' derivations based on literature reviewed, 2022)

EMPIRICAL LITERATURE

Roberts (2014) argues that the concept of devolution is evidenced by the fact that since the late 1950s, many countries have introduced policies to support decentralisation and devolution of government and the spread of economic development. Two factors need emphasis in this observation. The first one is that devolution and decentralisation are two different aspects of modelling governance; and the second aspect is that economic development, and not economic growth, is the resultant factor of implementing decentralisation and devolution. There are no clear definitions for both decentralisation and devolution. However, it is generally understood that decentralisation is much broader than devolution. Mapuva and Miti (2019) submit that there are three major forms of administrative decentralisation, namely: de-concentration, delegation, and devolution. The OECD (2019) defines devolution as part of the decentralisation process that is mainly concerned with the transfer of power and control from the national to a sub-national level that aims to build a more cooperative and strategic role for national and subnational governments. On the other hand, Simba *et al.* (2015) link devolution and economic development in their definition of local economic development (LED) as the process in which the local government, or some agency, authority or organisation on behalf of the local government, engages to enhance a community's capacity to effect economic progress in both a quantitative and qualitative manner. This implies that devolution is a tested driver of local economic development. However, Roberts (2014) argues that whereas devolution practices have been successful in most secondary cities of developed regions such as North America and Europe, in developing countries, there are few good examples of good practice of devolution of government.

Mapuva and Miti (2019) argue that the most famous example of devolution is in the United Kingdom, where Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland exercise authority over their own lands, but still retain their places as components of the United Kingdom (UK). Torrance (2022) posits that devolution in the UK is asymmetric in that different parts of the UK have different forms of devolution and varying degrees of power, and this has contributed to its success. Moreover, there is also a non-legislative framework of agreements between government

departments and the devolved institutions that help resolve disputes between central and devolved governments (Torrance, (*ibid.*)). The reference to the UK devolution governance is of significance in that it is anchored on four pillars: political; administrative; fiscal; and people and place (Industrial Strategy Council, 2021). These four pillars depict all the variations of devolution that are expected when a country adopts devolution of government.

According to Hope (2014), administering and maintaining decentralised governance requires sufficient capacity in institutions, networks, organisational, facilities and equipment, human resources, and data and information, to effectively deliver services. Ghai (2015) suggests that devolution necessitates coordinated capacity-building initiatives by the national government. Intensive capacity building and administrative and political staff training at both the national and local levels of government must accompany devolution if it is to result in positive LED. Other branches of government should assist local authorities in enhancing their management, technical, and administrative skills and the responsiveness, accountability, and transparency of their organisational structure (United Nations Human Settlements Programme, 2009). The necessary human, financial, and technological resources should be available to local governments so that they can carry out their duties in an effective and timely manner (Chirisa *et al.*, 2013).

It is crucial to stress that strengthened accountability procedures should accompany LED and devolution in general to prevent the devolution of inefficiency and corruption. Without appropriate accountability systems, devolution cannot be implemented successfully to achieve the goals of LED. In the absence of effective accountability measures, Ribot (2004) contends that there is a risk that decentralised resources may be unlawfully misdirected and/or that insiders would profit from the benefits of decentralisation. Legislators should create accountability measures to make sure local authorities are held responsible for their actions and to stop local corruption and fiscal irresponsibility. Corporate governance problems and financial irresponsibility, according to Chigudu, 2020, are crippling local governments' ability to function. Considering this, it is asserted that decentralised effective political organisations can provide

services more effectively and responsibly as long as there are sufficient channels for political, financial, and administrative responsibilities.

The institutionalisation of monitoring systems should go hand in hand with the devolution of governmental authorities and responsibilities to local governments to guarantee that they operate within the bounds established by the Constitution and other appropriate Acts of Parliament (Bosire, 2014). This is because devolution does not aim to establish fully autonomous local government entities. Central government oversight is a critical accountability tool for the efficient implementation of devolution (Chigwata, 2018). Without the essential safeguards in the form of checks and balances, Zimbabwe's current vertically split political system might strangle local authorities, particularly those governed by opposition parties, and undermine LED, resulting in a negative intersection between devolution and LED.

Ndung'u (2014) used a Brazilian comparative case analysis research with lessons for Kenya as one of the developing nations trying to boost economic development through devolution to evaluate the local economic potentialities and limitations connected with a devolved government. The logical conclusion to the arguments made regarding devolution and the focus on economic development in Brazil is that devolution has impacted economic development through a variety of intricate channels, and the extent to which the two factors have been related positively has in part been dependent on institutional-specific policies. To prepare for the potential effects of reallocating resources and power tiers of government, Zimbabwe should benefit from Brazil's devolution experience by reviewing this study. Devolution can have negative impacts on local economic development if its harmful implications on equity and efficiency are not managed by policy. Regarding the relationship between devolution and local economic development, this empirical research yields mixed results overall. This, however, might be indicative of many forms of devolution taken into account, such as whether local government accounts for a significant portion of total government revenue or expenditures. When the various forms of devolution are examined separately, there seems to be more agreement that on revenue devolution, local government receiving a significant portion of overall government revenue

is associated with local economic development. However, there is still a contradiction in the research findings regarding the size of the effect and the tenacity of the relation.

METHODOLOGY

The study used secondary data, that were taken from already published academic works like books, journals, research papers, official government reports, and gazette articles. The analysis of documents that convey information about the phenomenon being studied is known as a documentary review (Mogalakwe, 2006). Utilising insights from the building of urban resilience in Zimbabwe, the researchers used qualitative content analysis to discuss instances where LED and devolution intersect.

RESULTS

The intersectionality of devolution and local economic development in Zimbabwe is a persuasive notion because there are no definite legislative instruments promulgated to affect the local governance models in the country. The LED model as an economic development model is inferential since a LED policy is yet to be drafted in the country. Concerning devolution, the lynchpin of the model is the 2013 Constitution and the Devolution and Decentralisation Policy effected in 2020. Whereas the previous governance instruments depended on the political will of the incumbent Local Government Minister to promote decentralisation, the new Constitution makes it a right for residents to enjoy the fruits of decentralisation through devolution. This is pointed out in Section 264(2) of the 2013 Constitution which puts forward that the objectives of devolution include: To recognise the right of communities to manage their own affairs and to further their development. Making it a right for communities to manage their own affairs implies that this can be legalised through legislative instruments. Of significance is that the Constitution infers that through devolution, local economic development may be achieved, and there is a purported legal connection between the two. However, although the new Constitution was adopted a decade ago, supporting legislative instruments are yet to be crafted to implement devolution in Zimbabwe.

Furthermore, Chigwata (2019) argues that the new Constitution is fudged when it comes to devolution issues. For starters, even though the devolution concept is mentioned several times in the new Constitution, there is no definition of what constitutes devolution in the Zimbabwean context. Therefore, implementing it without a clear understanding of what it is may be challenging. Moreover, whereas the Constitution envisages devolution to promote socio-economic development, it is also mum on what constitutes this concept. This is compounded by the fact that the Devolution and Decentralisation Policy also ignores defining what devolution is. Therefore, the legal connection between devolution and local economic development in the urban councils of Zimbabwe is only inferential and thus not prescriptive. This denotes that it is only up to the central authority to implement devolution to realise local economic development. Ironically, the Government of Zimbabwe in the Devolution and Decentralisation Policy argues that “Zimbabwe already has some devolution exercised through Local Authorities in the form of Urban Councils and Rural District Councils established to provide services to a heterogeneous citizenry in geographically defined and demarcated areas of jurisdiction” (Government of Zimbabwe, 2020: 03). This declaration emanates from the fact that there is no clear roadmap of what the devolution entailed in the new Constitution is. Kamel and Bohn (2020) argue that the devolution initiative in Jordan failed owing to different interpretations of the basic concepts and a lack of political support from the central government. The Zimbabwean devolution exercise may be analogous to this case. The Zimbabwe Policy Analysis and Research Unit (ZEPARU, 2020) submits that in both the Constitution and the Devolution and Decentralisation Policy, there is no clarity of roles and responsibilities for different tiers of Government. This may spell doom to the devolution and LED initiatives of local governance in Zimbabwean urban areas.

There is also a political aspect to the synergies between devolution and local economic development. Nyikadzino and Vyas-Doorgapersad (2022) assert that the major proponents of devolution during the drafting of the new Constitution were opposition leaders in Matebeleland, Midlands, and Manicaland provinces. It was envisioned that devolution would become a panacea to both political and economic marginalisation (Chirisa and

Dube, 2012). However, looking at the Devolution and Decentralisation Policy of 2020, the Devolution Circular of 2019, and the 2022 Ministry of Finance and Economic Development Budget Strategy, it is noted that the incumbent government is more inclined towards fiscal and economic devolution than political devolution. This is worrying in that it is a sign that the central authority is reluctant to relinquish power to the lower tiers of government, yet literature has it that political and economic devolution cannot be separated if the result is to be local economic development (Jean-Paul, 2021; Muntaz and Ishmael, 2021; Chigwata, 2018). Therefore, the reluctance of the incumbent government to simultaneously promote political and economic devolution, as articulated in the new Constitution, is a harbinger of the failure of the devolution concept in Zimbabwe. Nonetheless, a hypothetical analysis of the synergies between devolution and local economic development within the local authorities of Zimbabwe serves to explore the benefits of the two concepts.

HARARE

Harare City Council is the responsible local authority for the capital city of Zimbabwe. There are palpable central-local contestations between Harare City Council and the Ministry of Local Government and Public Works, and this is mainly political. This has seen the central authority meddling in the affairs of the local authority, to the detriment of service delivery for the residents. The recent bone of contention is the Pomona Waste Investment. In the Voluntary Review of 2020, Harare City Council revealed that it is mooting to invest in a Waste-to-Energy plant at Pomona dumpsite as a major component of its Integrated Municipal Waste Management Plan. The investment was envisioned to be funded through a Public-Private Partnership to generate 60 megawatts (MW) of electricity at an estimated cost of well over \$100 million. However, this initiative was high-jacked by the central authority when the Harare City Council reneged on the deal with an Albanian company Geogenix BV. Even though the deal would allegedly cost the local authority USD40 000 per day for the minimum 1000 tonnes of garbage per day at the Pomona Dumpsite, the central authority through the Minister responsible for Local Government and Public Works, sided with the investor, arguing that the resolution by Harare City Council to suspend the deal till an investigation is undertaken is null and void (The Standard, 05 June

2022). Additionally, Masimba (2021) posits that the political rights of residents exercised through council elections have also been rendered inconsequential in Harare as elected officials are frequently frustrated, suspended or in some instances expelled for political reasons. Therefore, these interruptions may only be reduced through devolution. Since devolution entails political weaning of local authorities from central authority interventions, but supervision, the City of Harare Council and the residents may benefit from it.

Harare enjoys the advantages of being a primate city. These advantages include the fact that it houses the administrative seat of the country. Most vibrant companies and organisations in the country are headquartered in the capital city. Moreover, since it is the capital city of the country, it acts as a magnet in pulling both foreign and domestic direct investment. This analysis resonates with Roberts (2014) who argues that primate cities are associated with economies of scale, and this further propels local economic development. Moyo (2021) argues that investors over the years had preferred Harare as an investment destination over Bulawayo, the second largest city in the country, and this contributed to de-industrialisation of the latter. Additionally, Masimba (2021) observes that Harare city acts as a major hub for the country's road, rail and air transport networks, and is positioned strategically for trade and tourism. Such endowments promote local economic development. In this vein, Pindiriri (2020) submits that the major economic activities that may contribute to local economic development include the following: wholesale and retail trade, repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles, and manufacturing, wholesale and retail trade. Repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles contributed at least 16 percent of Harare's GDP since 2015 while manufacturing contributed at least 15 percent from 2015 to 2020. The study also notes that Harare significantly contributes to the economy of Zimbabwe, contributing at least 34 percent to the national GDP. This implies that if the City of Harare sneezes, the whole country coughs. This means that economic developments within the City of Harare have a large impact on the national economy. In this regard, it may be argued that Harare City Council is self-sufficient to promote socio-economic development through devolution.

BULAWAYO

According to the 2022 Census Report, Bulawayo has a population of 665 940. The population growth for Bulawayo from 2012-2022 is a positive 0.2 percent. This implies that owing to both natural population growth and rural-urban migration, the population growth for Bulawayo City is on an upward trajectory. In other words, the Bulawayo City Council is being reminded of the increasing demand for services it has to offer to the residents. Of interest is that the 2023 Budgetary Statement for Bulawayo City Council is characterised by incremental growth of service delivery. For example, it was highlighted that the Council had set aside land in various wards for green gardens where the less privileged are allocated plots to do market gardening to sustain themselves (Bulawayo City Council, 2022b). The idea of urban agriculture sustains urban livelihoods, considering the urban poverty trend that now characterises urban areas of Zimbabwe (Food and Nutrition Council, 2021). Therefore, setting aside land for urban agriculture implies that the Bulawayo City Council champions an inclusive development thrust. This is also highlighted by the fact that the Budget statement also emphasises participatory decision-making whereby residents and other stakeholders are offered the opportunity to contribute to the running of the city through interactions and feedback meetings at ward levels (Bulawayo City Council, 2022b). This is a major component of devolution whereby stakeholders within a jurisdiction are offered the opportunity to participate in governance. The rationale behind devolution is the improvement of service delivery through reduced bureaucratic red-tape as the government, as represented by the empowered local authority would be 'closer' to the people (Musgrave, 1959; Roberts, 2014; Nyikadzino and Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2022). In this light, the Bulawayo City Council is development-oriented as envisioned in the devolution thrust. This is also highlighted by the fact that the devolution funds through the Inter-Governmental Funds Transfer (IGFT) that the City Council received were used to renovate the Thorngrove Infectious Diseases Hospital and the construction of Vulindlela Primary School in Ward 28. These efforts depict that the city council is concerned with economic development for the residents of Bulawayo.

With regards to Bulawayo City Council, it is argued that devolution and local economic development have a synergistic relationship whereby each aspect promotes the other. For example, the Bulawayo City Council minutes for a Council meeting that was held on the 7th of September 2022 highlighted that portable water supply for the city can only be improved if illegal mining that was being practised along rivers that drained into the city's supply dam, particularly the Umzingwane river, was banned and if possible, replaced by controlled mining (Bulawayo City Council, 2022a). Whereas illegal mining is harmful to the environment, it is a livelihood strategy for the local residents. Therefore, replacing illegal mining with controlled mining becomes the most viable solution if an environmental impact assessment is done to approve such economic activity. In this regard, mining promotes local economic development that increases revenue for the Council and provides for the local stakeholders through job opportunities.

Besides the mining prospects as drivers of local economic development in Bulawayo, the city is situated as the industrial hub of Zimbabwe. Although the city experienced de-industrialisation owing to the country's economic turmoil, this can be resuscitated by attracting both domestic and foreign direct investment. The major advantage for the city is that it hosts Zimbabwe's railway headquarters, which is the National Railways of Zimbabwe. The City of Bulawayo (2019 p. 28) notes that "Bulawayo is strategically located and forms the axis of the road and rail network links to the rest of the country and the southern African region providing important railway linkages to South Africa, Botswana and Zambia". This implies that trade, as facilitated by the railway infrastructure, with other countries such as Botswana, South Africa, and Zambia can be revived to promote local economic development. Moreover, Bulawayo also serves as the major regional centre servicing smaller towns such as Victoria Falls, Hwange, Gweru, Zvishavane, Gwanda, Beitbridge and Plumtree. This implies that the sphere of influence for the city stretches to both Matabeleland provinces. In other words, besides being the administrative centre for all the Matabeleland secondary towns, Bulawayo may also tap into local trade opportunities that come with that large sphere of influence. By and large, through initiatives such as the Zimbabwe International Trade Fair, Bulawayo City may be put back into the

limelight as Zimbabwe's industrial hub to promote local economic development. For example, Moyo (2021) argues that in 2019, the Zimbabwe International Trade Fair event attracted more than 500 local Bulawayo exhibitors to showcase to international stakeholders from more than 14 countries. Therefore, there is a need to exploit the city's comparative and competitive advantages to the fullest as the city has an adequate electricity supply, good national road linkages, and railway lines passing through and linking it to other parts of the country and broader region. This is in unison with Mandisvika (2015) who posits that since urban development is concerned with an agglomeration of industrial sectors, regional competitive advantage can be derived from the ability of agglomeration to reinforce clusters of business and to attract other businesses. However, Bulawayo City Council (2019: 29) notes that "There are some designated industrial sites in the city but what is lacking is adequate servicing of these industrial stands for the attraction of major industrial and manufacturing concerns."

VICTORIA FALLS

In June 2018, Victoria Falls adopted a 5-year Sustainable Development Plan (2018-2022) based on the vision of building a sustainable city, local economic development, strengthening the capacity of the city and leading in service delivery. The drafting of the plan was consultative as it included the input of various stakeholders such as the following: community, Councillors, and staff, and the input was gained through several reviews, meetings and consultative workshops. This is premised on the principle of living no one behind, a principle of inclusiveness as envisaged in the Agenda 2030 development plan. In this regard, the Victoria Falls Town Council strives for inclusive development. For example, it is noted that the Town Council adopted pro-poor policies to solve poverty challenges among its residents. The intervention measures to combat poverty include job creation by the Council (Victoria Falls Town Council, 2020). In this regard the Town Council introduced "public work schemes, providing the poor with semi-skilled or unskilled work, and guaranteeing them at least 100 days of employment per year" and the scheme has so far benefited more than 1000 individuals (Victoria Falls Town Council, 2020 p. 16). In this regard, the provision of employment for the residents is of paramount importance in sustaining local livelihoods as envisioned in

Sections 274 and 276 of the Constitution which gives the mandate of overseeing the welfare and affairs of residents to local authorities. Moreover, if a local authority can initiate job opportunities for its residents, it signifies that it can champion local economic development. Whereas the concept of local economic development is premised on economic development that emphasises the welfare of people, its lynchpin is economic drivers, particularly income for the recipients. In this regard, Victoria Falls Town Council, through creating jobs for the people, is promoting sustainable economic development through economic growth. Additionally, it is noted that as a local economic development thrust, the tourism and hospitality industry in the resort town creates a total of 1500 new jobs each year, and this sustains the residents both directly and indirectly (Victoria Falls Town Council, 2020). Noteworthy is the fact that “Victoria Falls Municipality has maintained an environment conducive for local and foreign- direct investments thereby creating jobs for all” (Victoria Falls Town Council, 2020 p. 16). Therefore, although the Zimbabwean ease of doing business indicators have been on a downward trajectory for years, the Victoria Falls local authority strives to attract investors through localised initiatives.

However, one notable setback for the local authority is a shortage of land. This challenge was noted in the 2019 Auditor General’s Report for local authorities whereby the review for the year ended 31 December indicated that the Council had 15 776 people on the waiting list for residential stands and only 10 un-serviced stands were allocated (Government of Zimbabwe, 2020). The response by the Victoria Falls Town Council to this challenge was that “Engagement with central government is at an advanced stage for Council to acquire land” (Government of Zimbabwe, 2020). This response reflects that there is land contestation between the local authority and the central authority. Based on the Urban Councils Act Chapter 29: 15, land can be acquired by a local authority inside or outside the council’s area through purchasing or expropriation. The provision for expropriation includes an application for approval from the central authority, and “Approval of the expropriation of land is often given with conditions as the Minister of Lands and Land Resettlement thinks fit” (UKAID, 2015: 06).

However, in the case of Victoria Falls Town Council where demand for land surpasses the supply, the only logical solution is to expropriate the surrounding private land. This is against the backdrop of more than 1 100 hectares being availed to Chegutu Rural District Council and Chegutu Municipality by the Local Government and Public Works Ministry for the expansion of the town (The Herald, 21 August 2021). Ironically, in the Voluntary Local Review Report of 2020, the local authority iterated that it is facing a land acquisition challenge and this has a negative impact on its economic growth (Victoria Falls, 2020). However, the shortage of land negatively affects the real estate sector of the town (Matsa *et al.*, 2021). This is particularly true considering that the town is a tourist destination that attracts land developers for conference convention centres; resorts and casinos; hotels and lodges; and shopping malls. For example, a survey carried out by the 'We Are Victoria Falls' group on behalf of the Ministry of Environment, Climate, Tourism and Hospitality Industry (MECTHI) and the Zimbabwe Tourism Authority (ZTA) in 2022 indicated that 73% of respondents confirmed that Luxury Boutique hotels will be the preferred accommodation choice of travellers in the next five years (MECTHI, 2022). This implies that the real estate sector in Victoria Falls is a viable local economic development avenue that can be tapped into for the sustainable development of the town. Therefore, the contestation between the local authority and the central authority concerning the needed land will only be ironed out through devolution to promote such local economic development.

CHEGUTU

Chegutu is among the oldest towns in Zimbabwe. According to the Chegutu Town Council archives, the town was established in 1900 after the discovery of gold in the district by a hunter called Henry Hartley at Butterfly and Giant mines. Nonetheless, it was in 1942 when Chegutu was proclaimed a Town Management Board, and in 1974 the town attained municipal status as proclaimed in terms of the Urban Councils Act 1973. This is evidence enough to reveal that the service infrastructure for the town is dilapidated. The recurrent cholera outbreaks in the town are attributed to the aged sewer system. Sifile *et al.* (2015) report that the cholera outbreak in 2008 and 2009 claimed 248 lives and 700 cholera cases were recorded in Chegutu town, and in 2012, 280 cases of typhoid

were recorded, while in 2013, 60 cases of typhoid and one case of cholera were recorded.

On the other hand, the 2017 Auditor General's report on local authorities highlighted that Chegutu town was experiencing challenges in supplying adequate water to its residents, citing that the Municipality's water reservoirs have a carrying capacity of twelve and a half (12, 5) mega litres in contrast to an expected twenty-two and a half (22, 5) mega litres (Government of Zimbabwe, 2018). In this regard, owing to unplanned urban expansion, the town experienced water shortage and this explains the recurrent disease outbreaks as the residents opted for unclean and unprotected water sources for sustenance. However, the town council has not been able to raise the needed budget for rehabilitating the water and sewer systems. Although the macroeconomic environment in the country made it a challenge for a local authority to raise the needed funds, administrative shortfalls also contributed to the poor state of infrastructure in Chinhoyi town. For example, the 2020 Auditor General's report on local authorities revealed that 77% of the properties that were being supplied water by Chegutu Municipality were unmetered and 11% had non-functional meters, and the Municipality raised a fixed charge on all properties that had no functional meters. As such, the accompanying risk is loss of revenue due to under-billing. From this perspective, it may be pointed out that the Chegutu Town Council is economically incapacitated to be independent of the central authority. It is noteworthy that devolution funds have been used to resuscitate both the sewer and water systems in Chegutu town. The Parliament of Zimbabwe (2022) submits that as of August 2022, 4km of sewer network rehabilitation in Chegutu High-density of Kaguvi Phase 3 had been 95% complete; and rehabilitation of 4km of water network in Pfupajena high-density suburb was 90% complete. Therefore, the case of Chegutu validates the need to capacitate local authorities before the devolution drive is set in full motion. The Devolution and Decentralisation Policy reiterates that empowering devolved sub-national tiers of Government will require rigorous capacity-building exercises that will also target enhancing the capabilities of elected Mayors and Councillors to competently assume and exercise newly acquired Constitutional mandates.

Moreover, the 5% minimum threshold for the IGFT devolution fund is proven to be a necessity in some cases to ensure equitable distribution of resources across the country. This is validated by the fact that although the town's economic foundations were hinged on mining and agricultural activities, these have been on the decline (Simba *et al.*, 2015). Such a decline is evidenced by the closure of the David Whitehead textile industry over a decade ago. Therefore, the local economic development base for the town was put in disarray. Nonetheless, on 06 October 2022, the Herald Newspaper reported that David Whitehead Textiles in partnership with Agro-Value Chain Limited had reopened in Chegutu town (The Herald, 06 October 2022). This implies that the town may once again have a viable agro-industrial base to boost local livelihoods.

DISCUSSION

According to the Commonwealth Local Government Forum (2005), local governments should have the financial resources to carry out their objectives and guarantee a sufficient degree of autonomy in resource allocation. If there is an imbalance between financial resources and responsibilities, it will be challenging for local governments to handle the delegated duties. Chigwata (2019) correctly notes that devolution entails more than just distributing duties to lower tiers; it also entails distributing financial resources to drive local economic development that is centred on the needs of the people. According to Mitchinson (2003), the assignment of a service responsibility must be supported by the simultaneous handover of the appropriate resources, including employees, money, and assets, to advance LED which has a significant effect on urban resilience building. By and large, a positive intersection between devolution and LED can only be realised provided there is an effective political system in the country at both national and local levels where the central government transfers should be foreseeable and visible to enable local governments to create their own strategic plans for achieving set goals. Once a positive correlation between devolution and LED is realised, urban resilience building in Zimbabwe is inevitable.

According to Chigwata (2018), without the establishment of modalities to encourage cooperation between and among the devolved units and the central government, the design of devolution will be insufficient. Ghai

(2015) underlines how important it is to make sure that the various levels of government would not operate independently after the devolution of powers and responsibilities. To meet the demands and expectations of local communities, all levels of government's operations should be strategically linked both vertically and horizontally. Devolution needs to work in harmony with other factors for it to accomplish the goals of LED and urban resilience building in Zimbabwe.

When figuring out where LED and devolution intersect, it is essential to be clear about the relationship between the central structure and the devolved structures. It is necessary to clarify and enhance the relationship between the national government and local governments. There must be methods to control intergovernmental relations because conflicts between the various tiers in a decentralised form of government are unavoidable (Ghai, 2015). To facilitate cooperation and coordination between national and local governments, the central government should establish favourable conditions (Chirisa *et al.*, 2013). To safeguard LED through devolution, the established regulatory institutions should exert control over the central government when it violates the principles of devolution and over the local government when it acts outside the law.

The lack of resources and staff at the local government level to assume responsibility for service delivery is the biggest obstacle facing devolution as a framework for service delivery and undermining LED (Muriisa, 2008). Devolution might, however, exacerbate local capacity problems in the early stages due to the added policy formulation and implementation obligations (Siddle & Koelble, 2012). As a result, only if the necessary ability to exercise devolved rights and responsibilities is prioritised and developed, will LED be implemented in Zimbabwe in a way that is both successful and sustainable. Nonetheless, as highlighted in the Devolution and Decentralisation Policy, Councillors and other local government staff in a devolved system of government need training through both short-term and medium-term interactions for them to make decisions that are advantageous for LED and urban resilience building. They ought to get training that emphasises, among other things, policymaking, corporate governance, local government finances, and ethical concerns in public

management. All this is because they are responsible for making judgments that may be difficult to undo in the long run. Higher institutions may assist in conducting training requirements analysis to identify skill gaps and potential areas for capacity building.

CONCLUSION

The Zimbabwean government has decided to employ devolution as stated in the Constitution to secure the decentralisation of authority to provincial, metropolitan, and municipal authorities. This article looks into the intersection between local economic development and devolution. According to the literature assessment, there is conflicting data about whether or not devolution is good for local economic development. This may be in part due to the complexity of evaluating devolution and the fact that many other factors besides decentralisation have an impact on local economic development. Nevertheless, it appears from various studies that Zimbabwe's devolution is promoted as a method for reducing local disparities, strengthening local democracy and public engagement, ensuring local economic development, and enhancing urban resilience. The achievement of complementing fiscal, political, and administrative reforms is necessary for devolution to succeed. The move to a viable devolved system of government is therefore dependent on additional institutional, legislative, and fiscal considerations. The positive intersection between devolution and LED will remain a theoretical concept and local inequities and problems will persist if fundamentals such as effective political systems, accountability mechanisms, regulation on intergovernmental relations, budgetary devolution, and capacity building are not prioritised. Again, local governments' ability to function will be compromised, as long as power remains centralised. Therefore, there is a need for effective national and local political systems. The framework for implementing devolution to achieve local economic development with insights into urban resilience building in Zimbabwe is crucially dependent on the country's political willingness. To avoid stifling change, policymakers should strike a careful balance and refrain from establishing several novel and unrealistic institutions, laws and procedures.

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