

A Review of Rural Local Government System in Zimbabwe from 1980 To 2014

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Abstract: *This research looks at the rural local government system in Zimbabwe. Local government is the sphere in which most citizens operate and hence its capabilities to a very large extent define the capacity of national governments. It is the closest and most accessible level of government to the people. It provides the services utilised by individual households such as waste disposal, public transport, water, schools, health clinics and other social services. To the majority of rural Zimbabweans, local government is the level of government they engage with more often, and hence its ability to engage them in decision-making and service delivery is critical for local democracy. The critical question is whether the system of local government promotes or inhibits local democracy.*

Keywords: *Local government, rural district councils, democracy, development.*

I. Introduction

According to Reddy (1999), the evolution of local government in most African countries and Zimbabwe in particular has had the following major stages:

Pre-colonial period: indigenous self-rule under various forms of traditional chiefdoms or kingdoms. During this period there were many forms of social organisations which were in continuous transformation and development. Pre-colonial traditional authorities derived their authority from a variety of sources:

- (a) Rights of conquests control over land, direct descent from great ruling ancestors, or membership in a particular ruling family (Lutz and Linda, 2004).
- (b) Colonial period: modern municipalities were established in urban areas where most Europeans and Westerners resided. In addition, traditional leaders were in charge of certain municipalities, mostly in rural or urban outer peripheries with the colonial power in a system of indirect rule. Indirect rule was common to all Anglophone countries where the British hand was felt through the indigenous traditional leaders who were under the supervision of the Colonial District Commissioner responsible for law and order and other judicial functions. The local government system in Zimbabwe during the colonial period had the same experiences as other Anglophone countries in Africa such as South Africa, Zambia, Malawi and Uganda. It is argued that matters were worse in the Francophone countries prior to 1918 as French policy was based on assimilation and a direct rule system of governance with colonial administrators operating from municipal centres to village levels (Binza, 2009).
- (c) Transition period: a period where Africans were preparing for their independence. Agreements which led to the establishment of democratic local governments between the colonial masters and African leaders were signed, although these democratic local governments were short-lived in some African states like Uganda due to factors such as corruption, tribalism and a lack of developmental vision.
- (d) Post-honeymoon: this period was characterised by administrative and political centralisation by either one-party or military regimes such as Uganda under which local self-government was abolished. In most states, local governments served as puppets of the central government which led to a progressive decline of competence, resources, legitimacy and service delivery (Binza, 2009).
- (e) Contemporary new dawn: this period started in the mid-1980s in some states and early 1990s in others.

Contemporary local government system in Zimbabwe is a product of historical developments. The history of formal local government is generally traced back to the arrival of the British South Africa Company (BSAC) in 1890 (Chatiza, 2008). This is when the first modern local governance structures were established and the traditional ones were effectively supplanted by English-style administration. Masunungure (1996:1) supports this argument by indicating that “from its inception, the overriding imperative was the consolidation of the colonialist hegemony and its attendant infrastructures of control.” However, some scholars observe that traditional local governance institutions that existed before colonisation in 1890 deserve recognition and classification as forms of local government (ACPD, 2002). The two points of view regarding when to begin the story of local government in Zimbabwe are not necessarily opposed. They provide insight into the very

conception of local government in the country from both a central and a local perspective. Changes in policies and laws are a useful framework to use in tracing the history of local government in Zimbabwe. This is because they capture the essence, structures and functions of local government (Chatiza, 2010).

II. Pre-Independence Period 1890-1979

According to Mutizwa-Mangiza (1985), during the colonial era, the policy of racial segregation dominated political, economic and social spheres, and was enforced by legislation such as the Land Apportionment Act of 1930 and the Land Tenure Act of 1931 which demarcated land as being European or African. The urban, mining and prime farming rural areas were designated for Europeans and the Africans were confined to the more marginal Tribal Trust Lands (TTL) which was later renamed Communal Lands. A 1953 document by the Government of Southern Rhodesia defined the basis of local government as “a genuine community or its creation . . . and [that] no definition of local government is more suited or urgently needed in Africa than that of a community building agency” (Government of Southern Rhodesia, 1953). This followed a government-sponsored comparative study whose findings were used to facilitate a debate on local government. This study influenced the government’s view of community building as separate from political representation, tribal authority as a form of local government different from central government and that local government would flow from voluntary movement towards meeting local needs. The Southern Rhodesian Government also sought to avoid dependence of Africans on central government and cautioned against spoon-feeding as follows:

“The serious danger of breeding a species of sub-economic man . . . ignorant of elementary responsibilities and regarding government as an inexhaustible source of benefits . . . the problem calls for a re-examination of the present system with a view to assigning a definite sphere of finance and self-help to African local government” (Government of Southern Rhodesia, 1953).

As can be noted from the above statements, sound conceptualisation of colonial local government in African areas was undone by racist separate development policies. The first formally established local authority was the Salisbury Sanitary Board in 1891 (Jordan, 1984; Wekwete, 2006). The necessary legal instrument (Ordinance 2) was, however, only enacted in 1894 and followed by the first Municipal Law of 1897 which granted municipal status to Salisbury (now Harare) and Bulawayo with wholly elected councils. Hlatshwayo (1986) interprets the time lag or delay between setting up the Salisbury Sanitary Board (SSB) and Ordinance 2 as an indication that local government was established ‘grudgingly’. The urban local government which was developing excluded Africans from urban governance. In rural areas, the creation of the Gwai and Shangani ‘reserves’ under the Matabeleland Order in Council of 1894 signified the beginning of colonial local government (Hammar, 2003). Subsequent orders, legislations and Commissions entrenched white expropriation of African land until the 1930 Land Apportionment Act. Large-scale commercial farms, mines and small urban centres were administered by Roads Councils which were later transformed into Rural Councils through the 1966 Rural Councils Act. These were under European control. This process shaped the development of local government (Chakaipa, 2010). During the Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) period from 1965 to 1979, administration of black rural areas became increasingly centralised and authoritarian, dominated by centrally appointed Commissioners with “dictatorial powers.” Extensive centrally determined rules governed such activities as land use and tax collection. The motive was that of central control rather than local development (Mutizwa-Mangiza, 1985)

In terms of urban local government legislation before independence, changes were made through the enactment of a Municipal Act in 1930 and the Urban Councils Act in 1973. In big urban local authorities like Salisbury (now Harare) and Bulawayo, a number of local Town Management Boards (TMBs) were created. From the 1930s through to independence, more local government legislative and policy changes were witnessed in African than in European areas (Chatiza, 2008). This was part of managing the Native question and ensuring that the African rural economy remained secondary and subsidiary to the white economic sector as a basis for the availability of African labour for the Europeans. As a consequence, local government institutions in African areas were not autonomous. They did not pursue local interests, lacked local legitimacy and resources, compared with those in the European areas. Urban and rural areas were divided, and development which was pursued at that time subjugated African interests and ambitions and was managed by structures dominated by privileged groups. For instance, the 1973 Urban Councils Act provided for the control of African Townships by rate-paying whites, coloureds and Asians (Jordan, 1984). Between 1940 and 1970, Advisory Boards were established in African Townships with a purely consultative role. In non-African areas within municipalities like Harare, smaller local authorities known as Area and Town Management Boards (TMBs) were established. Most of these were incorporated in 1972 before the enactment of the 1973 Urban Councils Act (Jordan, 1984).

Local government legislation provided for racially divided urban and rural areas. The divisions were both spatial and institutional. From a historical perspective it is important to note that the first formal local government body was established in an urban context (Hlatshwayo, 1986). It was only in 1927 that rural local government in a formal sense was given form under the Native Councils Act. The creation of Native Boards and

later African Councils was progressive. In 1940 there were only 23 Native Councils, increasing to 58 by 1958 before dropping to 52 by 1965 (Jordan, 1984). In 1979 there were 220 African Councils, and it was anticipated that 20 more African Councils would have made the full complement (Jordan, 1984; Makumbe, 1998). Many of these councils ceased to function or relocated to urban areas as the war of liberation intensified. African Councils mainly presided over social services or welfare issues such as agricultural development. Other infrastructural services were provided by the Department of African Agriculture and the African Development Fund which were directly run from the District Commissioner's Office (Matumbike, 2009). Such an approach reinforced direct White control over the main African economic levers.

The position of chiefs was consolidated in 1957 through the African Councils Act with chiefs as vice-presidents and the District Commissioner as president for all African Councils (Holleman, 1968; Weinrich, 1971). African councils were vested with statutory powers to impose rates, collect taxes and enact locally binding by-laws. The chiefs and African Councils were further empowered, especially as African nationalism took root in the 1970s, to counterbalance the emerging threat of nationalism. Chiefs were encouraged and enticed to have Native Councils in their areas and such councils were named after the chief of a given area (Weinrich, 1971). The pre-independence governments used chiefs as primary policy implementers particularly with regard to land, and were given extensive powers as a means of exercising control over the rural populace. As a result, their relations with communities were often fractious (Community Law Centre, 2010).

Pre-independence developments of local government were intricately linked to the land and race questions. The colonial government generally treated the Natives as "children" and imposed centrally defined programmes on African and Native Councils. Any pretence of promoting African self-government was overrun by white supremacist policies (De Valk and Wekwete, 1990). African Natives increasingly saw self-help as denial of national resources to them. Evidence was seen in denial of participation, linking of local government to traditional authorities and the use of chiefs to subdue and contradict nationalist aspirations. As such, national contest for political power between Africans and the white settlers shaped the discourse and practice of local government. In due course, African and Native Councils became synonymous with all unpopular measures and regulations instituted for Africans, such as herd control, soil conservation, and land use planning and land tenure changes (De Valk and Wekwete, 1990). Local government facilities like schools, dip tanks, clinics, bridges, among others, were later targeted for destruction during the liberation struggle as a way of resisting and sabotaging the colonial government.

Yoshikuni (2006) describes Africans' experiences of segregationist landscapes in urban areas, particularly state control of African housing. These experiences contributed to the shaping of community action even before the 1920s. Rural and urban Africans were therefore, "the other", a social history characterised by under-provision of services, political exclusion, and socio-economic ill-treatment, with local government literally reduced to an instrument of the central government (Auret, 1995). The struggles that the pre-independence political economy inspired were critical in shaping African identities and aspirations at individual, community and national levels. Africans' experiences of local government institutional processes were influential in defining the agenda of, and participation in the liberation struggle. In essence, the liberation struggle progressively delegitimised colonial local government, creating a basis for a new local government system after independence. The liberation war contradicted African Councils and rationalised the disposition of traditional leaders. By contradicting and rationalising African Councils, the liberation struggle installed structures around which early independence local government reforms were built (Chatiza, 2010).

III. Post-Independence Period 1980 – Present

The post-colonial local government system in Zimbabwe has to be looked at in the context of decentralisation. As a major strategic policy thrust of government, decentralisation started in 1980 to redress inherited colonial imbalances, to improve the participation of rural people and to transfer powers and functions from central government to the rural councils. At independence in 1980, the Zimbabwean government sought to introduce wide-ranging reforms which were aimed at removing some of the racial overtones in the local government system (Makumbe, 1998). These reforms included the removal of restrictions based on race, the participation of all races in local government elections, and the redistribution of resources. The intention was to make the system of local government democratic and more responsive to the needs of the people and redress the imbalances of colonial neglect (Helmsing, 1991). The government also increased its level of fiscal support to the rural councils to enable them and government to embark on the massive provision of services and the major reconstruction of the war ravaged infrastructure. The concept of decentralisation rose out of the philosophy of rejection of the idea of elitism and is founded on the belief of the important role of the capacity of local people (Matyszak, 2011).

In 1980 the Government of Zimbabwe created a new single Local Government ministry, and brought all the three types of local government institutions (urban, African and Native Councils) and all legislation (Acts and Statutory Instruments) under one Ministry. Tribal Trust Lands were renamed Communal Lands and 55 Dis-

district Councils were created under the District Councils Act of 1980 from the amalgamation of about 220 African Councils. These were larger geographical units whose size and boundaries encompassed all the communal land in an administrative district. The councils were democratically elected and were charged with development functions. This was a significant landmark in the history of the development of the structure of local government (Matyszak, 2011). Within the broad context of decentralisation, the Zimbabwean government sought to increase the decision-making powers of local authorities and transfer added functions to them so that they could respond more effectively and efficiently to the needs of local citizens (Chatiza, 2008).

3.1 The District Councils Act 1980

The District Councils Act 1980 (amended in 1981 and 1982) applied to the Communal Lands, where it revived local government after the period of the liberation struggle, consolidated the previously fragmented African Councils from over 220 to 55, and democratised the system of local government (Mutizwa-Mangiza, 1985). District Councils consisted predominantly of elected councillors, and other members nominated under the Act such as chiefs and headmen. They were chaired by an elected councillor. The councils were the principal planning and development agencies within their jurisdictional zones. They had limited powers of taxation, implementing a variety of central legislative enactments, and provided various services. The District Administrator (DA), who was the chief executive of the council, was a national civil servant, responsible for overall planning, development and coordination. Although the traditional leaders who had dominated local government during the colonial era were not removed, no new ones were appointed. Their powers of adjudication and land allocation were transferred to the District Councils (Mutizwa-Mangiza, 1985). The District Councils Act decentralised more power to districts but was viewed by some as an attempt to recentralise power through the Ministry of Local Government, especially as the district councils were headed by the DA who was an employee of the Ministry.

3.2 Prime Minister's Directives on Decentralisation 1984 and 1985

The most significant changes to rural local government were introduced by the 1984 and 1985 Prime Minister's Directives on Decentralisation and Development (Mutizwa-Mangiza, 1985; Makumbe, 1998). The Prime Minister's Directive on Decentralisation of 1984 outlined the organisational structures through which peasant communities at sub-district level fitted into the district local governance framework. It outlined the local government structure that is in existence today. The Prime Minister's Directives guided the establishment of grassroots participation structures and provided a framework for the coordination of government institutions and participation in rural development.

Local government legislation was enacted to capture the new political dispensation, particularly with regard to universal adult suffrage and the one-city concept (Chakaipa, 2010). The directives created structures based on popular representation and participation and envisaging a democratic orientation to the process of planning for local government. It provided the basis for a hierarchy of representative bodies at the village, ward, district and provincial levels (Mutizwa-Mangiza, 1985). Development committees were introduced at these levels and were meant to bring about democratic representation and participation of rural communities in the decision-making processes for development planning and implementation in their areas (Makumbe, 1998). The local government reforms also introduced five-year and annual development plans at the local government level.

The concept of decentralisation became the mode of governance in Zimbabwe after the realisation that centralised systems of governance were expensive, cumbersome, and inflexible. They adapt slowly to the new phenomenon of governance and most importantly are open to political abuse (World Bank, 1997). There is very little space or no space in centralised governments for disadvantaged people to participate in governance systems. The option to decentralise was seen as the positive step towards poverty alleviation mainly because local authorities are closer to the people, and hence are better positioned to deal with the needs of their people. Their proximity to the people reduces the time to introduce interventions that are necessary to alleviate the negative conditions that local people face at the earliest convenient time.

Decentralisation brings an important dimension of good governance, accountability and transparency. The proximity of local government to consumers of their services can easily make them accountable to them and compel them to be transparent (Chigwenya, 2010). It is also important to note that decentralisation can allow easy coordination between various government agencies, a process which is very difficult in centralised systems where agencies operate independently, resulting in fragmented development (Mubvami and Nhekairo, 2006). The global trend towards decentralisation of public roles, resources and responsibilities is frequently presented as an important vehicle for increasing women's representation and participation and as a means by which their policy priorities and political participation can be guaranteed (Beal, 2005).

The Prime Minister's Directive of 1985 created the office of ten Provincial Governors (now Ministers of State for Provincial Affairs). Their functions were to co-ordinate and implement development planning in their respective provinces. This also saw the creation of the provincial councils under the Provincial Councils

and Administration Act of 1985. The outcome of the directives appears to share a common thread with the key features of colonial rule. They were a quest to discipline local institutions into certain forms of rule, racial domination during the colonial period and one-party political domination in the post-colonial era (Mandondo, 2000).

3.3 Rural District Councils Act (1988)

The last major decentralisation reform to be implemented was the Rural District Councils Act in 1988, which formalised the planning process, envisaged under the Prime Minister's Directives and established a system of administration, management and development of rural areas. In 1988, the Rural District Councils Act [Chapter 29: 15] was promulgated with a view to unifying district and rural councils. This ended the dual system of rural local government. However, it only became effective in 1993 when 45 Rural Councils were amalgamated with District Councils to form 55 Rural District Councils (Community Law Centre, 2010). The major objective was the rationalisation of local government in the rural areas. Rural District Councils (RDCs) cover the areas that are designated as communal land in Zimbabwe.

The amalgamation of the rural and district councils was seen as a necessary step to dismantle the former racially based local government system and to create for the rural areas a local government system that would promote nation-building through interaction across the racial line, and to permit a more equitable distribution of public services (Chakaipa, 2010). The creation and promotion of this mutual understanding was regarded as a prerequisite for the equitable provision of services and resource sharing particularly as it related to the question of land for resettlement programmes (Helmsing, 1991). This reform gave effect to the bipartite system of local government that currently exists in Zimbabwe. However, the amalgamation was fraught with difficulties and reflected a range of compromises which seriously distracted it from its ostensible objectives. Full democratic participation was not extended to the former Rural Council areas where only local taxpayers and their spouses were able to vote, thereby excluding the black landless farm workers (Helmsing, 1991).

The RDC Act failed to unify the tax base. It continued to rely on the basic land tenure divisions between the different categories: commercial, communal, and resettlement. The proceeds of the land development levy (collected from the commercial farmers) were to be spent on road maintenance. Thus as Helmsing (1991: 134) points out, while the Act formally did away with a relic of separate development, "basic socio-economic and tenure divisions have remained and the Act accepts these and the RDC is organised around these divisions." Challenges identified at the amalgamation led to the RDCs capacity building programme in 1996 which was aimed at developing the capacity of RDCs to plan, manage and implement their own development (Chakaipa, 2010).

The number of RDCs has since risen to 61 as new ones were created by subdividing bigger RDCs (MLGPWNH, 2009). The abolition of African Councils to create District Councils was accompanied by the transfer of powers of traditional leaders to the new Councils (planning and land allocation), elected Village Development Committees (Vidcos), Ward Development Committees (Wadcos) and Community Courts (judicial). However, lobbying and continued practical influence resulted in legislative changes to harmonise modern local government and traditional institutions through the Traditional Leaders Act of 2000. RDCs exercise devolved power in theory, but in practice virtually all they seek to do have to be approved by the central government through the Minister of Local Government who is accorded enormous powers by the RDC Act (EISA, 2008). Extensive efforts have been made to encourage RDCs to promote local economic development. Some of the initiatives include the Communal Areas Management Programme for Indigenous Resources (Campfire), Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs), more efficient revenue generation, and institutional and organisational capacity building. The RDC Act gives rural communities access to the democratic participatory process in local governance and their access to benefit from local development initiatives.

RDCs have the general powers relating to the administration expected of a local government authority, including the powers to make by-laws (Section 71 and 88 of the RDC Act). However, all by-laws made by the Council must be approved by the Minister, and the Minister himself may make by-laws where he feels the Council ought to have but has not (Section 94). There are 250 instances in terms of the RDC Act where the Minister may interfere in the affairs of the RDCs. The Minister has substantial control over the finances of a council and must approve any borrowing (Part XIII and Section 124 of the Act). In addition to these powers, the Minister may direct any resolution of a Council to be rescinded and give notice that the resolutions on notified matters require his approval.

The Minister has powers to dismiss a councillor on certain specified grounds, including if he has reasonable grounds to believe that the councillor is responsible for "gross mismanagement of the funds, property or affairs of the council" (Section 157). Where all the Councillors for a given council area are unable, for any cause whatsoever, to exercise all or some of their functions as councillors, the Minister may appoint Commissioners to run the council. RDCs are heavily dependent on central government for funding and in most cases have on average been able to raise only 15% and in some districts 1% of their revenue from local levies, taxes, rates and charges (Community Law Centre, 2010). The remainder comes in the form of transfers from the

centre, all of which are tied to particular activities. They collect a small amount of revenue from the development levy, user fees, licences and income-generating activities. The distribution of these transfer funds from central government follows no set formula for calculating the transfers. The main forms of transfers from central government are loans under the Public Sector Investment Programme (PSIP). It is entirely at the discretion of the central government and is usually disbursed through sector ministries. The transfers have not been followed or funded in full, resulting in operating deficits on the part of local authorities. As a result, the political and administrative independence of the Councils is severely compromised.

RDCs are responsible for policy formulation provided that it is not in conflict with national policy, district planning, regulation and control of activities subject to national legislations. They are run by an elected council and staff headed by a Chief Executive Officer (CEO). The CEO is chosen by the council subject to approval by the Minister of Local Government. The key coordinating mechanism at the district level is the Rural District Development Committee (RDDC). This is a committee of the RDC but also includes all other stakeholders in the district, including central government officers, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), parastatals and the private sector. There are five mandatory committees under the RDC which are: finance, roads, natural resources conservation, human resources, and social and health. The council may create other committees when the need arises (Matyszak, 2011).

3.3.1 Qualification for Election into the RDC in terms of the RDC Act

The requirements for one to stand as a candidate in council elections are provided for in Section (28) of the RDC Act. This involves that one must be enrolled as a voter for that ward and be an ordinary resident in the council area. The requirements are very minimal and therefore many women and men do qualify. The requirements for voter registration in terms of Section (16) of the Act are gender-neutral. The Section provides that:

“Every person who, on the 1st of March of the year in which the voters’ roll is prepared;

- (a) Is of or over the age of 18 years, and
- (b) Is a citizen of Zimbabwe, and
- (c) Is a resident of any communal land or resettlement ward, shall be entitled to be enrolled on the voters’ role as a voter in that ward.”

IV. Elections For Councillors

Elections for councillors have been held regularly since the pre-colonial period. However, after independence in 1980, various reforms have taken place in the management of elections for councillors. Before 2000, local authorities would run their own elections guided by their enabling legislations. These elections were held after every four years. As from 2002, the management of all elections is now under the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC), established in terms of Section 238 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe. Elections for local government councillors are now conducted in terms of the Electoral Act [Chapter 2: 13]. While in the past national and local elections were held separately, these were harmonised for the first time during the 29 March 2008 elections (ZEC, 2008).

According to the Local Government Laws Amendment as amended in 2008, the Minister of Local Government can appoint special interests councillors in terms of Section 7(b) to represent special interests groups. The number of appointed councillors cannot exceed 25% of the number of elected councillors. These special interests councillors participate in the business of the council to which they are appointed and perform the same functions and are entitled to the same benefits in every respect as if they were elected councillors. However, they do not have voting rights in meetings or decisions of councils (Mushamba, 2010).

The idea of “special interests group” has been even institutionalised by being included in the urban councils legislation, since the time ZANU-PF started losing control of urban constituencies to opposition parties. Jonga (2012) argues that at an election all interests are represented through their political affiliations. Thus individuals are free to choose and elect a candidate from the political parties that represent their interests. He further argues that the idea of remembering special interests after an election is theft, corruption, dishonesty or fraud that is only bent on benefiting regimes or politicians whose political traits include “monocracy, autocracy, violence, thuggery, treachery and inconsistency.” Many of the individuals who are being appointed to represent special interest are known ZANU-PF supporters and this can be interpreted to mean that the “special interests” covered by this legislation are ZANU-PF party interests.

Local government elections are ward-based. There has never been any requirement of academic qualifications for councillors in Zimbabwe. The onus for choosing credible candidates for public office at local level rests on political parties (Machingauta, 2010). To be elected as a councillor, the only requirement is that the candidate must be 21 years of age and registered on the ward voters roll for the ward in which one is contesting. Voter turnout for local government elections in Zimbabwe has always generally been low. In the 2008 harmonised elections only 35% of the registered voters participated in the local government elections (ZEC, 2008).

V. Structures of Local Government

The Local Government system in Zimbabwe, which is a unitary state, is predicated on a decentralisation mode of governance (Machingauta, 2010). However, as has been argued in the first part of this chapter, the extent to which the local government system is decentralised is subject to debate, as decentralisation is a process and not an event. In terms of the legal framework, the following Acts define the modus operandi of the local government system in Zimbabwe:

- (a) The Regional Town and Country Planning Act (1976);
- (b) Provincial Councils and Administration Act (1985);
- (c) The Rural District Councils Act (1988);
- (d) The Urban Councils Act (1993);
- (e) The Traditional Leaders Act (2000); and
- (f) Constitution of Zimbabwe (2013)

These six legislations are at the core of local government in Zimbabwe in terms of defining functions, powers, structures and procedures. The above legal instruments introduced and some of them subsequently amended in the post-independence era empower the local government institutions to carry out their mandate (Machingauta, 2010). The Acts among other issues define the legal and functional relationships between and among the various actors in local government, who in essence are the key enablers to development, to the extent the same have to proffer safe landing to all development initiatives. Key among the local institutions of rural governance is RDCs which are charged with the mandate to deliver services, as well as promote general development in their areas. In the context of decentralisation, local authorities bring communities closer to the decision-making process on local development initiatives, thereby inducing the indispensable sense of ownership and sustainability development initiatives.

A call has been made for the decentralisation of existing local government legislations to come up with one local government law (Mushamba, 2010). By 2007, the Ministry of Local Government had come up with a framework for a single local government Act. The reasoning behind decentralisation stems from the desire to eliminate perceived disparities in levels of autonomy, and to provide for a uniform legal framework for rural and urban local authorities. Such a rationalisation flows from post-independence local government reform projects which saw amalgamation of small African Councils and District Councils (District Councils Act 1980), amalgamation of Rural Councils and District Councils (Rural District Councils Act 1988), and the decentralisation of elected and traditional leadership structures.

Local government in Zimbabwe operates in a delegated capacity, performing functions conferred upon it by the central government. The functions, while defined in law, are open to central government variation and reassignment to other state agencies. Local government's existence and sustenance is largely dependent on central government, which has historically operated more through field administration than councils (Zimbabwe Institute, 2005). Pre and post-independence policy and structural developments have sustained centre-local relations that undermine the emergence of sound local governance in Zimbabwe (Mushamba, 2010). The rural local government system is characterised by a multi-tiered and hierarchical two-strand administrative structure. One strand comprises democratically elected local government councils, the other comprising appointed traditional leaders and officials imposed by the central government. There are thus two loci of power in local government running parallel to each other – one democratic and one appointed, with some formal linkages between the two established by statute. The result is that numerous tentacles of power emanating from different sources in this bifurcated system touch upon and control the lives of the rural communities (Matyszak, 2011).

5.1 Ministry of Local Government, Public Works and National Housing (MLGPWNH)

Existing local government structures and their operation further illuminate the status of local government and its potential to address the development deficit. At the apex of the local government system in Zimbabwe is the Ministry of Public Works and National Housing (MLGPWNH) charged by the Executive with the local government functions. Its policy is to recognise local democracy and decentralisation of powers and responsibilities from central government to lower-tier structures. The main structures include the Ministry of Local Government, the Provincial Councils, RDCs, Ward Development Committees (Wadcos) and Village Development Committees (Vidcos). The ministry has been assigned the various statutes which establish and operationalise local government. The ministry is accountable to the Nation, Parliament and the Executive for the efficient operation of local government (Chakaipa, 2010). The Minister and the Permanent Secretary have far-reaching decision-making powers affecting rural communities. The Minister may give directions to, and demand reports from, Provincial Councils, and pass regulations to ensure compliance with the Provincial Councils and Administration Act and “good governance” (Matyszak, 2011).

The Ministry is responsible for administering local government legislation, which in practical terms entails coordinating policy formulation, implementation, and evaluation. Its functions entail leading the development and management of the local government sector and representing the sector's interests at national

and sub-national levels in relation to other arms of government. It also has offices at national, provincial and district levels, providing certain competencies such as physical planning and civil protection which may be scarce or unavailable in local councils (Mandondo, 2000). The deconcentrated offices of the Ministry at provincial and district levels provide for interface, facilitation and coordination of local government with central ministries. The local government elections in Zimbabwe are supported by the New Constitution of Zimbabwe 2013, Electoral Act, Zimbabwe Electoral Commission Act and the Referendums Act. The elections are based on the single-member constituency system (Morna and Tolmay, 2010).

5.2 Provincial Councils (PCs)

Provincial councils were not local authorities in the strict sense of the term as they were not elective bodies. Administratively, Zimbabwe's provincial tier of government is headed by a Minister of State for Provincial Affairs who is a presidential appointee. Before the new Constitution of Zimbabwe (2013), Ministers of State for Provincial Affairs were known as Provincial Governors and were created under the Provincial Councils and Administration Act 1985 [Chapter 29: 11] to perform coordinative, consultative, and political functions for each province, seen as essential for the speedy and coordinated development of districts and provinces. Ministers of State for Provincial Affairs chair provincial councils whose membership is drawn from councils, Members of Parliament (MPs), Senators and political party leaders within a province. The provincial councils are serviced by the Provincial Development Committees (PDCs) and are answerable to the central government, not to locals, for their actions. The provincial councils have no revenue-collecting powers, nor do they receive any direct transfers from government. The provincial councils are coordinative structures essentially meant to coordinate government interventions at sub-national level and also to ensure local authority compliance with central government policies and directives.

Each province is assigned a Provincial Administrator (PA) who is appointed by the Civil Service Commission (CSC). The manner of the appointment of these officials is obscure, though their appointments may be authorised by Section 33 of the Provincial Councils and Administration Act (1985), and they are part of the CSC. No legislation sets out the qualifications for, or duties of office, of Provincial Administrators (Matyszak, 2011). They are appointed in terms of the Act and are simply and broadly described there as being "to perform such duties in relation to the Provincial Councils as the Minister may from time to time direct" (Provincial Councils and Administration Act, 1985). They appear to be the Ministry's liaison point with the Provincial Council and Minister of State for Provincial Affairs, and acted to some extent as a quasi "permanent secretary" to the Minister of State for Provincial Affairs, often exercising power in areas where statute specifically assigns it elsewhere, for example in the nomination of chiefs. Provincial Councils comprise the following membership:

- (a) The Minister of State for Provincial Affairs;
- (b) The chairperson of the municipal council and one other person nominated by that council;
- (c) The chairperson of each RDC within the province and one other person from such council nominated by the Minister, who may be an appointee to that council;
- (d) A Chief from the Province appointed by the Provincial Assembly of Chiefs; and
- (e) Three other persons appointed by the President – one chosen on the basis of skill and experience in the political affairs of the province, one chosen to represent the youth, and one to represent women.

At the provincial and district levels, Ministry of Local Government staff (the Provincial and District Administrators) are the most senior representatives of central government with a responsibility to coordinate multi-agency development planning and management through chairing PDCs and RDDCs respectively.

5.2.1 Provincial Councils as Enshrined in the New Constitution of Zimbabwe (2013)

The New Constitution of Zimbabwe (2013) provides for the establishment of Provincial Councils. Section 268 (1) indicates that:

- (1) There is a provincial council for each province, except the metropolitan provinces, consisting of:
 - (a) a chairperson of the council, elected in terms of Section 272;
 - (b) the senators elected from the province concerned;
 - (c) the two senator chiefs elected from the province concerned in terms of Section 120(1)(b);
 - (d) the president and deputy president of the National Council of Chiefs, where their areas fall within the province concerned;
 - (e) all the Members of the National Assembly whose constituencies fall within the province concerned;
 - (f) the women Members of the National Assembly who are elected in terms of Section 124(1)(b) from the province concerned; and
 - (g) the mayors and chairpersons, by whatever title they are called, of all urban and rural local authorities in the province concerned; and
 - (h) ten persons elected by a system of proportional representation referred to in subsection (3).

- (2) A person is qualified to be elected to a provincial council in terms of subsection (1) (h) if he or she is qualified for elections as a Member of the National Assembly.

5.2.2 Devolution of Governmental Powers and Responsibilities

Section 264 (1) of the Constitution of Zimbabwe indicates that

‘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’. There has been a massive demand for devolution of powers in Zimbabwe, as a mechanism of promoting popular participation in governance. Whilst the New Constitution of Zimbabwe entrenches the principle of devolution of powers from the national to the provincial and local governments as a fundamental value, it does not devolve the powers. Without providing for the powers to be devolved, the essence of devolution of powers is undermined. Therefore there is likely to be a continuation of the current situation where political power is centralised within the nation or rather central government (Mavedzenge, 2012).

5.3 Provincial Development Committee (PDC)

This is the technical arm of the Provincial Assembly and consists of:

- (a) The Provincial Administrator for the Province;
- (b) The Town Clerk, principal officer, secretary or senior council officer of every municipal council, town council, local board, rural council or district council whose mayors or chairmen, as the case may be, are members of the provincial council;
- (c) Provincial heads of security services such as the Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP), Zimbabwe National Army (ZNA) and the Central Intelligence Organisation (CIO);
- (d) The provincial head of each ministry and department of a Ministry within the province that the Minister of Local Government may designate by notice of writing to the Minister of State for Provincial Affairs; and
- (e) Such further members representing other organisations and interests as the Minister of Local Government on the recommendations of the Minister of State for Provincial Affairs may appoint.

All the members hold office at the pleasure of the Minister and the security sector and Ministry officials have a strong and anomalous presence (Makumbe, 2010; Matyszak, 2011). The functions of this Committee are to make recommendations to the Provincial Council as to matters to be included in the annual development and other long-term plans for the province, assist the Provincial Council in preparing such plans and when instructed to do so by the Council. Although a Minister of State for Provincial Affairs and the Council have virtually identical functions, no hierarchy or chain of command is indicated by the legislation. The somewhat nebulous description of duties and lack of any indication as to the precise nature of power accorded to carry out these duties, allows for an “expansive interpretation” by those concerned and the “arrogation of considerable power” by a Minister of State for Provincial Affairs (Matyszak, 2011: 6).

5.4 Rural District Councils (RDCs)

Section 8 of the Rural District Councils Act (Chapter 29:13) provides for the establishment of RDCs by the President. Local authorities (Rural District and Urban Councils) form the lowest local government structure, closest to the people. Zimbabwe currently has 61 rural district councils and 31 urban local authorities (ZEC, 2008). Council areas are divided into wards, each represented by an elected councillor who is elected through the first-past-the-post (FPTP) electoral system. This means that the person with the most votes in a ward wins the seat. Currently there are 1 596 wards under the RDCs (ZEC, 2008). Councils are made up of two arms which are:

- (a) The elected councillors who serve as policy makers and the legislature for making and passing bylaws and budgets; and
- (b) The executive and technical arm, which is responsible for the day-to-day running of the council and implements council decisions. In the urban councils, the head of appointed staff is the Town Clerk and in the RDCs is the Chief Executive Officer (CEO).
- (c) There is a separation of functions, which means that councillors should not become involved in the day-to-day operations of the council. The council staff should not become involved in the political aspects of the council (Tolmay and Morna, 2010).

The Minister of Local Government also appoints a maximum of three chiefs to each of the RDCs. Section 6 of the RDC Act indicates that:

“All Rural District Councils have been divided into wards for the purpose of electing councillors. These Councils are headed by a chairman who is elected from among the councillors at their first meeting following a general election which is held every four years. In addition to the elected councillors, the Minister also appoints up to three Chiefs from within any given Council area for the purposes of representation of the traditional leaders.”

Besides chiefs and special interest councillors, two other administrative appointments are important in relation to the governance of RDCs. Firstly, the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Council, whose appointment by a Council must be approved by the Minister of Local Government. The CEO effectively acts as secretary to the Council and is responsible for the keeping of records and minutes. All notifications pass through his or her office. Secondly, but more important, is the post of the District Administrator (DA). It is difficult to identify any legislation providing for the appointment of these officials. There is no provision in the RDC Act authorising the appointment of DAs. The definition section of the RDC Act defines a DA as being “the District Administrator within whose district the council area or proposed council area lies”, a somewhat secular and unhelpful description. More commonly, definition sections of legislation, when describing officials of this nature, use terms such as “the person appointed as such in terms of” a particular section of identified legislation (Matyszak, 2011).

While DAs appear to be public officials whose appointment is thus made by the CSC and authorised by the Public Service Act, no other provision appears to govern their appointment. Yet these individuals wield enormous powers and have been described as acting on behalf of the Ministry of Local Government as “chief implementers, government regulators and monitors” of Ministerial Policy in the districts to which they are assigned (Zimbabwe Institute, 2005). DAs have thus been assigned to chair land and food distribution and generally appear to regard all administrative matters relating to government as falling within their purview. For example, DAs have become involved in disputes over the appointment of chiefs, have issued instructions to polling officers during elections, and meddled in the arrangement of venues for the 2010 constitution-making outreach programmes (VOA News, 2010). The DAs also chair RDDC meetings and have other powers spread over 13 different pieces of legislation (Matyszak, 2011). RDCs operate through a committee system which are provided for in relevant legislations and may include any of the following; finance, human resources, planning, audit, housing, health, roads/works, environment and social/community services. Each committee consists of a number of councillors and relevant executive staff. One of the councillors is elected as chairperson. Committee recommendations are discussed in Full Council meetings which all councillors are supposed to attend.

5.4.1 Characteristics of RDCs

Some of the basic characteristics of RDCs in Zimbabwe have been described by Olthof and Wekwete (1992) as:

- (a) Financially highly dependent on central government resources for the delivery of basic resources and for their own institutional sustainability, reflected for instance by grant aid to most key executive posts;
- (b) Covering areas with limited readily exploitable and developed resources, worsening the dependence on central government. Nevertheless, improved management of natural resources such as wildlife has provided opportunities for increasing local revenue;
- (c) Having peasant agriculture on marginal land as its major economic base. Limited urbanisation and a general lack of non-farming activities continues to cause labour migration to other areas;
- (d) With limited finances and few opportunities for human resource development, the management capacity and technical skills of executive staff have remained relatively undeveloped, resulting in more administrative than development-oriented RDCs;
- (e) The statutory powers of councils are generally limited allowing for few and standard activities. Such limited powers are evident in terms of local revenue-raising powers, which are restricted to inelastic tax resources, while many services are provided by central government ministries and parastatals;
- (f) Although councillors play an important role in representing the interests of their wards, they have in their activities frequently been overshadowed by Members of Parliament and Senators, and by representatives of other interest groups, mainly due to the lack of resources available to council.

5.5 Rural District Development Committee (RDDC)

This is in theory the most important, practical and functional of all development committees (Matyszak, 2011). The RDDC consists of:

- (a) The District Administrator, who chairs the Committee;
- (b) The chairmen of every other committee established by the Council;
- (c) The CEO of the Council and such other officers as the Council may determine;
- (d) District heads of national security services such as the ZRP, ZNA and CIO;
- (e) The district head of each ministry and department of a ministry within the district that the Minister may designate by notice in writing to the DA; and
- (f) Such further persons representing other organisations and interests as the Minister, on the recommendation of the DA, may permit (Section 60(1) RDC Act).

Membership of the RDDC is thus almost exclusively restricted to bureaucrats and technocrats at the expense of ‘popular’ representatives of grassroots structures in the district’s supreme planning body. This attenuates the spirit of popular participation in planning for local development. It excludes communities from forums

in which crucial decisions are made over grassroots visions and aspirations (Chakaipa, 2010). Grassroots under-representation in the RDDC is further reinforced by lower literacy levels among community representatives in comparison with bureaucrats and technocrats. The presence of the security sector also provides an intimidating setting, given their role and history as instruments of state force and coercion (Chakaipa, 2010; Matyszak, 2011). Their presence also on a Committee charged with developmental issues is obviously anomalous and reflects both the importance of the Committee and the desire to control the distribution of resources by the Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) which currently controls the respective Ministries (Matyszak, 2011). Equally indicative of this is the fact that the Committee is chaired and dominated by ministerial civil servants, and that all persons on the Committee “hold office at the pleasure of the Minister” (Section 60 (3) of the RDC Act).

Because of its imbalances in terms of effective power and representation, the RDDC basically serves as a technical and bureaucratic referee and editor of purported grassroots plans (Chakaipa, 2010). RDCs, as elected bodies, are meant to approve plans before they are forwarded to provincial councils, PDCs and national planning agencies. In practice, RDDCs effectively do the planning while the Councils simply approve plans for onward forwarding to the higher bodies (Thomas, 1991; Makumbe, 1998). In practice, development plans are formulated in accordance with sector ministries’ funding requirements and pay little heed to the Councils’ own resources. The result is that plans forwarded from the Wadcos are largely ignored and sub-national planning becomes “an exercise in futility” (Community Law Centre, 2010).

In principle, councillors should consult their wards for approval of the consolidated plans. The RDDC, however, perpetuates top-down orientations by providing a forum for development planners and administrators to mobilise local participation for the endorsement of RDDC-authored plans, and by legitimising such plans through shallow, hurried, dubious and cosmetic consultation processes (Murombedzi, 1991; Makumbe, 1998). Instead of providing a form of representation which is accountable, councillors become conduits for funneling bottom-up visions into the RDDC level and reporting top-down decisions on such visions to local communities. Such a role reinforces the image of councillors as “extensions of the state” instead of popular representatives charged with articulating and making decisions in the interests of grassroots communities (Makumbe, 1998; Chakaipa, 2010).

The integrated district plans are sent to the Provincial Councils. Plans then enter a “tortuous bidding process” within the PDC, which prioritises them for funding (Chakaipa, 2010). However, plans that progress beyond this stage are often sidelined in favour of sectoral plans, which are centrally authored within line ministries (Thomas, 1991). Local plans are thus only tendered as “shopping lists” which are subject to editing and prioritisation at the district level and further reprioritisation at the provincial level where they are often sidelined. Local-level decentralisation, therefore, only participates in initiating futile plans but does not in any meaningful way decide, prioritise, fund, or implement the plans. These roles are usually taken over by the organisations above them (Wekwete, 2006).

5.6 The Ward Assembly

Section 18 of the Traditional Leaders Act establishes the Ward and Village Assemblies under the effective control and charge of traditional leadership. Its technical work is undertaken by the Ward Development Committee (Wadco). The Ward Assembly is made up of all Headmen, Village Heads, and the Councillor for the ward concerned. The Ward Assembly is based on universal participation (all villagers above 18 years). It is chaired by a Headman who presides over the meetings, which are convened with the same frequency or in the manner of Village Assemblies, save that a Chief cannot instruct a Ward Assembly to convene while a Headmen may instruct the convening of a Village Assembly. Functions of the Ward Assembly are described in Section 18 of the RDC Act. The Ward Assembly is charged with the responsibility of supervising the activities of the Village Assemblies within its jurisdiction. It reviews and approves development plans or proposals submitted to it by the Village Assembly and submit such plans for incorporation into the RDDC plans. There is intended to be a two-way flow of information. Thus it considers and reports on any matter that is referred to it by:

- (a) The DA; or
- (b) The Chief; or
- (c) The RDC; or
- (d) A member of the Ward Assembly.

5.7 Ward Development Committees (Wadcos)

They are established by Section 59 of the RDC Act and Section 20 of the Traditional Leaders Act. They are chaired by an elected councillor representing the ward at the district level, with representatives of development organisations operating at that level as members. A ward is defined as consisting of an administrative unit of approximately 6 000 to 7 000 people, further organised into six villages of about 1 000 people each. The Wadco draws its membership from leaders of its constituent Vidcos whose boundaries coincide

with those of traditional villages. Two positions are reserved for representatives of the ruling party's women's and youth leagues in the Wadco. A Wadco receives plans of its constituent Vidcos and consolidates them into ward plans. Councillors then forward them to the district where they are submitted to the RDDC, the district's supreme planning body that is tasked with consolidating the various ward plans into the district's annual and five-year plans (Mandondo, 2000). The Wadco is the vehicle through which development proposals for the district are channeled upwards or downwards.

The councillors in any ward have the mandate to guide the council on its functions that are aimed at improving rural infrastructure and providing better social services for the people. Although local government elections for ward councillors are held regularly, they are conducted along political party lines. Councillors owe their allegiance to the political party's elites, who endorse their candidature for the party's primary polls (Makumbe, 2010). The electoral system therefore churns out councillors who are upwardly accountable to their political benefactors and not downwardly accountable to their grassroots constituencies (Mandondo, 2000).

Some of the roles and functions of councillors include:

- (a) Organise and convene ward meetings (community meetings) to discuss matters of development and to give the opportunity to the community to air their views on all aspects of their lives.
- (b) Attend to community developmental needs such as draught power, hunger, agricultural needs, infra-structural development, and unemployment.
- (c) Distribute humanitarian assistance such as maize, clothes, food for work and any other activity that requires their input.
- (d) Implementation of empowerment projects:
- (e) Attending meetings at church, schools, village functions and other important community functions such as funerals and weddings.
- (f) Attending council meetings both full and subcommittee meetings.
- (g) Attending to council business such as officiating at functions, attending workshops and other related issues.

5.8 The Village Assembly

Village Assemblies are established by virtue of Section 17 of the Traditional Leaders Act. The Village Assembly comprises all members of a village over the age of 18, and is presided by the Village Head who is an ex officio chairman. It meets once every three months, or when one third of members request a meeting, or when the ward has instructed the Village Head to convene a meeting. The Village Assembly acts as a democratic liaison point between the villages and those charged with responsibility for their wellbeing and development of their area. The Village Assembly thus "considers all matters, including cultural matters, affecting the interest and well-being of all the inhabitants of the village." It elects and supervises the Vidcos and reviews and approves any village development plan before its submission to the Wadco for incorporation into the ward development plan. Its main functions are:

- (a) To consider all matters, including cultural affecting the interests and well-being of all the inhabitants of the village; and
- (b) To consider and resolve all issues relating to land, water and other natural resources within the area and to make appropriate recommendations in accordance with any approved layout or development plan of the village or ward.

It is also intended to be a two-way flow of information. Thus, it considers and reports on any matter that is referred to it by:

- (a) The DA for the district concerned; or
- (b) The RDC; or
- (c) The Chief or Headman for the area concerned; or
- (d) The Ward Assembly within whose area the Village Assembly falls; or
- (e) The Vidco established for the village; or
- (f) Any member of the Village Assembly (Section 15).

5.9 Village Development Committees (Vidcos)

The Vidco is the lowest unit of government administration which is expected to identify the needs of the village and articulate them through the development of a local village plan. The Vidco normally consists of 100 households, with slight variations from area to area, and it is presided over by an elected chairperson. Technical matters of the assembly are handled by a committee that draws in the input of technical agents from within the village. The committee is chaired by the Village Head. The Vidcos have little credibility at the local level. This may be attributed to the fact that they are generally accountable upwards and not to their constituencies. The failure to create a representative system may be attributed to the lack of a political culture that encourages participation (Katerere and Mohamed, 1996).

Although the Prime Minister's Directives gave rural communities a system of representation and

participation in the process of planning for local development, political expediency subverted the democratic element of the system. Universal suffrage elects four of the six members of any Vidco. The remaining two positions are reserved for women and the youth, and are usually filled by members of the ruling party's youth and women's leagues (Makumbe, 1998). The post of Vidco chair is never regularly contested in democratic elections, partly because there are no resources for such a process and also because the office is largely perceived by locals to be void and meaningless (Sithole, 1997).

The Vidcos and Wadcos were perceived to be successors to those established by Zimbabwe National Liberation Army (ZANLA) forces (ZANU-PF's military wing) during the liberation war (Zimbabwe Institute, 2005). As such, although in theory they are intended to foster bottom-up participatory democracy, the opposite has been the case. While they were initially headed by a democratically elected chairperson, Village Heads have taken over this role in Vidcos following the increase in their power with the passage of the Traditional Leaders Act in 2000. In most instances this has resulted in Vidcos becoming "empty shells" and the Village Head taking all decisions on behalf of the Vidcos, often on instructions from central government and ZANU-PF officials (Zimbabwe Institute, 2010). Wekwete (1988) quoted in Makumbe (1998:97) argues that there is an affinity between ZANU-PF and the local government structure by asserting that "the whole local government structure in Zimbabwe is a carbon copy of the ZANU-PF structure."

Though Section 22 of the Traditional Leaders Act requires that every village or ward assembly needs to ensure the adequate representation and participation of women, the youth and any other interest group on the Vidcos and Wadcos, there are no practical measures of enforcement. In theory the institutions and processes are inclusive and participatory, while in practice the traditional leaders as individuals make most of the decisions at the village level with few assemblies being operational (Makumbe, 1998). Chatiza (2010) suggests that the definition of local government at a national level has been confused. He argues that central government vacillates between a devolution thrust (administering local affairs by locally elected officials) and a delegation one (performing tasks transferred from or assigned by the centre). As a result of the hierarchical nature of local government in Zimbabwe, central government often intervenes in its affairs. Depending on the nature of their scope, some of the interventions have been so intrusive as to substitute council decisions with those of the Minister, while others may not be so intrusive. In its current form, local government legislation treats local government as an extension of central government rather than as a separate sphere of government (Makumbe, 1998; Matyszak, 2011).

One may argue as to the rationale behind the occurrence of such a structural design of rural local governance in Zimbabwe. This structure stemmed from the Prime Minister's Directives of 1984 and 1985. It may seem the Prime Minister initiated these changes either to cope with the demand of modern times or to decentralise the administration nearer to the people (Chakaipa, 2010). However, viewing this in critical terms, it can be argued that there are serious hidden causes. These structures have been used by the ruling party ZANUPF to strengthen its political base in local government rather than to ensure opportunities for common people to take part in the decision-making process (Zimbabwe Institute, 2005). In terms of efficiency, Mushamba (2010) argues that this structure has failed to perform for the following reasons:

"Most administrative decisions are made by the central government. Frequently they involve top level officials in the Ministries. Several attempts have been made at decentralisation, but the system has remained highly centralised. As such local bodies are characterised by weak administrative capacity, a limited financial and human resource base and little public participation."

VI. Conclusions

Zimbabwe's legislative environment imposes structural constraints upon sound local governance. This is because of a mosaic of institutions that often contradict local government independence and constrain its soundness. An argument can therefore be made that the inclusion of local government in the Constitution of Zimbabwe in 2013 has not decisively dealt with the subjugation of local government to the form and political orientation of central government. In this way, the powers of the central government have not been limited in relation to the creation, functioning, and dissolution of local government units. The inclusion of local government in the constitution will ensure that local government law. The current structures of power in the rural areas have been organised so the determining authority has been shifted away from democratic institutions, such as the RDCs, to appointed individuals who are beholden to central government in the form of the Ministry of Local Government and the President. These individuals are Provincial Chairpersons, Provincial Administrators, District Administrators, Chiefs, Village Heads, and Headmen. Where a council holds any residual power, the exercise thereof is strictly monitored and controlled by the Ministry, and in the case of their development committees, by the security organisations, particularly where donors and donor funds are concerned. The local government structure is largely comprised of people who hold explicit partisan loyalty. It is remarkable that any rural dweller dependent on these individuals for access to scarce resources, and frequently food aid should admit to membership of the majority party in government. Local governance is thus not only

about formal processes and structures but about informal processes and spaces in which different actors and factors interact. Therefore a political approach which views local government as a site of political action with the state at the local level is more beneficial in approaching local government.

Democratic decentralisation in Zimbabwe has been preferred for reasons that include administrative, fiscal and political decision-making. Decentralisation is further justified if it promotes democratic good governance and furthermore participatory approaches to development. It can also be argued that decentralisation can bring government closer to the people and can easily enhance communities' participation and interaction with local government officials in the affairs of their local areas. Moyo (2010) expressed that decentralising governance should not be seen as an end in itself. It can be a means for creating more open, responsive, and effective local government and for enhancing representational systems of community-level decision-making.

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