DECENTRALISATION AND LOCAL GOVERNANCE IN

THE LILONGWE DISTRICT OF MALAWI.

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DECLARATION

I, the undersigned hereby declare that this is my own work and that I have not previously submitted this thesis to any other academic institution for a degree. All sources used have been properly acknowledged by means of references.

Signed by ………………….on this ………….day of ………………………2005

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

ABSTRACT

This research measures the impact of decentralisation on the promotion of good local governance in the Lilongwe District Assembly. The study explores the condition of local governance by examining the status of the facets that underpin local governance namely participation, transparency and accountability, gender equity and efficiency. It highlights dilemmas associated with implementing decentralisation in areas where there are no functioning local institutions and where tendencies of centralisation still loom large. Local elite capture of decentralised local government and clientelism are revealed as some of the serious problems associated with the implementation of decentralisation. The study explain the problem of transferring responsibilities to the peripheral units without corresponding financial resources to support them and shows that the promulgation of policies and laws is not enough, these have to be publicised through civic education to make them work. The study submits that decentralisation albeit with some problems has to some extent promoted good local governance in the Lilongwe District Assembly. Visibly decentralisation has some virtues, which could justify its continued implementation. However, some adjustments have to be made for optimal results. To this effect, the study proposes various suggestions.

The research employed qualitative methods to extract data. Group discussions, participant observation, structured interviews, study of central and district level documents, and community workshops were among the tools that were employed

to collect the data for this research. The qualitative method was deemed appropriate for collecting data of this kind of research in view of its flexibility.

ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ADC   Area Development Committee

AEC   Area Executive Committee

CBO   Community Based Organisation

CONGOMA   Council of Nongovernmental Organizations in Malawi

DPD   Director of Planning and Development

DAT   District Advisory Team

DA   District Assembly

DC   District Commissioner

DDF   District Development Fund

DFID   Department for International Development

DDP   District Development Plan

DDPF   District Development Planning Framework

DDPS   District Development Planning System

DEC   District Executive Committee

DTT   District Training Team

GVH   Group Village Headman

LDA   Lilongwe District Assembly

LGFC   Local Government Finance Committee

LGSCOM   Local Government Service Commission.

MLG   Ministry of Local Government

NSO   National Statistical Office

NGO   Non-Governmental Organisation

OECD   Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development

PRSP   Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper

SEP   Social Economic Profile

UNCDF   United Nations Capital Development Fund

UNDP   United Nations Development Programme

VAP   Village Action Plans

VNRMS   Village Natural Resource Management

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1. INTRODUCTION

1.2 BACKGROUND

Malawi, formerly known as Nyasaland, is a country in the south-eastern part of Africa covering a land mass of 119,140 square kilometres, about 20% of which is covered by Lake Malawi. Mozambique borders the country to the south, southwest and southeast, Tanzania to the north and northeast and Zambia to the West and Northwest. Its current estimated population is 12 million. Malawi re-attained its independence from the British in 1964 as the smallest and poorest of the three territories, which previously comprised the Central African Federation. Since independence, Dr. Hastings Banda and the Malawi Congress Party dominated the country until 1993. In May 1994, multi-party elections were held in Malawi, which brought into power the United Democratic Front (UDF) under the leadership of Bakili Muluzi – marking the end of an era of a regime described by many critics, as "the most repressive in Eastern, Central and Southern Africa."(Chirwa, 2000:93, citing *Africa Watch*)

After over three decades of steadfast state centralisation, as provided for in the constitution, credible local government was officially reintroduced in Malawi in 1998 following the enactment of the Decentralisation Policy and the Local Government Act in the same year. The new government introduced decentralisation of devolutionary type. Decentralisation is believed to be the tool for promoting good local governance through increased participation in development planning and promotion of transparency and accountability. Good local governance, it is believed, would assist to reverse the deteriorating socio-economic conditions in the periphery, where 68%[1] of Malawi's population live.

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[1] See NSO, 2000.

1.3 DECENTRALISATION INITIATIVES IN EAST AND SOUTHERN AFRICA

In African political and administrative history, decentralisation is not new. From the colonial period until the last decades of the 20th century, decentralizations prevailed in the form of deconcentration almost without exemption. According to de Valk (1990:4), a wave of such 'decentralization' hit Southern Africa in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Zambia, in the one party rule, had decentralization reforms in 1969, 1971 and 1980 in which the party's political control over district administration gradually increased (Therkildsen, 1993:82). Equally, Kenya decentralized in 1964, 1970, 1974 and 1982 reducing the importance of local government (Therkildsen, 1993:82). Kenya's last decentralization was in 1983 called 'district focus', which according to Conyers (1993:28) was "intended to increase efficiency of central government administration rather than promote local autonomy or popular participation." In Malawi decentralisation occurred in the early 1960s until the one party regime reversed the process as from 1967. New attempts to decentralisation were made again in 1993 in form of the 'district focus', which was based on the Kenyan model (Kaunda, 1999).

A general assessment of the previous wave of decentralisation reveals that African governments failed dismally to engage the citizens in participatory politics and local development; instead, it only entrenched central government control of the local government structures (UNCDF, 2000:2). This is not surprising as part of the ulterior motives of the nationalist governments to decentralise, were to control local government apparatuses in order to curb irredentist tendencies (Mawhood, 1983).

A new wave of decentralisation emerged in the 1990s this time the discussion on decentralization began to draw attention to "democratic decentralization" as the favoured reform (Crook and Manor 1998; UNCDF 2000:1). Reasons for renewed interests in

decentralisation are numerous and they vary from country to country. Olowu (2001:53) and (Therkildsen 2001:1) maintain that the new interests in decentralization is a product of pressure exerted by economic crises. It is a means for central governments to relinquish some fiscal and administrative onus (Nsibambi 1998:2). It is due to failure of central administration (Wunsch and Olowu 1995) and an imitation of reforms in other developing countries (Therkildsen 2001:1). The renewed interest in decentralisation is also attributed to the result of populist political success (Heller 1996; 31; Olowu, 2001: 53) and of donor pressures and conditionalities of the structural adjustment and other programmes imposed from the outside (World Bank 2000; Mutizwa-Mangiza 2000:24; Therkildsen 2001: 1; Cross and Kutengule 2000). Equally, it is a result of particular relations between central and local authorities (Crook and Sverrisson, 2001: 2). However, there are other implied reasons for decentralising which in most cases are not mentioned as the motivation for countries to decentralise, for instance the aim of poverty reduction, which it is arguably2 thought would be achieved through decentralisation3. It is evident that countries look more on the associated benefits of decentralisation, than the initial reasons for decentralizing. For instance, in Malawi decentralisation was by default it was due to donor pressure that the government was compelled to decentralise (De Muro, Salvatici & Comforti, 1998; Cross and Kutengule 2000; OECD, 2004), but the government later owned and spearheaded the process.

1.4 BRIEF OVERVIEW OF DECENTRALISATION IN MALAWI

After more than thirty years of centralization, Malawi reverted to decentralisation. A new decentralisation policy was adopted in 1998 following the enactment of a new Local Government Acts in the same year. Whereas the decentralisation policy sought to create

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[2] There are two schools of thought one which is pessimistic that poverty reduction aims can be achieved through decentralisation (e.g. see: Katsiaouni, 2003:4, Manor, 1999) and another which is optimistic on the effects of decentralisation on poverty reduction (e.g. see Bongilifioli, 2003; OECD, 2004; Manor, 1999)

[3] A more elaborate process on how decentralisation leads to poverty reduction is discussed in chapter 2.

an operational framework for decentralisation in Malawi, the Local Government Act is the legal framework within which the policy operates. The Local Government Act (1998) is the foundation document for the legal implementation of decentralization in Malawi. The LGA enshrines key elements of the Decentralization Policy including structure of government (District Assemblies), composition of the Assemblies, and powers of the Assemblies, functions, and financing. The fundamental objectives of the Decentralization Policy are to:

- Create a democratic environment and institutions in Malawi for governance and development at the local level, which facilitates the participation of the grassroots in decision-making.
- Eliminate dual administration (field administration and local government) at the district level with the aim of making the Public Service more efficient, more economical and cost effective.
- Promote accountability and good governance at the local level in order to help government reduce poverty.
- Mobilize the masses for socio economic development at the local level

1.4.1 Rationale for Decentralisation in Malawi

There are two fundamental objectives: firstly, it is to establish a single institution at district level, which will manage many of the functions, currently performed by line ministries to eliminate overlapping structures. The single unit it was envisaged would abolish the dual administration of local government at the district level, which has resulted in an intense scramble for resources between the two systems. Furthermore, it resulted in unnecessary duplication of efforts and very inefficient utilisation of human, financial and material resources. Thus, decentralisation is aimed at facilitating the creation of a single

unit of administration at district level that will coordinate in a cost – effective manner the delivery of services, planning and implementation of development programmes (GOM: the Decentralisation Policy, 1998: 3). Because decentralisation embraces democratic values and ideals, it is also envisioned that local authorities will promote popular participation in the development process. But this can only be achieved through an effective, well-coordinated and comprehensive devolution of power.

Secondly, the main motivation for decentralising in Malawi is to deal with the deteriorating socio-economic conditions. Therefore, government views decentralisation as a key strategy for implementing its enunciated policy of Poverty Alleviation. The framework of the policy emphasized on the need for a participatory process in which government, the civil society and the private sector organise themselves to explore grassroots solutions to poverty. The call was sanctioned by the evidence of extreme conditions of pervasive poverty, especially in the rural areas coupled with the many competing needs, which have resulted in an uncoordinated approach to development. This resulted in a plethora of incoherent and disjointed activities in the various sectors, which have tended to perplex rather than assist the beneficiaries (Dept of District and Local Administration, 2000: 4). As such, an all-inclusive and integrated approach to development and poverty reduction was therefore required. In this vein, the policy adopted decentralisation as an institutional objective and strategy for implementing the poverty alleviation programme. And in a bid to institutionalise poverty reduction interventions, the government developed the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) in 2002, which has replaced all previous poverty reduction initiatives, including the Poverty Alleviation Programme.

In accordance with the Local Government Act, in November 1999, District Assemblies were established in all the districts by merging the District Commissioner's office with that of the Clerk of Council. This move eliminated the dual local administration as required by the decentralisation policy. Interim staffs were appointed to head the newly created Local Government Administration. Permanent personnel were appointed in January 2003. The Management Unit for the Local Assembly included a Chief Executive Officer /District Commissioner, Director of Planning and Development, Director of Finance and Director of Administration. Under the LGA, all of these were to be recruited positions by the assembly. However, in January 2001, following an amendment of the LGA, the Local Authorities Service Commission became the institution vested with the powers of recruiting management level staff for the assemblies. All lower level staff would continue to be recruited by the assemblies. Nevertheless, it was in December 2000 that the Assemblies were filled 'debatably'[4] with rightful members, after local government elections were conducted.

The Local Government Act stipulates that the Assembly shall perform the following functions among others:

- to make policy and decisions on local governance and development for the local government area;

- to consolidate and promote local democratic institutions and democratic participation;

- to promote infrastructural and economic development through the formulation, approval and execution of district development plans.

- to mobilize resources within the local government area government and development;

- to make by-laws for the good governance of the local government area;

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[4] These elections were marred by dismal turnout of 14% of the registered voters, which make other scholars to question the legitimacy of the elected candidates

Therefore, it is clear both in the stipulations of the Local Government Act and the Decentralisation Policy that decentralisation in Malawi was planned to facilitate good local governance (e.g., participation and accountability are explicitly stated). In turn would promote local development through infrastructure development and efficient service delivery; and it is in this framework that steps towards poverty reduction were conceptualised.

1.4 2 Statement of the Problem.

The rhetoric of decentralisation in Malawi does not match the results on the ground. The government has already shown some elements of fatigue with the whole process even before actual devolution has started. Lack of adequate funding to the district assemblies and visible reluctance to devolve essential functions to the district assemblies are some of the indicators. In addition, the government still manifests obvert tendencies of centralization reminiscent of the one party regime, the abrogation of the section in the Local Government Act, which gave district assemblies powers to appoint senior officials would serve as one such example. As such, the district assemblies are now dominated by government appointees who are not directly accountable to it and which it has neither the mandate nor the influence to hire or fire let alone discipline.

Matters are exacerbated by the fact that the Assemblies have failed to promote good local governance and therefore jeopardized any opportunities of poverty reduction. Though both the Local Government Act and The Decentralisation Policy, emphasise on participation and accountability (both vertical and horizontal), there is no real participation at the grassroots, instead a top-down approach in different guise is in operation; again there is lack of accountability at both local and district levels. Local and district elites have usurped the decentralisation initiatives to their advantage. The design of decentralisation

has concentrated more on building the capacity of the District Assemblies in neglect of the capacity of local areas and local institutions (the focal point of service delivery) where there is greater need of it. The constitution and the Local Government Act are silent on what type of local institutions should be established; instead, the same inefficient Area and Village Development Committees are being used by the Assemblies as institutions of development, instead of the wards which are legally constituted and where elected representative were selected specifically to represent people. Thus, what the decentralisation policy had done was to abolish the parallel structure at district level and created another at the local level where such structural conflict is very damaging. Further, there is no coordination among development practitioners in the grassroots leading to a proliferation of a multitude of user committees, which again confuse the people.

However, when governments are unaccountable and corrupt poverty reduction programmes have little success in targeting the benefits (UNDP, 2000). The poor cannot gain a hearing for their view from authoritarian political regimes. They cannot gain access to public services from unresponsive central bureaucracy or know whether the services exist if they do not have information. Even if services are decentralized, poor people cannot have access to them if local elites divert the resources for their own interests. In such an environment, reforms of governance institutions should be moved front and center to provide minimum conditions for getting poverty reduction programmes.

The above scenario in some cases resembles the situation in Malawi where the government though professing democratic still manifests centralisation tendencies. In addition, there is evidence of the existence in the District Assemblies of unaccountable officials, signs of elite capture of the decentralisation process and lack of information by the constituents due to the absence of proper local institutions. It is obvious that the situation demands drastic overhaul of the governance structure, but the political will and

vim to do that is not adequate in Malawi. Ironically, it is in this political and administrative predicament that aims of poverty reduction are being pursued. However, as cautioned by several authors decentralisation should not be treated as a panacea to poverty reduction (Makumbe, 1998; Manor, 1999; Katsiaouni, 2003). It is possible, just as it happened to previous regimes to achieve decentralisation with neither development nor poverty reduction. Indeed Mitzberg (cited in Magolowondo, 2003:9) cautioned that '...the waters of decentralisation are dirty. But before spilling them away, it may be worthwhile to see if we can find a baby in there'.

Therefore against this background, this study hypothesizes that decentralisation in Malawi has so far not managed to effectively promote good local governance and since the potential of decentralisation to have impact on poverty reduction depends on good local governance, poverty reduction will not be achieved unless governance is improved. As already discussed, good local governance embraces such elements as participation, transparency and accountability, efficiency, equity and gender sensitivity all of which are instrumental in poverty reduction strategies. Therefore if these elements are missing due to flawed implementation of decentralisation, missing too will be its impact on poverty reduction.

1.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS.

- What has been the impact of decentralisation reforms on the following issues?
- Popular participation
- Transparency
- Horizontal and vertical Accountability
- Efficiency
- Equity and Gender sensitivity

- How has decentralisation succeeded in improving the capacity and efficiency of local organisations (e.g. ADC and VDC)?

- What kind of institutional conflict is prevalent at local level?

- How are actors coordinating in the grassroots

1.5.1 Aims of the Research.

In the context of what has been discussed above the fundamental aims of this research will be to:

- Provide the study with a theoretical and conceptual framework to create a deeper understanding of the conceptual and theoretical dimensions within which decentralisation is discussed.

- Investigate the parameters, of the multifaceted concept of decentralisation that play a role in poverty reduction and indicate how decentralisation promotes poverty reduction.

- Provide a general profile of the social-economic and political aspects of the Lilongwe District Assembly (the case study area for this research).

- Examine the impact of decentralisation reforms in the promotion of good local governance in Lilongwe District Assembly.

- Provide suggestions on what can be done to improve the implementation of decentralisation reforms in district assembly.

1.5.2 Rationale of the Study

This study is significant because it seeks to assess the impact of decentralisation reforms on the development of good local governance in the district assemblies. The promotion of good local governance is important for the country because it has implication on poverty reduction, which is the country's ultimate goal in the promulgation of decentralisation

reforms. It is therefore necessary to critically examine how the decentralisation reforms are being implemented and point out issues, which need to be addresses before the situation get out of hand. Decentralisation is not a new concept it had been tried previously, but its goals were not achieved. Equally, it is possible that the current initiatives could also lead to nothing if mistakes are not checked or brought to public attention.

1.6   RESEARCH DESIGN

1.6.1   Introduction

The following section outlines s and justifies the method used to conduct the research in order to derive at accurate results. It will also describe the whole research design, brief description of subjects (at the local level) and methods employed to collect data at those levels. Finally, it will describe how the data was analysed.

1.6.2   Qualitative Approach

The research takes a qualitative case study approach in order to collect more information and get a deeper understanding and multiple interpretations of the dynamics of decentralisation reforms in Lilongwe district in relation to good local governance. Evidently, people's perceptions, feelings and interpretation of socio-political events around them, formed a tremendous part of the data collected. It is in view of the subjective nature of the data to be collected that a qualitative approach was chosen. Indeed, qualitative method is hailed by scholars for employing subjective information and participant observation to describe the context or natural setting of the variables under scrutiny, as well as the interactions of diverse variables in the context. Therefore, it seeks a wide understanding of the entire situation (Peck & Secker, 1999; Putney et al, 1999). Further, Patton (1990) argued that qualitative design is conducive to studying a definite issue or situation in depth in order to produce a wealth of detailed information. When

conducting qualitative research, the investigator seeks to gain a total or complete picture. Thus, a holistic description of events, procedures, and philosophies, occurring in natural settings is often needed to make accurate situational decisions.

In relation, to the theoretical framework this method is very appropriate because all the theories and concepts used are broad and require wider discussion to derive at as much interpretation as possible in order to make well-informed conclusions. In relation to the research questions, the method makes it possible to discuss politically sensitive issues in their normal context. In addition, this method is not discriminatory as it allowed both the literate, less literate and illiterate to contribute in the study.

1.6.3. Case Study

Case studies emphasize detailed contextual analysis of limited events or conditions and their relationships and thus make a complex subject manageable to research. Yin (1984:23) defines the case study research method as an empirical investigation that examines a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the margins between phenomenon and context are not evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used. Case studies are detailed investigations of individuals, groups, institutions or other social units. The researcher conducting a case study attempts to analyze the variables relevant to the subject under study.The case study method provides a basis for the application of ideas and extension of methods. In the context of the current study, this method is suitable because it makes it possible to study the complex concept of decentralisation vis-à-vis local governance and poverty in a bound environment in order to understand the cause-effect relationship of the variables. It also makes it possible to make inferences or cautious generalisation of situations of similar occurrence. In Malawi, decentralisation reforms have been applied uniformly in all the districts. The process is top-down that is not demand-driven, thereby making the process succumb to uniform

prescriptions in one size-fit-all fashion. Although local conditions vary from locality to locality, district administration and governance structures have always been the same in all but personnel, such that a critical examination of one District Assembly may as well imply an examination of all the District Assemblies in the country.

1.6.4   Gaining Access.

It was not very difficult for the researcher to get access to the area of study because he was already working with these people in the past three years. Respondents were already familiar with him and his intentions. The normal protocols were followed such as making appointments and seeking permission before interviews were conducted the above protocols applied at all the levels that the interviews were conducted. At the local level prior consultations with the local leaders was done before group discussion or community workshops were done.

1.6.4.1 The Role and Experience of the Researcher.

The researcher has worked in Lilongwe District Assembly for more than three years as director of planning and development. He was in close contact with the people with whom he conducted interviews or the communities where community workshops and group discussion were done. He had already built trust with these people and they were not suspicious that he would use the information they given to him maliciously. In the whole research process the researcher's position varied from a clinical interviewer (with central and district level officials) to interested listener (in the Focus Group Discussions); participant–observer and facilitator (in the community workshops) and 'ruthless' scrutinizer when it came to dealing with the raw data (in the District Assembly Data Bank) and government / district assembly's documents.

1.6.4.2 Selection of Site and Participants

Lilongwe district was selected as the study area because the researcher had full knowledge of the whole district. In addition, the data sources of the research are located in three different levels namely: central, district and local levels. Lilongwe provided the most convenient opportunity for the research because the government headquarters is located in the district. It was therefore easy to interview subjects at the mentioned levels with less effort. The participants of the research were selected using different methods. The central level officials were selected according to their expertise in the subject under investigation. Therefore, it was more or less like targeted interview, as it only targeted those with the right information or knowledge. The same was applied at the district level. However, at the area level random sampling was conducted. For instance, there are 17 traditional authorities in Lilongwe District, which are geographically dispersed, therefore only a few could be interviewed. The same applies to Group Village Headmen, councillors, MPs and Village Development Committees. There were three group discussions each comprising eight individuals and two community workshops one of which was composed of 24 and the other of 31 members.

1.6.4.3 Description of Sites and Participants.

A full description of Lilongwe District is furnished in Chapter Three. However, what could be elaborated here are the descriptions of local participants. Most of them live in rural areas and are either illiterate or semi-literate. Poverty is rife, but nonetheless very enthusiastic to make something happen if asked to do so. It is a society where men are dominant and women tend to be timid especially in public and allow their male counterparts to control the show. They are very willing to cooperate in providing information and very respectful of people who also treat them as human beings. Except councillors who live with the people in the villages, members of parliament tend to reside

in urban areas away from their constituents. Traditional leaders embrace the entire moral, ritual and customary responsibilities for the people, they are the hubs around which village activities and authority revolves.

1.6.4.4 Data Collection

Six strategies were used to obtain information for this thesis. The literature review, study of raw data in the Assembly data bank, document study, focus group discussions, key informant interviews (at three levels national, district and local) and community workshops. This section therefore is going to furnish the details of the methods that were used to collect data and how the data was analysed to get the results.

1.6.4.5 Literature Review

 There were two primary areas of focus in the literature review. The first part dealt with literature concerning the major concepts, which are enshrined in this research namely: decentralisation, poverty and good local governance. The second section examined two major theories that are underlying the research. There are the theories of public choice and the path dependency. In short, the literature review was done to properly define the concept, which is part of this study, and also to explore and select suitable theories for the study.

1.6.4.6 Study of Raw Data

The study benefited from the data that was collected by the District Assembly from the whole district, which is kept in SPSS format and is updated every year. This data is used for district development planning. However, it was very useful as it provided a base line for the study. Most of the information concerning the district was extracted from this data.

1.6.4.7 Document study

This involved the study of both published and unpublished documents related to decentralisation in Malawi. This includes; government communiqués, appraisals of decentralisation reforms, reports, journals and articles. Assembly minutes, financial statements from local government finance Committee on their funding to district Assemblies, devolution plans, socio-economic profile, village action plans and district development plans for Lilongwe District Assembly; the Local Government Act, the Decentralisation Policy and the Constitution were used.

1.7 INTERVIEWS

1.7.1 National Level.

Six personal interviews, either in-person or by telephone, were conducted to gather information from experts with the knowledge relating to decentralisation from the ministry of local government and the decentralisation secretariat which is an interim body set up to implement decentralisation reforms in Malawi. These were structured interviews. The questions were open-ended and broad as they were intended to collect as much information as possible. Probing was used to stay in track with the answers being sought. The questions here asked questions more related with policy and asked them to give a general appraisal of the decentralisation reforms as regards local governance, development and poverty reduction.

1.7.2 District Level.

At district, level interviews were conducted with seven key Assembly officers namely: the Director of Planning and Development, the Director of Administration, The Director of Finance and the District Commissioner, Data specialist, Management Information Systems Specialist and Works Supervisor. The questions here focused more on their capacity to

deliver services to the people and their constraints in doing so. The questions also encompassed such issues as the Assembly's financial status and allocation, government grants and responsibilities so far devolved to the assembly by central government and further, their relations with District Assembly Members (i.e. councillors), as well as questions on the status of local institutions. Finally, they were asked to make a general appraisal of decentralisation reforms in relation to local governance, development and poverty reduction, achievements and constraints.

1.7.3 Local level

The interview targeted councillors, traditional authorities, group village headmen and Members of Parliament. In other words, officials representing wards, area development committees, village development committees and constituencies respectively, were interviewed. These interviews were intended to get local views of the decentralisation reforms from local leaders. Questions here were also open ended but less sensitive. The contents of the questions included such issues as the relationship between local actors; the frequency of community meetings, which they organize, issues discussed; problems and constraints. Further, they were asked to rate the services delivered by the Assembly to them and the Assembly's responsiveness to their demands. They also had to provide information on the behaviour of development actors in their respective area, best and bad practices. Finally, they were asked if there has been any change in terms of how they are governed now and before decentralisation, reforms were promulgated.

1.7.4 Focus Group Discussions.

Three focus group discussions were organized; two in separate village development committees and one at the District Assembly with ward councillors. The discussions in the villages discussed development issues in the villages and the problems that emerge. The

people were also asked to comment on the roles of local leaders, the councillors, the traditional authorities, the group village headmen, the members of parliament, district Assembly officers and other development actors. They were asked if they are satisfied with the way these people perform their duties. This group discussed most sensitive issues but they were facilitated tactically that nothing was taken personal. The information was treated with strict confidence and binding ground rules were set so that people could speak freely. The group discussion with councillors however focused on the affairs of the Assembly, such as management, working relations between the elected and the appointed officials as well as the status of development in their respective wards.

1.7.5 Community Workshops.

These were conducted in Village Development Committees where none of the above interviews had taken place before. These were participatory, they covered more questions relating to the concept of decentralisation, and they were intended to find out if people know anything about decentralisation and what has been their reaction to the reforms. In addition, it was a way of finding out if people use the so much publicized Area and Village Development Committees. They were asked to list all the committees available in their villages and rate them in order of their importance and give reasons for such rating. Similarly, they were asked to identify major development actors in their area and rate them in terms how often these players organize development meetings

FIGURE 1: SOURCES OF DATA

Interviews [6]	**Documents**	*Central level*
Raw Data. Interviews [7]	Group [1] Discussions	*District level*
Interviews [12]		*Area level*
Community Workshop [2]	Group [1] Discussions	*Village level*
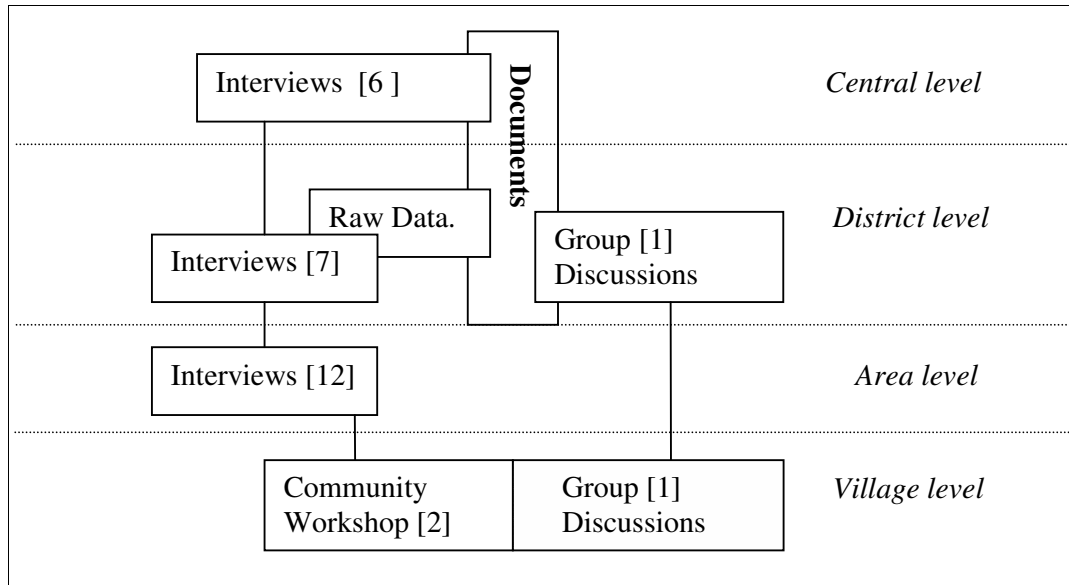
1.8. DATA ANALYSIS AND PRESENTATION

In qualitative data analysis, the researcher sorts and sifts the data, searching for types, classes, sequences, processes, patterns or wholes. The aim of this process is to assemble or reconstruct the data in a meaningful or comprehensible fashion (Jorgensen, 1989: 107). Charmaz (1983: 114) holds a similar view. He argues that "…at first, the data may appear to be a mass of confusing, unrelated, accounts. But by studying and coding, the researcher begins to create order..." Equally, in this research, the transcriptions of all the data collected were juxtaposed, sorted, sifted and classified to determine sequences, processes, patterns or wholes. Then meaningful analytical units and themes were identified. They were then coded using priori codes (i.e. codes that were developed before examining the current data). Additional codes were however developed to capture relevant issues which were not envisaged prior to the development of the initial checklist. The data was then summarized and relationships across categories drawn for example, cause-effect relationships, reasons for occurrences of events or display of habits and sequential relationships of events to mention a few.

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1.9 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

There is scanty academic literature on decentralisation and local government in Malawi. Most of the available literature are government communications and project documents, which means real information could only be derived from research projects, which are also very few. Another limitation was to find informants with a good grasp of the decentralisation policy, such that information given had to be crosschecked many times to get a general picture of the issue being investigated. This was particularly true in the local communities, which had no or little grasp of the decentralisation policy. Nonetheless, the researcher is certain that the results derived from the study reflect the real situation on the ground and therefore should be trusted.

1.9.1 COMPOSITION OF THE STUDY

Chapter One: Introduction to the Study.

This Chapter states the methodology for the research, statement of the problem research questions and a general background of decentralisation processes in East and Southern Africa and then Malawi. It generally sets the scene for the study.

Chapter Two: Conceptual Framework.

This Chapter provides the study with a theoretical and conceptual framework to create a deeper understanding of the conceptual and theoretical dimensions within which decentralisation is discussed. The chapter investigates all the parameters, of the multifaceted concept of decentralisation, which play a role in poverty reduction and indicate how decentralisation promotes poverty reduction through local governance. The chapter also places the decentralisation process in the context of public choice and path dependency theories.

Chapter Three: Overview of Local Governance in Lilongwe District.

This Chapter provides a general profile of the institutional arrangements for local governance as well as the functions of various local governance structures in Lilongwe District Assembly (the case study area for this research).The chapter illustrates the status of the grassroots in relation to the intentions of the decentralisation policy.

Chapter Four: Findings.

This Chapter examined the impact of decentralisation reforms in the promotion of good local governance in Lilongwe District Assembly. It provides details of the status of local governance in the grassroots and the various dynamics that impact on or influence it. The Chapter applies theory to practice in the case study also by making cross references. The results are then analysed and interpreted.

Chapter Five: Conclusion and Recommendations.

This Chapter recapitulates the findings and several emerging themes in the inquiry. It draws conclusions and suggestions for improvement. In addition, the Chapter provides areas for further research.

1.9.2 Conclusion.

The first part of this Chapter has provided a general background of the study and some research questions that the research intends to address. It has also not only furnished justifications for carrying out the research in this specific area, but also provided the aims of the study. The second part of the Chapter dealt with the approach as well as the methodological aspects. The next chapter will address the conceptual and theoretical aspects of the research.

CHAPTER TWO: CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2. INTRODUCTION.

This Chapter is devoted to the assessment of main theories and concepts underlying this study. The discussion includes definitions of the concepts of decentralisation, poverty and local governance on the one hand; and the theories of public choice and path dependency on the other hand. The analysis of these theories and concepts intends to provide a general framework for understanding and analysing the results of the research. In addition, the chapter provides justifications for using these theories and concepts by proving their relevance and applicability to the current inquiry.

2.2 THE CONCEPT OF DECENTRALISATION

Conscious of the ensuing debate over the definition of decentralisation, this discussion subscribes to Mawhood's (1983:2) assertion, which states that it is not the validity of a definition, or theory that makes it preferable for adoption, but its usefulness. As such, this discussion will not immerse itself in this endless debate, but follow Mawhood's analysis to find useful definitions for the concept. Decentralisation entails the sharing of central government powers with other institutions, especially those geographically separated or responsible for specific functions, or those given jurisdiction over specific physical locations (Makumbe, 1998). Mawhood (1983:18) defines decentralisation as the "sharing of part of governmental power by a central ruling group with other groups, each having authority within a specific area of the state". Fundamental areas in the decentralisation process according to Mawhood are power, authority and responsibility, which start from the centre and are then diffused to the periphery (ibid). Kasfir (1983:25), while adhering to Mawhood's spatial aspect of a decentralised power structure, argues, "Decentralisation means distributing authority and power horizontally rather than hierarchically."

However, Smith (1985), as also noted by Makumbe (1998), and departing from Mawhood's spatial aspect of decentralised power structures and authority, argues that decentralisation is a process of subdividing the state's territory into smaller units and institutions. Power and authority are then devolved to them to perform certain prescribed administrative and political functions within their areas of jurisdiction and specialisation. The same power-sharing pattern may be replicated by these intermediate organisations to those below them.

Adding a more developmental sense to the definition of decentralisation, Work (2002: 5) contends that decentralisation is "…the transfer of responsibilities for planning, management and resource raising and allocation from the central government and its agencies to the lower levels of government." However consistent with the other authors, already alluded to in the discussion, he also links decentralisation to the concept of subsidiary, which proposes that functions be devolved to the lowest level of social order that is capable of completing them effectively and efficiently. In a bid to give an all-encompassing definition of decentralisation, the World Bank (2000: 108) defines it as "…the transfer of political, fiscal and administrative powers to sub national units of government."

Therefore, in summation, and compounding all the definitions discussed above, in its traditional form, decentralisation entails the distribution of central government's political, fiscal and administrative power, authority and responsibility to geographically dispersed, legally autonomous and semi-autonomous bodies of government. This is done in order to improve efficiency and effectiveness in service delivery at central and sub national government levels.

However, the taxonomy of decentralization discussed above harbours no necessary democratic elements, because, according to Blair (1998), the existence of the concept precedes the emergence of democracy as an essential component of the discourse in international development in the mid to late 1980s. At this time, there were no real strides towards enhancing local participation. Although implicit in the concept of the devolution-type of decentralization is an element of democracy, it is not a precondition that the local entities acquiring decentralised authority and responsibility be democratic. Therefore with an ingredient of democracy, the concept assumes a new meaning – democratic decentralisation, which is also synonymous with democratic local governance. In its new form, the concept is therefore defined as; "…a system in which meaningful authority is devolved to local bodies that are accountable and accessible to their citizens, who in turn enjoy full human and legal rights in exercising political liberty." (Blair, 1997:12). Currently this definition is being espoused for decentralisation by the major world bodies such as the United Nations, the World Bank and other international organisations. Consequently, the recently democratising African and Asian states are implementing this type of decentralisation. Therefore, this research will use this definition of decentralisation, not only because it is the one universally being adopted, but also because it is the one prevalent in the area of study -Lilongwe.

2.3 TYPES OF DECENTRALISATION

There are four main types of decentralisation, each of distinct form, but which collectively make up the concept of decentralisation. These types depict a hierarchical order based upon the extent of authority effectively transferred from the central government.

2.3.1 Deconcentration/Administrative Decentralisation

According to Mawhood (1983:4), deconcentration means, "The sharing of power between members of the same ruling group having authority respectively in different areas of the state." It is, according to Hyden (1983:85), a power relationship within the same organisation. The fundamental goal is to relieve the centrally positioned officials of the administrative onus by transferring some of this load to their colleagues in the periphery as a way of adapting central directives to the local conditions (Rondinelli, Nellis & Cheema, 1983:14). This allows the central government to penetrate the grassroots without necessarily relinquishing authority.

2.3.2 Delegation

According to Work (2002:6), "Delegation redistributes authority and responsibility to local units of government or agencies that are not always necessarily branches of local offices of the delegating authority." It concerns the shifting of managerial responsibilities for specific functions from central government to the statutory corporations or parastatals, which are normally "…outside the regular bureaucratic structure" (Osmani, [undated]: 6).

2.3.3 Privatisation/Divestment

Divestment or privatisation occurs when planning and administrative responsibility or other public functions are transferred from government to voluntary private or nongovernmental institutions for the benefit of the public, (Work, 2002:7; Makumbe, 1998: 9). Manor (1999), however argues that this type of decentralisation transfers power from one bureaucratic machinery to another in that it usually involves the transfer of power between two colossal entities therefore it cannot be regarded as authentic decentralisation as it does not devolve decision-making powers to the people.

2.3.4 Devolution

Crook and Manor (1991:12) as well as Work, 2002: 6) define devolution as the transfer of legalised 'elements of political power' to local government institutions or to specialised or functional authorities. These bodies are therefore vested with political powers to discharge certain functions and responsibilities within their areas of jurisdiction such as the provision of social services. However, Osmani ([undated]:5) argues that in addition to political authority, also devolved, is fiscal authority. He maintains that 'devolution entails the reorganisation efforts that approximate classic decentralisation' in view of the autonomy that the sub national governments acquire in the process. Hyden (1983: 85) while espousing a spatial aspect of devolved power structure discerns devolution as an inter-organisational transfer of power from the centre to the peripheral units; which, although not normally within the command of central government, are indirectly controlled and supervised by it (Rondinelli et al, 1983:24). These units are mostly recognised as autonomous legalised bodies and are usually elected (Work, 2002).

Comparatively, of the four types of decentralisation, divestment and devolution denote the highest amount of power transferred to the local people; while deconcentration and delegation denote the least amount of power transferred. Therefore, the last two are not very useful in the development of local governance because they do not really encourage the local people to participate effectively in decision-making processes. Worse still, both the Colonial and the One-party regimes used these types of decentralisation to effectively suppress local people's dissent against their systems. Consequently, these systems were transformed into instruments of oppression.

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2.4 EVOLUTION OF THE NEW DECENTRALISATION WAVE

Scholars attribute the renewed quest for democratic decentralisation in the field of social science and politics to various origins: firstly, it stems from the failure of centralised models (Wunsch & Olowu, 1995; Schmidt 2003). Advancing this argument, they maintain that centralised systems of governments proved inefficient to grapple with the complexity of the development processes. The second factor is accorded to the collapse of the state-sponsored services, which due to the effects of the Structural Adjustment Programme and the prevailing African economic crisis impelled the state 'to retreat' (Schmidt, 2003; Ndegwa, 2002). One the same, another front argues that it was as a result of donor pressures and conditionalities associated with the structural adjustment and other programmes imposed from the outside (World Bank 2000; Mutizwa-Mangiza 2000:24; Therkildsen, 2000:1). Schmidt attributes the third reason to the recent democratisation processes. However, the fourth reason, as Dillinger and Fay (1999) and the World Bank (2000) observed, is that the new wave of decentralisation is sanctioned by the decline in the menace of warfare and external hostilities in most parts of the world, making authoritarian regimes unjustified. Furthermore, it is due to the emergence of educated, urban bourgeoisie, which has led to the demise of the once-prevalent patron-clientele relationship between the government and the people. However, there are a host of reasons propounded by various scholars and this list is by far not exhaustive (for instance; see Manor, 1999:26-50; Therkildsen 2001:1; Olowu 2001:53)

In Sub-Saharan Africa reasons for the current wave of decentralisation processes varies from political to economic. Political reasons include 'the maintenance of law and order in the locality' (De Muro et al, 1998) such as in Uganda and Bukina Faso; internal demands for devolution of power, for instance in South Africa where the National Party and the Inkatha Freedom Party were in favour of decentralisation (ibid). Finally, external pressure

exerted by the supranational funding organisations such as the World Bank (Rondinelli, 1997; World Bank 2000; Mutizwa-Mangiza 2000:24; Therkildsen, 2000:1) or the United Nations Development Programme (for example in Malawi); or indeed a former colonial power such as France, which exerted pressure for political reforms in all French -speaking countries (De Muro, Salvatici & Comforti, 1998). Economic reasons for decentralisation include to provide social and economic development for example in Mauritania; and to curtail the level of public expenditure when making structural adjustments to the economy, for instance in Tanzania in the early 1990s (ibid).

2.5 JUSTIFICATIONS FOR DECENTRALISATION.

The arguments for decentralisation revolve around a wider critique of central state planning (Johnston, 2001) which stipulates that large and highly centralised bureaucracies prove to be an incompetent and potentially very unhelpful means for amassing wealth and for resource allocation in society. Scholars have advanced three arguments to support this claim:

The first view maintains that centralised state entities lack information which gives them a clue as to when and where to implement policies and programmes which address people's genuine requirements and preferences, (Ostrom, Schroeder & Wynne, 1993). The second argues that states lack flexibility and reach to supply certain types of goods and services more especially those that require vast information, (Robinson, Dorcas, Hewitt & Harriss, 2000). The state's inherent fundamental principles of command and control, makes it different from the markets and voluntary organisations, which are more flexible (Robinson et al, 2000); the third view contends that the unrestrained authority and inadequate incentives breed 'rent seeking behaviour' among government employees (Ostrom, et a1 1993).

It is therefore due to the above limiting characteristics of the state that the creation of more decentralised state machinery is justified. In this regard, it is widely accepted among scholars that more decentralised states are more transparent and react promptly to local demands and wishes, (Crook & Sverrison, 2001; Osmani, 2000; World Bank, 2000; Dillinger & Fay 1999; Makumbe, 1998). Physical closeness not only makes it easier for local communities to hold local officials liable for their performance, but it facilitates acquisition of more accurate information of conditions or the status quo of the periphery which could be used for planning and provision of resources. Decentralisation is also beneficial to central government in that it reduces workload and congestion at the central office. As a result, the central government responds quickly to public demands and the quality and quantity of service improves.

In addition, economists justify decentralisation based on allocative efficiency and the effectiveness of poverty reduction (DFID, 2002). Moreover, decisions taken proximate to grassroots level are generally anticipated to reflect the preferences of the citizens and consequently local authorities are better placed to implement poverty policies through community participation and social inclusion (ibid).

2.6 PROBLEMS OF DECENTRALISATION

Just as there are several positive aspects about decentralisation, there are also negative ones, which may threaten the attainment of the anticipated benefits if it is not properly implemented. According to Smith (1985), decentralization is inherently divisive and sectionalist in character and in its consequences, therefore it threatens national unity and integration. Further, he brands it as being anti-egalitarian because of its design that goods and services are provided at local rather than national level.

At local level, decentralisation is criticised as being oligarchic in that it may benefit only a few at the expense of the general population (Makumbe, 1998; World Bank, 2000; Blair 1997; Manor, 1999). Consequently, autocratic governments are therefore, "…likely to ensure that decentralised bodies are limited in their autonomy or that they have limited local resources to allocate," or that appointed rather than elected officials make final decisions. Viewed as such, it becomes a sheer expansion of the national elite's resource and power base, but of questionable efficacy to the people, thus decentralisation can also become a potent instrument for central government's control of the public at local level (Makumbe, 1998:11). Decentralisation can also lower the quality of public services. Due to the shortage of appropriately qualified personnel, it may result in the provision of lower quality goods and services at local level than may be obtained at the central level where skilled personnel are more readily available (Makumbe, 1998; World Bank, 2000). It could also entail the decentralisation of corruption.

2.7 THE CONCEPT OF POVERTY

Don't ask me what poverty is because you have met it outside my house. Look at the house and count the number of holes. Look at my utensils and the clothes that I am wearing. Look at everything and write what you see. What you see is poverty[5].

The objective of this section is to briefly define the concept of poverty. The discussion is aware of the many interpretations of the concept from multitude of authors (for instance see: Sen, 1980; Lipton, 2001; World Bank, 2002; Atkinson, Cantillon, Marlier, Nolan 2002; Fusco, 2003), but discussion here is limited to those interpretations that are more relevant to the current inquiry.

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[5] A poor man from Kenya (1997), cited in Habitat for Humanity , 2002 available on website: http://www.habitat.org/hw/aug-sep02/takemeasure.html

After decades of dissonance over the interpretation and measurement of poverty among scholars, finally there is an emerging consensus that sees poverty as a complex, multidimensional phenomenon. This is a sharp contradiction to the traditional way of looking at the concept.[6] However, routinely poverty is defined as the lack of essential assets or materials for well-being - especially food, housing, land, and other assets. It is a deficiency of multiple resources leading to physical deprivation. Poverty is also conceptualized as not having a voice, power, and independence, which subjects one to exploitation, humiliation, and inhumane treatment, by both private and public agents of the state from whom they seek assistance. Poverty is also defined as the non-existence of basic infrastructure- particularly roads, transport, water, and health facilities. Poor people focus on assets rather than income and link their lack of physical, human, social, and environmental assets to their vulnerability and exposure to risk. One of the most quoted definitions of poverty comes from the World Bank, which describes poverty as "Unacceptable human deprivation in terms of economic opportunity, education, health and nutrition, as well as lack of empowerment and security" (cited in Stanely, 2003:5).

The OECD (2001a:26; 2001b:39) defined poverty in terms of lack of capabilities in five areas namely economic, human, political, socio-cultural and protective mechanisms. Economically, it is defined as inability to earn income, to consume, to have assets and access to food, security, material wellbeing and social status. On a human level, it entails lack of access to clean water, health, education and decent shelter and poor nutrition (core

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[6] The traditional approach was unidimensional - it refers only to one variable such as income or consumption. The traditional approach to poverty is characterised by the fact that poor people are identified according to a shortfall in a monetary indicator. The theory implicitly underlying this assumption is the utilitarianism theoretically based on the criteria of utility and practically on the use of income or expenditure as a substitute of well-being. Henceforth, the criterion of poverty is here income and *poverty can be defined as a lack of economic welfare, i.e. income*. In the case of the absolute poverty approach, poverty is a lack of income in order to satisfy the essential requirements for physiological survival. In the case of the relative approach of poverty, poverty is a lack of income in order to reach the average standard of living in the society in which one live.

elements of well-being as well as crucial means to improving livelihoods). Politically it relates to issues of human rights. It means lack of say and influence over public policies and political priorities; thus, deprivation of basic political freedoms or human rights is a major aspect of poverty. On a social-cultural level, it denotes the inability to participate as an esteemed member of a community. "These capabilities refer to social status, dignity and other cultural conditions for belonging to a society that is highly valued by the poor themselves," (OECD, 2001a:26). Finally, it can also be seen as the inability to withstand economic and external shocks. The figure below depicts this interlocking web of poverty and wellbeing.

FIGURE 2: INTERACTIVE DIMENSIONS OF POVERTY AND WELLBEING
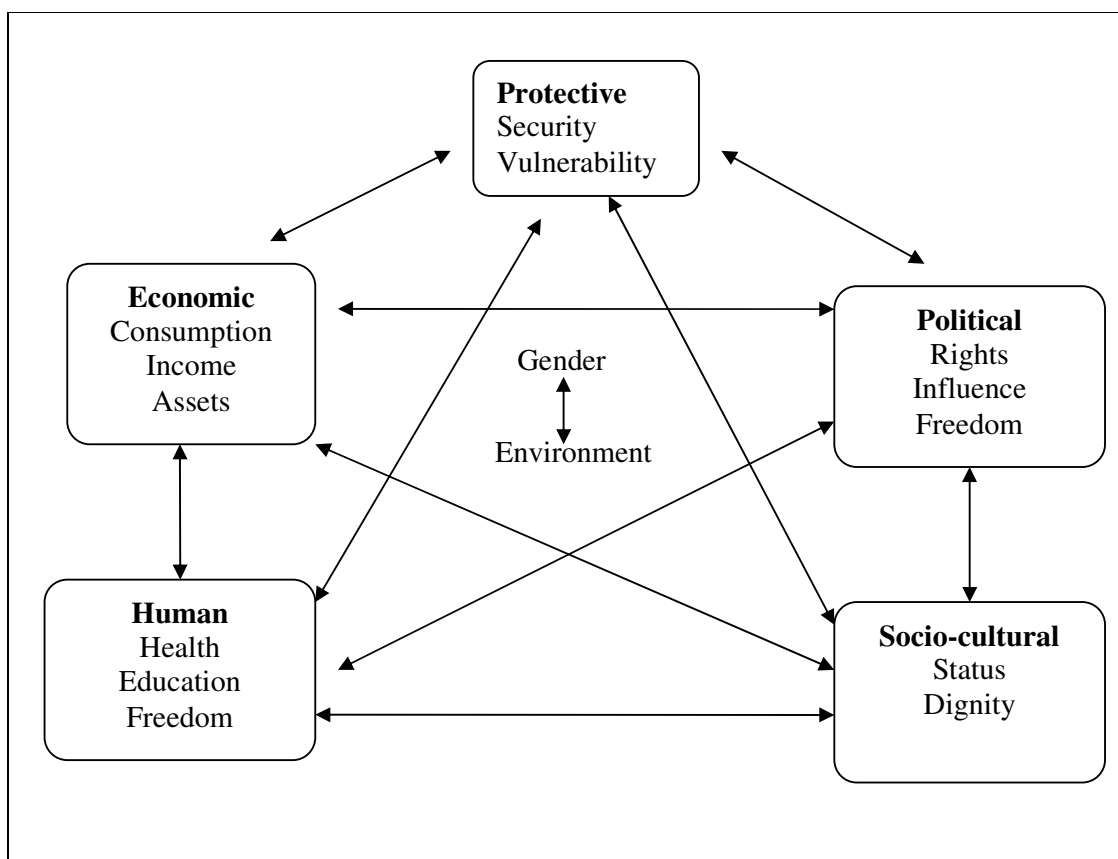
Source: OECD, 2001b:39

Each box represents an important dimension of poverty and which aggravates - and is aggravated by – all the others. Crosscutting issues in the web are those of gender and the environment. That is, gender inequality concerns all facets of poverty because poverty is not gender neutral. Similarly, the environment and poverty are linked in a cause-effect relationship. For instance, environmental degradation is a result of poverty and a degraded environment causes poverty.

The capability approach is in line with Sen's (1985) theoretical construction of development as associated with capabilities. Sen begins by launching a critique of the traditional welfare approach based on utility. According to him, "…insofar as opulence and utility have roles, these can be seen in terms of indirect connections with well-being and advantages" (cited in Fusco, 2003: 7). In his criticism of utilitarism, Sen considers that the possession of goods may not translate automatically into well-being as possession is different from ability to benefit from the characteristics of the goods possessed. That is why to have a clear idea of well-being, we have to move from the informational space of utility to the informational space of 'functionings' so as to understand what a person succeeds in doing with the commodities and characteristics at his/her command in order to satisfy his/her wants. Thus, the capabilities approach eliminated the two shortcomings raised against the traditional approach[7].

Therefore it is evident that the definitions of poverty have evolved over the last decades from those that focused only on income deprivation (and measured on a US Dollar scale)

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[7] The main criticism of this approach concerns two issues that it does not take into account and that constitute two pillars of the theoretical construction of Sen about capabilities. The first is that traditional theory doesn't deal with the human diversity, i.e. both the variation of personal features of individuals and the differences in the socio-economic environment of each individual. This raises a problem when trying to make inter-personal comparisons. The second critique insists on the fact that in the traditional approach, individuals are denied the right to choose between different alternatives. The freedom of the individual to choose is a fundamental constituent of well-being. So, being deprived of it constitutes a clear reduction in well-being (Fusco, 2003).

to those that are much more subtle and complex. However, what is perhaps important to the present study is a simple but valid definition of poverty as seen in the eyes of the poor. At an individual level, poverty can be defined as lack of basic needs and services such as food, clothing, beddings, shelter, paraffin, basic health care and education. However, at a community level it denotes lack of basic infrastructures such as village access roads, communications, hospitals, schools, land, clean water and assets from where livelihoods can be derived. In addition, there are dimensions of powerlessness, social exclusion, ignorance and lack of knowledge. Powerlessness is seen in terms of local participation, voicelessness, unmet aspirations, gender discrimination and poor governance. These factors converge and lead to the exclusion of the poor from the decision-making processes and to their powerlessness to hold local elites accountable.

2.7.1 The Relevance of Decentralisation on Poverty Reduction

In relation to poverty reduction, decentralisation has political and economic dimensions through which the poor can benefit (OECD, 2004). Politically, decentralisation will enhance popular participation in local decision-making processes, from which they have hitherto usually been excluded through lack of adequate representation or organisation. Thus, enhanced representation of previously excluded people in local municipalities, sequentially, could provide better access to local public services and social security schemes, thereby reducing vulnerability and insecurity of poor people. In addition, a secure political system offers requisite conditions for the poor to uplift their life and to start investing. Moreover, an acquisition of a better economic status can also contribute to a reduction in their vulnerability to shocks.

Economically, decentralisation has strenuous positive correlation on poverty through increased efficiency and better targeting of services. Improved efficiency in service

provision could directly enhance poor people's access to education, health, water, and sanitation facilities e.t.c, while devolution of power and resources to the local level may also lead to better targeting of the poor. A more decentralised framework will facilitate the monitoring of programmes and projects in a cost-effect way and will help to direct resources to those most in need. In addition, it would enable greater responsiveness to local needs

However, there is no direct link between poverty reduction and decentralisation (Crook & Sverrisson, 2001; Hadingham, 2003). Its appeal is because decentralisation will lead to good local governance which will in turn spur development and thus eventually lead to poverty reduction (e.g. see Blair 1997 & 1998; Manor 1999). It is indeed the purpose of this section to elaborate more on this chain.

2.8 GOOD GOVERNANCE

For the sake of brevity, this discussion subscribes to the definition of good governance supplied by the World Bank (2001) and Putnam (1993) due to their relevance to the study. 'Good governance' is "…epitomized by predictable, open and enlightened policy-making, a bureaucracy imbued with a professional ethos acting in furtherance of the public good, the rule of law, transparent processes, and a strong civil society participating in public affairs. 'Poor governance', however, is characterised by arbitrary policy making, unaccountable bureaucracies, unenforced or unjust legal systems, the abuse of executive power, a civil society unengaged in public life, and widespread corruption," (World Bank 2001: iv).

Putnam (1993) sees 'governance' as referring to the process whereby elements in society wield power and authority, which are employed to enact and influence policies and decisions concerning public life as well as economic and social development.

However, Plumptre (1999: 3) definition of governance transcends 'government' to include the role of actors from civil society and the private sector. In his submission, governance denotes "…the art of steering societies and organizations." He maintains, "Governance occurs through interactions among structures, processes, and traditions that determine how power is exercised, how decisions are taken, and how citizens or other stakeholders have their say. Governance is about power, relationships, and accountability: who has influence, who decides, and how decision makers are held accountable".

Inferred from the above discussion, good governance at the local level (or good local governance) is therefore an array of organizations and mechanisms or procedures intended to govern local public affairs (Bonfiglioli, 2003). In view of the complexity of the parameters to be investigated in this study, these broad definitions of governance are appropriate. The beauty of these definitions is that they define governance in relation to the government and the role of actors in the civil society and private sector, which are all analysed in this study.

Although the concept of governance is still debatable, there is a consensus as to its fundamental facets namely: participation, transparency and accountability, efficiency, equity and gender sensitivity, and consensus building.

2.8.1 Participation

Participation is a multifaceted concept and it means different things to different people thus it is crafted to suit one's use. Indeed as the World Bank notes, "There is no blueprint

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for participation because it plays a role in many different contexts and for different purposes." (2000: 237). The earlier definition of participation, which was highly influential in the 1970s, depicted participation as 'the organised efforts to increase control over resources and regulative institutions in given social situations, on the part of groups and movements hitherto excluded from such control' (Gaventa & Valderrama, 1999: 2 citing Stiefel & Wolfe). In this sense, this definition places participation outside the 'realms' of the state, amongst those who had been disenfranchised from existing institutions.

In local governance, however, participation entails 'the process by which stakeholders influence and share control over priority setting, policy making, resource allocations, and/or program implementation (World Bank, 2000: 237). From this perspective, participation could be perceived in the intensity of consultation or decision making in all stages of a project cycle, from needs assessment, appraisal, implementation, to monitoring and evaluation. The United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP) Human Development Report 1993 discerns participation, "…as a process, not an event that closely involves people in the economic, social, cultural and political processes that affect their lives." According to the UNDP, the meaning of participation transcends this developmental sense into a more philosophical paradigm - seeing it as both a means and an end.[8] The study subscribes to the UNDP's definition of participation because it presents participation as empowering, enabling and because this meaning transcends the instrumental value of participation to include aesthetic values.

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[8] Because the paradigm of human development stresses investment in human capabilities and the subsequent functional use of those capabilities to allow people to lead the kind of life they choose, participation is viewed as facilitating the use of human capabilities, hence serving as a means for socio-economic development. In this context, by allowing people to realize their full potential and enhance personal fulfilment, participation is also seen as an end in itself (Sen 1981; UNDP 1993).

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2.8.2 Accountability

Accountability is another concept that has undergone tremendous metamorphosis from its original meaning and in the advent of the discourse of democracy; the concept has acquired more extensions in meaning[9]. As Leat (1986) noted, in its new form it enshrines three dimensions. Firstly, it means being held to account by stakeholders or on their behalf, via sanctions or other approaches of redress that enforce the right to effect change. Secondly, it denotes giving account - furnishing stakeholders with an explanation or information to report what has taken place and the outcomes of that activity. Thirdly, it entails taking account of stakeholders' needs and views and responding to these by examining and, if necessary, adjusting practices or increasing performance.

In sum, three things are clear here, the element of sanction (in the first view), information sharing to stakeholders (in the second view) and responsibility (the third meaning). For instance, if a councillor does not perform during his tenure in office the electorates who have the right to elect him will punish him for not electing him again. Once in office the councillor is supposed to share information and elaborate on what is happening and the outcomes. Thus, he has the responsibility to perform as expected of him by the people and should be ready to improve performance if the people feel so. Accountability exists in three forms: vertical downward accountability: elected council/councillors to citizens, horizontal accountability: officers to elected councillors and vertical upward accountability: local councils to higher levels/central government.

2.8.3 Transparency

Transparency according to Ribot (2003) entails openness to public scrutiny. It is to the extent to which decisions are perceived as being made in a clear and open manner;

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[9] For more interpretations of the concept of accountability see Mulgan, Public Administration Vol. 78 No. 3, 2000 (555-573).

however, Bonfiglioli (2003) equates transparency to information sharing, open behaviour and clear decision-making procedures. Echoing the Bonfiglioli, the OECD (2003:8) defines it as "…successful two-way communication about public policy…(it) starts from a core set of measures that are so fundamental as to be almost indistinguishable from governments' basic legislative, administrative and fiscal functions. Core measures help to ensure that people who are affected by policies know about them and can respond to them." Apparent in all these definition are ideas of "openness" and information sharing between those making decisions and those to be affected by the decisions. It also implies participation of those to be affected by the decisions in the actual decision-making process and the right to question the basis and justifications of those decisions. It is only when this information is well communicated that people will respond to the decisions.

2.8.4 Efficiency

The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary defines the word efficient (in relation to systems) as meaning the production of 'satisfactory results without wasting time or resources.' In short, borrowing from Nielsen (2000:3), "Efficiency refers to the government administration of time and resources to produce a given outcome." In this light, the efficiency of the District Assembly would be assessed in terms of how it manages the resources and time to produce an output. Other very closely related concepts to efficiency are responsiveness and effectiveness. Responsiveness is defined as the achievement of "…congruence between community preferences and policies," such that activities of the institution are valued by the public (Fried & Rabinovitz, 1980). Thus, it is the linkage between the communication of needs by citizens and the market (demands) and the capacity of the state to address them (supplies) (Nielsen, 2000:3). Effectiveness relates to the appropriateness of government endeavours employed in the production of desired outcomes.

2.8..5 Equity and Gender Sensitivity.

Gender sensitivity refers to being sensitive to the diverse situations and needs of women, and men, throughout the decision-making process, in order to encourage the accomplishment of gender equality. It involves seeking, considering, and accommodating any facet of social interaction between women and men in their social and cultural milieu, during the course of any policy, planning, or implementation activity (Bonfigliori,2003).

In conclusion, Good governance entails the methods that societies use to dispense power and manage public resources and problems. Good governance provides an atmosphere for human development and the annihilation of deprivation. It embraces three qualities ownership, equity and accountability. Ownership implies that it is participatory and people-entered; equity: means it is conducive to building a society that offers everyone with equal access to opportunities and accountability implies that it is embedded in structures that are open and accountable to people. Thus "…when people's interests and human rights – not greater economic efficiency- are at the centre of governance institutions and practices - there can be real progress in combating poverty." (UNDP, 2000: 54) Therefore, good governance provides a precondition for distribution of benefits from growth.

2.8.6 Good Local Governance and Local Development

It is evident from the preceding section that decentralisation has the potential of empowering the poor through good local governance. According to Kabeer (2001), empowering the poor entails the elimination of all institutional barriers that inhibit their options and hinder them from taking action to improve their welfare. In addition, empowering the poor also mean strengthening the basic principles of good governance by enhancing popular participation, improving efficiency in pro-poor development and

promoting democratic accountability and transparency and decentralisation presents a requisite environment for such developments (Bonfiglioli, 2003). Moreover, because poverty is linked to powerlessness, injustice and exclusion, empowering people also imply promoting human rights, increasing the breadth of civil society interaction and freedom of association, strengthening the rule of law and unprejudiced administration of justice and bestowing more voice and control to the poor over the type, quality, and delivery of services they receive. Viewed in this way, decentralization through good local governance is a means to enhance local economic development, local delivery of infrastructure and social services, and local control, access to and use of productive renewable natural resources.

Furthermore, decentralisation creates an essential milieu in which true participatory development can emerge. All the ideals embraced in good local governance are those espoused in people-centred (participatory) development as argued by several authors. Gran, (1983: 327) defines participatory development as "…the self sustaining process to engage free men and women in activities that meet their basic human needs and, beyond that, realise individually defined human potentials within socially defined limits." Implicit in this is that people need to participate to develop themselves according to their needs and goals. Gran maintains that participatory development is endogenous, need oriented, self-reliant, and ecologically sustainable and based on structural reorientation. Therefore, development ceases to be prescriptive, ethnocentric[10] and paternalistic. The wishes of an individual never superimposes on those of a group (Dodds, 1989*)*. It is based on the foundations of freedom, real respect for human rights, human dignity and authentic democracy. There is also an element of shared vision within the socially defined goals. It is a process that harnesses individual potentials for the development of both the society

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[10] Ethnocentric – reference is made to the modernization theory which has been criticized as inherently Ethnocentric as well as paternalistic.

and the individual. People are respected and not treated in a mechanistic way, as has always been the case in top down approaches to development. The beneficiaries have to be subjects not objects of development. To borrow Dodd's words "…In order to arrive at a national process of development, people need to arrive at shared vision, which forms the basis of a shared mission or commitment. The purposes of individuals and groups (must) not have precedence over the whole system."(Dodds, 1989: 63).

Decentralisation is therefore being currently promoted as a necessary tool for facilitating people-centred development approaches, as its ideals and practice are very compatible with participatory approaches through good local governance. By bolstering good local governance which includes such ideals as equity, transparency, accountability, participation and gender sensitivity, just to mention a few, decentralisation, therefore, becomes an essential tool for promoting local development which ultimately impacts on poverty reduction.

In sum, the relationship of decentralisation to poverty reduction is through a sequential chain of events. Decentralisation reforms encourage good local governance and good local governance creates development, which in turn has the potential of reducing poverty. This picture can be depicted schematically in figure 3 as below.

FIGURE 3: THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DECENTRALISATION AND POVERTY REDUCTION
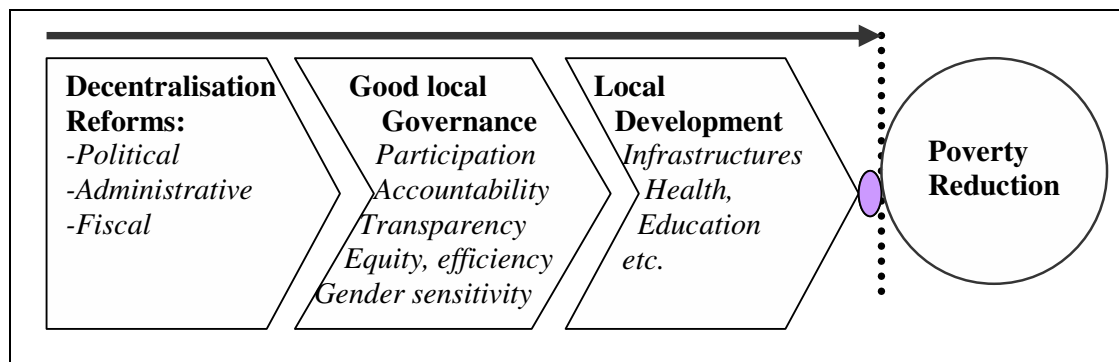
The implications from the above discussion are that the onus of poverty reduction rest on local authorities and the central government. It depends on the degree of good local governance achieved which is dependent on the design and how much power, responsibilities and resources are transferred from the centre to the sub regional units and in turn how much of the same are transferred from the sub regional units to the lower units. In addition, it depends on what impact the transfer of power and responsibilities have on the empowerment of the local people. Equally, it hinges on the willingness of the individual units to observe the rule of law and willingness to cooperate and achieve common goals. The very concept of good local governance implies impeccable local administration. It denotes quality, effectiveness and efficiency of local administration and public service delivery; the quality of local public policy and decision-making procedures, their inclusiveness, their transparency, and their accountability; and the manner in which power and authority are exercised at the local level. It is therefore essential that central government and the associated sub regional and local institutions to which power and responsibilities are transferred observe the rules of the game to make decentralisation work for the poor.

2.9 THEORETICAL TERRAIN

The second section of this Chapter discusses two theories that are relevant to the study. Theory is necessary in research in order to reinforce the study and to delineate a point of departure. This study is using two theories both of which are essentially economic theories, but which are also used to explain political dynamics- especially in political and administrative reforms to which decentralisation belongs. These are the theories of path dependency and public/ rational choice. Therefore, the following section is devoted to the discussion of the said theories.

2.9.1 Path Dependency

Path dependence is predominantly an economic theory, which is applied in many disciplines including politics especially when dealing with institutional change or institution reforms. As a concept, it is defined in various ways and it assumes a diversity of meanings depending on the circumstance (see: Crouch & Farrell, 2004; Deeg, 2003).

Path dependence prevails when present options are circumscribed by past decisions. Equally, path dependence conditions the correlation between inputs and outcomes, where outcomes are dependent on the decisions made at the input stage. In this view path dependence can be perceived of having some sort of magnitude- i.e. weak or strong dependence- depending on the strength of the relationship between the input and output factors. For instance, in cases of strong dependence, an organization may have very few alternatives due to past choices and in case of weak dependence, an organization may have several alternatives and it is not heavily restricted by past decisions.

In reality however, strong dependence is very common, which makes it difficult to switch paths freely without proper calculations especially where large costs are associated with changing of paths. These costs and effects include what Alexander (2001:253-259) has categorized as large transitional costs of institutional change arising from technical inter-relatedness or institutional density, set-up costs, learning effects and institutional 'stickiness' among others.[11] With this theory, institutions continue to persist without so much transformation and depict a high degree of residual characteristics of its previous form. Therefore, "Once a development path is set on a particular course, the network externalities, the learning process of organizations, and the historically derived subjective modeling of the issues reinforce the course" (North 1990: 99).

The theory of path dependence thus suggests that the longer an institution has been in place, the more resilient to change it will be and the more likely that any changes will be incremental', (Deeg, 2003:6). Thus, if given sufficient time and adequate self-reinforcing mechanisms, a path will develop a "deep equilibrium," that is, becoming more resistant to change and likely to persist for a very long period of time (Pearson, cited in Deeg, 2003:6). In this context, institutional change only occurs as a result of an 'exogenous shock' – an event exterior to the path that significantly modifies the incentives/constraints confronting actors on the path – can lead to the end of the path. Other than this, change is incremental or 'on-path' (ibid: 6, paraphrasing Pearson). In relation to the study of decentralisation reforms, this part of the theory would assist to explain unplanned decentralisation reforms - decentralisation by default induced by external pressure.

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[11] Transitional costs implies that when phenomena are closely interrelated, changing one may necessitate changing many others, raising the costs of any change at all (Krasner, 1989: 78; North, 1990: 95).Learning effects mean that increasingly specialized knowledge makes the learning of an entirely new technology or system costly. *Institutional 'Stickiness':* Pierson (2000: 262) argues that 'public policies and (especially) formal institutions' are 'generally designed to be difficult' to revise as such they are only modified but not completely changed.

Countervailing, however, within the limits of the theory is another view that sees institutional change as arising endogenously within the path that possibly lead to new paths. According to Thelen (2003), mechanisms of change can operate concurrently as mechanisms of replication of a given path. Eventually, however, the mechanisms of change may offset those reproducing the path, ultimately causing a major transformation in the general trajectory of the path. Thelen identifies two mechanisms specifically that may lead to such change. The first is 'institutional layering' when actors use existing institutional material in different and innovative ways or combinations, or new institutions are added "on top" of existing ones. The other mechanism is 'conversion' in which existing institutions are turned to new purposes. This opportunity is seized by what Thelen calls 'marginal actors,' especially in a political sense, which may exploit such mechanisms to turn a path in a direction more favourable to their interests. Such actors may then use entrepreneurial skills, power, or access to other social networks or institutional ideas in an effort to modify the institutions of the path (Hacker 2002, 60; Crouch 2002).

Path dependency is an appropriate metaphor for our study. Decentralization reforms are constrained by several preceding factors and context in which they are implemented. In addition, it involves numerous institutional changes. The pre-existing conditions can determine how far the reforms can deviate from the normal and can determine the quality of the reforms. Sequentially, the quality and type of decentralization reforms will determine its potential to fulfill the purposes for which it was intended. Thus, the success or failure of decentralization reforms to achieve their intended goals is not only a function of design or implementation, but also the path; in this case, the political history and the socio-economic and political climate of the country in which the reforms are designed and implemented. In addition, these reforms may occur by plan or by default induced by exogenous factors.

Conversely, change may happen because of internal factors and finally there is a possibility that as change is taking place, others may take advantage of the unstable system and reconfigure existing mechanisms of change to enhance their selfish interests. It is therefore necessary while looking at the promises of decentralization reforms towards poverty reduction in Malawi, to reflect on the political circumstances influencing the nature of the reforms produced, its design and implementation pattern as well as its vulnerability to capture by selfish bureaucrats. This brings me to another relevant theory in the study namely the 'the theory of public/rational choice'.

2.9.2 The Theory of Public /Rational Choice

Like the previous theory, the theory of public or rational choice is also fundamentally an economic theory, which is also applied in politics. It has changed the way government behaviour is analysed. Hitherto, government was perceived "…as exogenous to the economy, a benign corrector of the market economy when it faltered," but after public choice, the position of government in the economy became something to be explained, not assumed (Tollison, 1985:906). Traditional economic analysis uses the apparatus of economic theory to explain the behaviour of individuals in private settings. Public choice represents the use of standard economic tools (demand and supply) to explain behaviour in non-market environments, such as government (ibid). Public choice theory professes to explain and predict the behaviour of political agents (politicians, bureaucrats, voters, and rent seekers) on the supposition that they are instrumentally rational (Pincione, 2004).

Public choice theory assumes that individuals or entities have clear preferences and are capable of choosing them and that they act in their self-interest and not in the interests of others. Individuals or entities have information about how to maximise their preferences, they are able to analyse the options and choose the course that maximizes their welfare, and they are able to change their action when costs and benefits change. According to this

assumption, Lemieux (2003:30) argued that ordinary individuals, who have the same self-interest motivations in the political, sphere as in the economic sphere, man the state. The existence of the state thus creates a political market, i.e., a market for political favours. The state will redistribute in favour of the interest groups whose support the rulers need most to remain in power and increase their benefits. Thus, the state exists because rulers want to redistribute in their own favour, (i.e., to steal).

Again, public choice assumes that the bureaucrats who are executing agents of political decisions are ordinary individuals who, like everybody else, seek to maximize their utility. Another way that the bureaucrat exerts power is by being an 'agenda setter'. For instance, being an agenda setter, he can often lead the system toward the results he prefers by deciding which alternatives and in what sequence business is going to be undertaken. Therefore, when public choice theory is applied to bureaucracy, it reveals other reasons for being sceptical that the state can efficiently reconcile individuals' preferences and aggregate their demands for public policies. The theory also assumes that decisions about supply of public services are not necessarily in the interest of the society. The bureaucrats may subvert those decisions or at worst implement them inefficiently and lower the overall standard of living. Walsh (1995:16) notes "…the simplest accusation against the public sector is that it is wasteful in the way that it uses resources because politicians and public officials have no incentives to control costs."

In sum, it is the behaviour of public sector bureaucrats, which is at the heart of public choice theory. While they are supposed to work in the public interest, putting into practice the policies of government as efficiently and effectively as possible, public choice theorists see bureaucrats as self- interested utility-maximises, motivated by such factors as: remuneration, prerequisites of the office, public reputation, influence, patronage and

the ease of managing the bureau (Niskanen, 1973). Central to all public choice theories then is the notion that an official at any level, be it in the public or private sector, operates at least partly in his own self- interest, and some officials are motivated exclusively by their own self-interest.

This theory is very relevant when seen in the light of decentralization reforms that by virtue of their nature tend to shift power, resources and responsibilities from the centre to the periphery. Obviously, there are winners and losers. Competition for survival, power and control of resources ensues between the bureaucrats at the centre and the local elites; and again between the local elites and the people. The behaviour of the politicians and the bureaucrats will determine the outcome of decentralization reforms and indeed their efficacy on other expected outcomes such as poverty reduction. Therefore, it is clear (by the assumption of the theory) that the fate of the poor in decentralization reforms is determined rests on the behaviour of their representatives and how egalitarian the bureaucrats are in delivering social services.

2.9.3 Conclusion

From the discussion on the concept of decentralisation, there are two fundamentals strands, which sum up decentralisation, seeing it as the transfer of power, authority and functions to lower levels of government, and this should be accompanied by the transfer of resources to support the devolved responsibilities. In addition, the broader picture in this chapter suggests that canvassing for decentralisation, as a panacea for poverty reduction, is problematic because of several intervening variables. One such variable is local governance, which enshrines a host of other concepts such as participation, accountability, efficiency, equity etc. all of which in turn have a combined impact on empowering the poor. The concept of poverty is seen here as a phenomenon that contributes to

powerlessness, exclusion and depredation. It follows that through local governance, poor people will triumph over the constricting tentacles of poverty. In terms of theories, the theory of public choice presents a serious reminder of the behaviour of public agents and bureaucrats in the public sphere, which also complicates the perceived egalitarianism of decentralisation towards the poor. It highlights issues of elite capture of the whole process. Conversely, the theory of path dependency suggests that the history of a nation or institution will determine the trajectory of the reform process. Thus, the effectiveness of decentralisation reforms will be dependent on the history of the state or institution being reformed. The next Chapter will present local governance institutions and local governance related issues in the case study area – the Lilongwe District Assembly.

CHAPTER THREE: OVERVIEW OF LOCAL GOVERNANCE AND LOCAL GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES IN LILONGWE

3. INTRODUCTION.

This Chapter provides an overview of local governance and local governance structures in Lilongwe District Assembly as envisaged by the decentralisation policy. It not only substantiates the intended purpose and roles of these structures, but also contains the activities of stakeholders such as NGOs, donors and other agencies in the promotion of local governance and development. The chapter presents a general institutional background under which the decentralisation policy is implemented in Lilongwe District Assembly.

3.2 BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF LILONGWE DISTRICT

Lilongwe District is located in the central region of the Republic of Malawi. The District is also the capital city of Malawi. The District is bordered by Dedza District to the East and Salima to the North East. Mchinji District marks the western border. Dowa District lies to the North of Lilongwe with Kasungu to its Northwestern tip and the Republic of Mozambique to the South West. The total land area is 6159 KM² representing 6.5 % of Malawi's total land area. According to 1998 Housing and Population Census (NSO, 2000), the largest population in the country was enumerated in Lilongwe District, which registered 1,346,360 (13.6%) of the national population. Of this, 440,471 (32.7%) live within the boundaries of the City Assembly and the District Assembly accommodates 905,889 (67.3%).

3.3. THE PEOPLE

Chewa is the major tribe in the district. It accounts for 99% of the total population in the rural areas. However, there are three other minor tribes namely: Tumbuka, Yao and Ngoni. Other tribes are found in the district either due to migration in search for employment or other economic gains in the urban areas of the district and through marriages. About four languages are spoken in the district. These are Chichewa, Chiyao, Chitumbuka and Chinyanja. However, the official language is English. Christianity is the predominant religion in the district, which in terms of figures accounts for 1,077,434 out of the total population (1,346,360); there are also a substantial number of people without religion (158,149) where as 67,979 are Moslems and 42,798 worship other religions (ibid).

3.3.1 The District Assembly

The District Assembly is the main developmental and policy-making body that makes the final decision with regard to policy and developmental issues. Lilongwe District Assembly is composed of 42 councillors, 18 Members of Parliament, 17 Traditional Authorities and 5 members of interest groups. By law the Assembly is required to provide for people's participation in the formulation and implementation of the District Development Plan (DDP) through the formation of action committees at area, village and ward levels. The District Assembly' main function is policymaking, coordination and supervision of development activities in the district. The District Assembly reviews, approves or rejects proposed projects identified by the community with assistance from the District Executive Committee (DEC), but also makes resolutions regarding implementation of management functions of the Secretariat. The chairperson elected from the elected councillors, is the head of the Assembly. Lilongwe District Assembly has five-service committees, namely;

Finance, Works, Development, Health and Environment, Appointments and Disciplinary and Education.

The following section describes the function, roles and membership of all the organisations encompassed within a District Assembly structure as depicted in Figure 4 below. The institutional structure is a generic structure in all the District Assemblies in Malawi that is, they are similar in all but numbers (i.e. this depends on the size of the district).

FIGURE 4. THE DISTRICT ASSEMBLY ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE

Committees of District Assembly
• Finance
• Education
• Development
• Works
• Health
• Appointments and Disciplinary

Ministry of Local Government

District Assembly

District Commissioner

District Executive Committee

No clear policies and regulatory framework Between NGOs, DA and Donors

All Technical Departments
e.g.
Health, Education, Agriculture Water, Forestry, Commerce and industry, tourism; community Development and social services e.t.c
NGOs

Core Management Team of the DC:
Directors of: planning and development, Finance, Administration Public Works

Area Development Committee

Area Executive Committee

Village Development Committee

Village Households

Source: Gama et al, 2003:24

3.3.2 District Assembly Secretariat.

The District Assembly Secretariat is composed of the District Commissioner who is the head and (as of now) four directors in the following departments: development and planning, public works, administration and finance. The Secretariat's function is to implement the resolutions and policies of the Assembly, coordinating sector development programmes and management of Assembly resources. The institutional structure of the District Assembly secretariat is depicted in the figure 5 below.

FIGURE 5. THE DISTRICT ASSEMBLY SECRETARIAT INSTITUTIONAL STRUCTURE
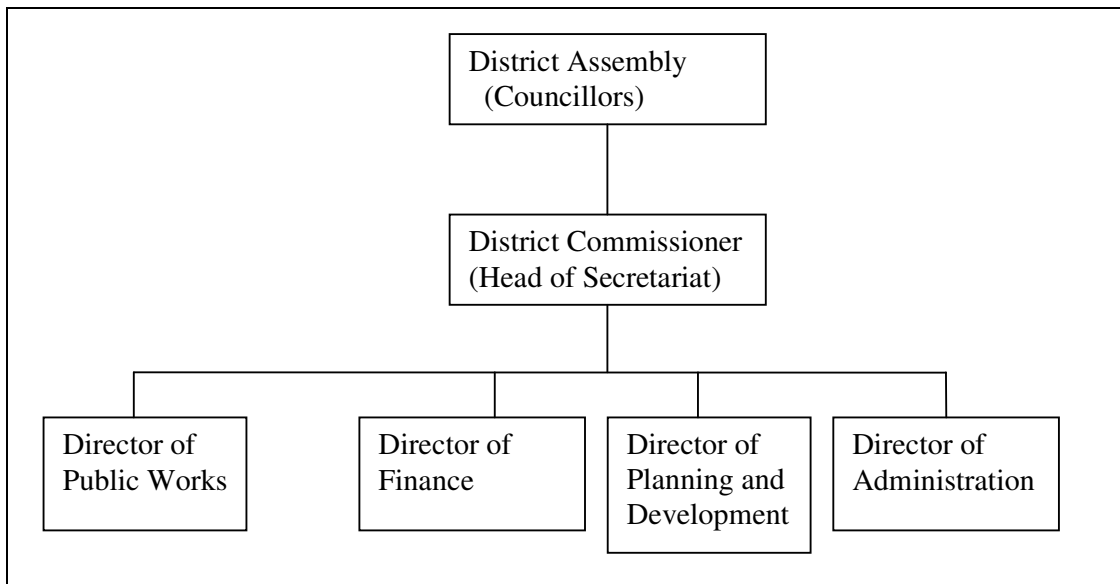
Source: Adapted from Gama et al, 2003:24

3.3.3 The District Executive Committee (DEC)

The District Executive Committee is composed of all government line ministries, statutory corporations and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) working in the district. This body functions as a technical arm of the District Assembly. The DEC facilitates the formation, training and capacity building for development planning for the decentralised lower level planning institutions such as Area Development Committees (ADCs) and Area

Executive Committees (AECs). The District Commissioner chairs the DEC. As representatives of line ministries in the district, the DEC liaises and harmonises district level policies and activities with national policies and activities. The DEC is empowered to make subcommittees and task forces under it to facilitate the performance of its tasks. The subcommittees include: development advisory teams (DAT), District Training Team (DTT) and District Environmental Sub-Committees (DESC).

3.3.4 Area Development Committee (ADC)

The Area Development Committee is a representative body of all Village Development Committees (VDCs) working within the jurisdiction of the area under the Traditional Authority. Its main functions are to assist in the identification, prioritisation and preparation of community needs, which encompasses more than one VDC. It supervises monitors and evaluates the projects at Traditional Authority level. Besides, it is the instrument for promoting local participation and local governance. The ADC is composed of Ward Councillors from the TA's area of influence, representatives of religious faiths, youth and women groups, the business community and the chairperson of the Area Executive Committee is its secretary. Lilongwe District has 18 Area Development Committees (ADCs) whose chairperson is elected by its members. The term of office is three years except the Ward Representatives who are members until the electorate votes them out.

3.3.5 Area Executive Committees (AECs)

The Area Executive Committees (AEC) is a representative body of all extension workers of government ministries, Non-governmental Organisations and Statutory Corporations working within the jurisdiction of the Traditional Authority. It is an advisory body to the ADC in needs assessment, project identification and project proposal preparation. A

chairperson is elected amongst the members. The AEC also conducts data collection and analysis. It facilitates training and capacity building in development planning for all Village Development Committees in their area.

3.3.6 Village Development Committees (VDCs)

The Village Development Committee is a representative body from a village or group of villages charged with the responsibility of facilitating planning and development at the grass root level. The Village Development Committee is composed of elected member from each village within the VDC, Ward Councillor, four women representatives nominated by people within the VDC and elected extension worker. An elected member from the members at its first meeting chairs it. The VDC's main functions are identification, prioritisation, and preparation of community projects and submit them to ADC. The VDC is also responsible for mobilization of community resources for popular participation in self-help initiatives and supervision, monitoring, and evaluation of the implementation of development projects. The VDC's term of office is also three years as is the case with ADCs. Lilongwe District Assembly has 334 Village Development Committees. Usually VDCs are configured around Group Village Headmen

3.4. DEVELOPMENT ACTORS IN THE DISTRICT

There are undoubtedly many players in the development of the districts. These include government line ministries and departments, parastatals, bi-lateral and multi-lateral organisations and nongovernmental organizations. For successful delivery of social services and development, the decentralisation policy envisaged proper coordination of these actors.

3.4.1. Non-governmental Organisations

Christian Service Committee (CSC), World Vision International, Care Malawi, Plan International, Inter-Aid, Save The Children, ADRA, Work for Rural Health, Evangelical Lutheran Development are some of the major Non-governmental organisations working in the district. These NGOs supplement government's efforts by supporting line ministries in providing social services such as water and sanitation, health, emergency relief operations, agriculture, employment, literacy, environment, HIV/AIDS, civic education of human rights, micro-finance and capacity building. Main areas of discipline by some of the NGOs are shown in Table 1 below.

TABLE 1: DISCIPLINE OF OPERATION OF SOME NGOS

Name of NGO	Area of operation
Action Aid	Agriculture, Food Nutrition, CCB
Save US	HIV/AIDS, CB Care
Aids Kumudzi Association of Malawi	HIV/AIDS
Centre for Human Rights & Rehabilitation	Human Rights
Malawi Red Cross Society	Relief
CADECOM	Relief
Plan International Malawi	Environment, Agriculture, Food Nutrition and Health
Christian Health Association of Malawi (CHAM)	Health
CPAR	Health, Environment, Agriculture, Relief
World Vision International	Health, Education, Water & Sanitation
CCAP-Nkhoma Synod	Agriculture, Food & Nutrition
Paprika Association of Malawi	Agriculture

Name of NGO	Area of operation
Evangelical Lutheran Development Programme	Agriculture, Environment, Education, Water & Sanitation
Malawi Enterprise Zone Association (MALEZA)	Small Micro-Enterprises (SME)
ADRA Malawi	Relief
Christian Service Committee (CSC)	Credit
Inter-Aid	Water & Sanitation
Care Malawi	Relief, Agriculture, Health, Literacy, Public Works.

Source:Lilongwe District Assembly , 2003 (Socio-Economic Profile).

3.4.2 Community Based Organisations.

There are eleven Community Based Organisations in the district- Nkhoma Orphan Care, Liti, House of Hope, Ministry of Hope, Voluntary Aids service, Consol Helmes, Tilerane Orphan Care, Mphatso, Chimbalame Orphan Care and Kabudula and Kulamula Community Aids Committees (CACs).

3.5. DECISION MAKING PROCESS

Planning starts at grassroots level in Lilongwe District using the decentralised local level planning institutions such as Village Development Committees and Area Development Committees with assistance from the Area Executive Committees. The issues are identified, analysed and prioritised by the VDCs and then submitted to the ADC for approval before submitting to the District Assembly for review and approval. The District Assembly submits all the development propjets to the DEC, which is its executive adviser on development. The DEC appraises all the projects before recommending them to the

District assembly for approval. It is only after the approval by the Assembly that implementation starts.

The district development planning process starts with the production of the socio-economic profile (SEP), which is an analysis of issues in the district. From the SEP needs are prioritised and compiled as a product for the district development planning framework (DDPF), which is a policy direction and guidance for the development of the district. This is compiled by professional staff that comprises the DEC under the leadership of the director of planning and development (DPD). The DDPF is then submitted to the District Assembly for approval. After approval projects are identified, proposed and appraised then the district development plan (DDP) is formulated and submitted for approval. Once approved, implementation starts followed by monitoring and evaluation, annual review and reappraisal. Figure 6 below illustrates the district development planning cycle.

FIGURE 6: THE DISTRICT DEVELOPMENT PLANNING SYSTEM.
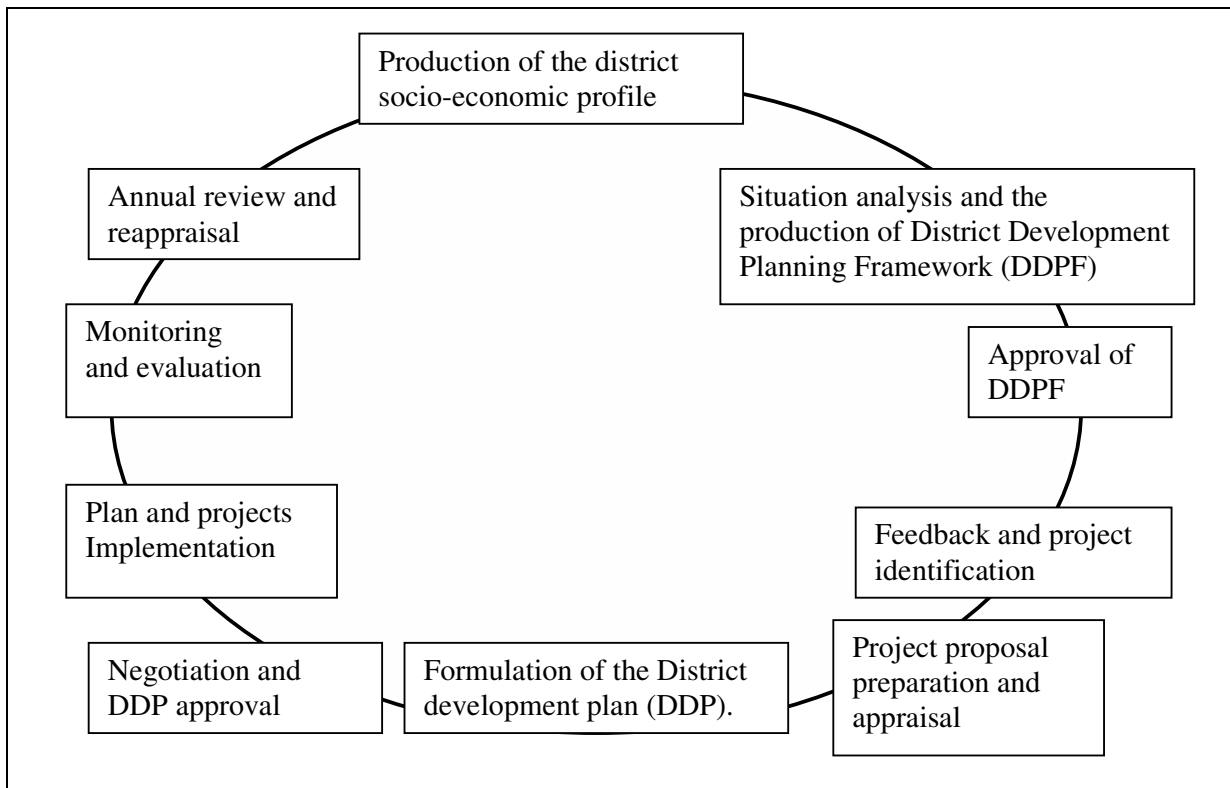
Source: DLG, 2001 (District Development Planning Handbook)

3.6 LOCAL POLITICS

There are two predominant parties in the district and these are the United Democratic Front (UDF) and the Malawi Congress Party (MCP). According to the 2004 Presidential and Parliamentary Elections, the opposition Malawi Congress Party won all 22 constituencies in Lilongwe District of which 18 fall under Lilongwe District Assembly (Electoral Commission, 2004). However, during the 2000 Local Government Elections, of the 42 wards that the Assembly has, the ruling UDF and the opposition Malawi Congress Party got 20 wards each and independent candidates won 2.

3.7 FORMAL LOCAL ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURES

In Lilongwe District, administrative structures are arranged in such a way that power trickles from the top to the lower levels. The District Commissioner heads the district, he administrates chieftainship matters on behalf of the government, but he does not have the mandate to hire or fire chiefs that is the duty of the president reacting on the recommendation of the clan representatives. The District Commissioner delegated power to hereditary Traditional Authorities who apportion the district according to the geographical location of their Clans. The Traditional Authorities also delegate their authority to Group Village Headmen who are appointed to head a cluster of villages. The Group Village Headmen pass on their authority to the Village Headmen who head individual village holds. is a distinguished feature of current rural Malawi that chiefs still maintain substantial authority, and continues to have jurisdiction over such fundamental issues as the allocation of land under customary tenure, installation of village headmen and presiding over local justices systems, which are used to solve local disputes. Besides, he/she is the supreme ruler of his/her land in as far as social matters are concerned.

3.8 LOCAL GOVERNANCE IN LILONGWE DISTRICT ASSEMBLY

As it has already been alluded to in chapter two, local governance has several facets such as participation accountability, equity, efficiency etc. it is to the description of these facets that this section must now turn.

3.8.1 Participation

In Lilongwe District Assembly, participation is more associated with development projects. It is likened to self-help initiatives, which were common during the One Party era. In the local areas participation takes the form of communities called together either by the village leaders (usually village headman), Members of Parliament or councillors to mobilise for a project or other communal activities. Usually it involves moulding of bricks, collection of sand, poles and stones, in short anything that can be found locally, which also include free labour. Sometimes mobilisation has elements of force. The traditional leaders by virtue of their power over customary rites exert tremendous influence on social life as such failure to comply is associated with serious sanctions, at worst one may be expelled from the village as somebody who does not want development. It is a general rule that communities should contribute at least 10% towards any project submitted to the Assembly for funds.

Administratively, especially in decision-making, participation is limited. Traditional leaders tend to be more autocratic and pass decisions as decrees, though sometimes after consulting their advisors. The advisors are however, not very critical of the leaders in order to preserve their coveted positions as their appointment to that position is more of a privilege than a right.

Politically, participation in the rural areas is less active as political activities are very sporadic. Most MPs, who would conduct credible political meetings, live in towns and seem to be less interested in the affairs of the people after elections. It is usually when elections draw near that MPs show up to campaign for re-election. In addition, Lilongwe District is monopolised by one party (the Malawi Congress Party) as such, there is less or no political competition. There is high illiteracy in Lilongwe District,[12] which makes it difficult for people to engage in political debates. This problem is compounded by pervasive poverty in the rural areas. People are more concerned with their wellbeing and livelihoods than engaging in political debates. Moreover, Due to their political socialisation poor people usually refrain from pushing through their interests. They tend to portray conservative political attitudes, which are shaped by a deeply rooted trust in authority. Political participation of the poor proves to be a one-time action that is soon followed by a rather apathetic political behaviour. Conversely, democracy is not well entrenched in Malawi's political culture. The political culture still manifests some autocratic linings stemming from the One Party state. Thus, ideas of democracy are new to Lilongwe District as they are to Malawi and it will take time for them to start having more impact on the lives of the people.

3.8.2 Transparency and Accountability.

The councillors were elected in 2000 to improve accountability in the district as envisaged by the decentralisation policy. The councillors were meant to be people's representatives in the newly created district assemblies to promote pro-poor development. The councillors are voting members of the Assembly. In normal circumstances, the full assembly meets once in a month except in emergencies, when the number of meetings increases. In the

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[12] The literacy rate for Lilongwe is 59.9 % of which 33.4% is for males and 26.5% for females.Culturally, men participate more than women do therefore. Thus in reality the literacy rate is lower than 59.9% i.e. 33.4%, which is also the one for males.

rural areas, the councillors are by law people's representatives and development agents however, there are no clearly defined rules separating the roles of various development actors. The councillors' conditions of service are somewhat difficult in that their office does not have a stipend apart from monthly allowances of MK 1000 (US$9) and other small allowances that they receive for attending Assembly meetings.

The District Assembly managers are mandated to carry out the decisions of the District Assembly. The management team (also called Directors) is headed by the district commissioner. However, the Ministry of Local Government (MLG) through the Local Government Finance Committee (LGFC) pays the senior District Assembly managers; the District Assembly in this way is just a working station. Equally, the MLG, through the Local Government Service Commission, (LGSCOM) hires the senior Assembly staff. They can be transferred anywhere at the discretion of the Ministry. The District Assembly through the District Commissioner sends progress reports to MLG furnishing information on the status of the District Assembly in all aspects. In turn, MLG supervises the activities of the District Assembly. It uses the District Assembly to acquire information on the status of local governance in the grass roots. It also trains the District Assembly staff as well as providing financial support. For example, the ministry provides the salaries of senior staff; this also includes monthly grants which government has to give to the District Assemblies.

Financial accountability at District Assembly level is enhanced by the promulgation of a code of conduct enshrined in the Financial Management Manual of District Development Fund (2002). This document outlines all the accounting, procurement and reporting procedures. The National Audit Office audits all the District Assembly's accounts regularly. The assembly budget is prepared in a participatory manner involving the entire stakeholders, which are going to be affected. For example, development budgets include

input from VDCs and ADCs from the grassroots. The Finance Committee in collaboration with the Director of Finance, the Director of Planning and Development and the Director of Public works prepare the budget at District Assembly level. The final draft budget is presented before the Full Assembly for approval for which it has a prerogative to accept or reject.

3.8.3 Efficiency.

The reason for instituting District Assemblies was to enhance efficiency and cost effectiveness of the public service by eliminating dual administration (field administration and local government) at the district level (DDLGA, 2000). Thus, currently at district level there is only one institution responsible not only for administration but also for the development of the district. Resources are pulled together for this purpose. However, the amount of resources available is not commensurate to the amount of tasks performed by the new structure. Equipments for running the District Assembly are not adequate, such as vehicles, computers, copiers etc. In view of inadequate funds, the District Assembly often fails to fulfill its obligations to the people. In terms of staff, although the District Assembly is supposed to have well qualified staff such as directors (i.e. up to Masters Level); efficiency is always affected due to the absence of these directors due to either resignation or transfer, yet it takes a very long time to fill these vacancies. Instead, it is the less qualified juniors who tend to work in place of the directors.

3.8.4 Equity and Gender Sensitivity

The status of women in the district is disadvantaged in contrast with that of males in respect of access to and control over resources and other development opportunities. In order to contribute to the empowerment of women in decision making, to enable them to have equal access and control over resources, the Assembly has initiated some

programmes such as Gender Mainstreaming in all on-going development projects/activities. For instance, women are organized into business groups and given training on business and credit management. At present, there are 28 organized women groups comprising about 250 women. In addition, the district has made deliberate attempts to let women lead the Community Based Management of Water Supply. Almost 70% of Water Point Committees' members are women most of whom hold decision-making positions like Chairperson, Secretary and Treasurer. In the 188 well-organized water points with 1,880 committee members, 1,316 are women representing 70%; almost 83% of these hold key positions (Lilongwe District Assembly,2003). In addition, micro-credit institutions give priorities to women in dispensing their credits for example see Table 2 below.

TABLE 2: MICRO-CREDIT INSTITUTIONS

Institution	No. of Applicants	Total Amount received (MK)	Recipients	
			M	F
MRFC	3,930	25,911,678.95	325	3,605
FINCA	2,750		150	2,600
Usiwa Watha	1,500	30,000,000.00	450	1,050
Community Services	280	767,000		280

Source: Lilongwe District Assembly, 2003 (Socio-Economic Profile).

3.8.5 Conclusion

This Chapter has presented an overview of local governance and local governance structures in the district as envisioned by the decentralisation policy. It has not only explained the power relations and functions of these structures, but also given a general impression of participatory development planning process in the district. In addition, it has

given a quick perusal of some local governance issues in the District. The next chapter will provide details of the findings and results on whether or not decentralisation process in Lilongwe District has promoted good local governance .

CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH FINDINGS TOWARDS AN ASSESSMENT OF THE IMPACT OF DECENTRALISATION REFORMS IN LILONGWE DISTRICT ASSEMBLY.

4. INTRODUCTION

Decentralisation and the promotion of good local governance have come to be acknowledged in development circles as comprising an essential milieu within which valuable apparatuses for rural poverty reduction could flourish. This thinking derives from the notion that decentralisation cultivates requisite factors for poverty reduction such as the promotion of good local governance, which enshrines such issues as grassroots participation in decision-making and resource allocation; transparency and accountability; equitable and fair access to essential services and government responsiveness to the needs of the people among other things. Thus, the success of decentralisation in poverty reduction issues depends on the extent to which decentralisation has succeeded in promoting good local governance, which in turn promotes poverty reduction.

The poverty report published by the UNDP (2000) identified good governance as the missing link in poverty reduction ventures and it argued that even if countries seek to implement poverty policies and target their interventions, faulty governance could nullify the impact. Similarly, the success of poverty reduction through decentralisation reforms in Lilongwe District depends on whether the reforms have succeeded in promoting good local governance. The purpose of this chapter is to unveil the empirical results of the research question whether or not the current decentralisation processes have promoted good local governance in Lilongwe District and what the results mean in relation to poverty reduction.

In order to facilitate a deep examination of indications of good local governance, the concept has to be broken down into sub-types that are more precise. In the discussion in chapter two, governance is depicted as oscillating around six main subtypes namely: Participation, Accountability, Transparency, Efficiency, Equity, and Gender-sensitivity. The same indicators were used to investigate the impact of decentralisation on local governance in the district.

4.2 PARTICIPATION.

Evidence of the practices of participation on the ground shows that it is seen as an episode and instrument for development planning and implementation rather than a process as perceived by the UNDP. In Lilongwe District for example, community participation is perceived as contribution of materials and labour to development projects when either a higher authority or influential local officials demand such tasks for local development projects. Thus, for building projects, moulding of bricks, collection of building poles, sand and willingness to offer free labour are some of the common contributions. In addition, people participate in the preparation of district development plans starting from needs assessment to evaluation.

Conyers (1990) submits that decentralised planning can improve popular participation in planning and development and increase the speed and flexibility of decision making when most decisions are made locally. Consistent with this assertion, the study revealed that community participation has improved because of the introduction of decentralised development planning. Currently the communities are able to identify and prioritise their development needs and participate in mobilising materials. At village level, project planning passes through four stages. The first stage is needs assessment. This involves sessions of discussions, brain storming and probing into the real development issues in the

village. The process is either initiated by the village headman or other influential leaders such as the councillor, the Member of Parliament or indeed the various government /NGO extension workers or CBOs operating in the area. The identified issues portray a picture of possible projects in the village, which are then selected and prioritised. The communities usually seek support for projects which they cannot accomplish using local resources alone. In this case, the District Assembly and other appropriate organisations and donors are contacted for assistance. This usually involves the filling of application forms and compliance with the conditions set by respective funding agencies[13].

Meanwhile the community will do preliminary mobilisation that is ascertaining that it has local resources required for the project , application forms are filled and submitted then the people will wait for the feed back of their applications. If the project is approved the community will do a secondary mobilisation. At this point, the leadership of the project will be confirmed and the project committee is given formal mandate to execute the project. The official launch date is announced where the funding agency representatives meet the community to officially hand over the cheque or the materials for the project and to sign a memorandum of understanding. After implementation the project is then formally handed over to the beneficiaries, this is usually done after an operation & maintenance (O&M) training. At the very end, the community will participate in a participatory impact assessment of the project.

Some of the most successful projects are afforestation, Water and school projects, implemented jointly by the District Assembly and the Malawi Social Action Fund, EU micro-projects, EU Public Works Programme and the District Forestry Office. In all cases,

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[13] Each donor has its own project application forms and different conditions attached to their assistance. The communities therefore have to be aware of all these different conditions to improve the chances of being funded.

communities contribute towards their proposed projects. Upon approval they are trained in bookkeeping, stores management, group dynamics and basic procurement techniques. During the course of the project they are entitled to produce progress reports, which include financial reports. To ensure sustainability, the community is trained in operations and maintenance (O&M) before the project is handed over to the community.However, sometimes overenthusiastic traditional leaders go as far as coercing the communities to mobilise materials for projects, failure to comply is associated with serious sanctions as evidence from a focus group discussion reveals:

'In some cases we are just told what to do and because the chief has commanded us and because everybody is complying, so we follow suit. However, we do not really see any benefits. In several cases, we have mobilised materials for development that is not forthcoming; as we are talking now, in GVH Chilinza's area we were promised a clinic, as usual we mobilised all resources required for the project, but until now, nothing has been done. As if that is not enough, you will see them next time asking us again to mobilise resources yet for another project, which we will do not because we are pleased of what happens, but because our leaders have requested us to do so'.[14]

The results reveal a sharp contrast to the previous tradition of self-help spirit for which the community has since been renowned. The communities are now less interested in these ventures unless there is an incentive to do so.[15]. One major reason cited for the decline in interest is undelivered promises by development practitioners, which include the District Assembly itself, NGOs and other donors. The communities mobilised materials as required of them but these organisations in several cases failed to deliver their part of the deal.

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[14] Focus Group Discussion conducted at Mpingu Trading Center (12/2003).
[15] Interview with Chief Malili (2004).

According to the District Assembly's data on community projects, it is clear that only few projects out of what people had contributed for were supported and eventually people ended up completing the remaining ones without any external support. The case in question is depicted in the figure 7 [graph] below.

FIGURE 7: THE FIGURE BELOW SHOWS AIDED AND UNAIDED SELF-HELP PROJECTS IN LILONGWE DISTRICT FROM 1998 TO 2001.

Aided and Unaided Self Help Projects

	1998/99	1999/2000	2000/2001
Unaided	147	197	277
Aided	70	91	92
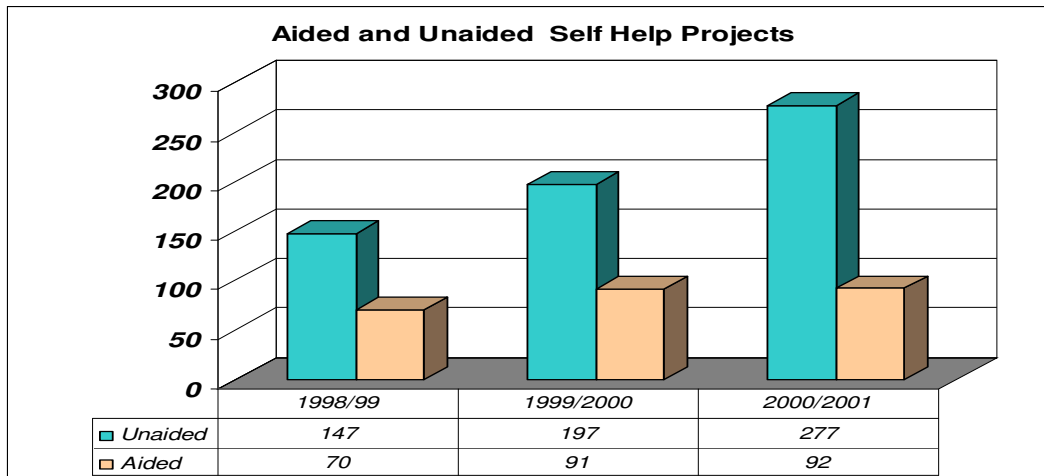
Source: figures from Lilongwe District Assembly, 2003, (Socio-Economic Profile).

It is evident from the chart that the numbers of unaided self help projects have always been higher than those that were aided over these years. A closer look however shows that the assistance had steadily declined over the years from about 48% in 1998 to 46% in 1999 and finally 33% in 2000.

In some cases, participation is seen as being synonymous to consultation. Projects are first designed and then as a way of targeting them, officers are sent to the grassroots to do some consultation with the people in the guise of participatory appraisals. Equally, the rhetoric and conceptualisation of participation by both district and central level officials is limited to development projects; thus, the conceptualisation of participation in the district

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is very much in line with the World Bank's definition of participation cited in the second chapter.

Another dimension of participation as noted by Blair (1998) is through representation by people's representatives in the local assembly. It is assumed that through the representatives, local people will participate in the decision-making processes. Evidence in Lilongwe however, indicates a general dissatisfaction of the people with the work of many of the councillors as their representatives. They argue that nothing has changed, "…in fact," lamented one Group Village Headman, "The situation is worse than before, today it is only confusions in the way village activities are run."[16] Councillors, who are designated as people's representatives, do not conduct meetings with the people before or after attending the Assembly Meeting. It is evident that people's genuine interests are not attended to and therefore they are excluded from the decision-making processes that matter to them. In this case, it is hard to judge whether the decisions concluded at an Assembly meeting reflect the needs of the people; or whether the decisions are pro-poor.

4.2.1 Participation and Local Development Institutions.

The Village Development Committee and the Area Development Committee have not been very successful in facilitating participation as intended. Evidence reveals that these committees are in active. For instance, according to the Assembly's records, of the 17 Area Development Committees only 2 are active, where as of the 338 VDCs, only 8 are said to be active. A group discussion in Mpingu area expressed ignorance of the existence of the so called Area and Village Development Committees instead they expressed knowledge of other user committees such as the Village Natural Resource Management Committees (VNRMC), Village AIDS Committees and Village Health and Water

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[16] Interview with GVH Mbwatalika.

Committees just to mention a few. The inactivity of the ADCs and VDCs is attributed to several factors. The first reason is that the Assembly only remembers the VDCs when it wants to use them for participatory rural appraisals for Village Action Plans, but thereafter nothing else is done. For instance, the last time the VDCs were trained was in 2001 when the District Assembly wanted Village Action Plans (VAPs). The second reason is that the VDCs themselves have no incentive to meet and discuss development needs in their respective areas. The third factor is attributed to the behaviour of other development actors such as NGOs, which prefer to form their own user committees, which they can easily control. Consequently, as the number of NGOs and NGOs' activities increases in an area so is the number of user committees. The proliferation of the user committees has brought new problems as the following extract from a community workshop in Kaoche VDC discloses:

"Donor or NGO-funded projects go straight to the people. They identify the projects without the knowledge of the ADC or the VDC. Some of these projects may promise food or money but if this promise is not fulfilled the chief has the problem to identify the culprit. This, therefore, creates a big problem because unlike the District Assembly the NGOs cannot be queried. Furthermore, they create their own development structures, which confuse development activities".

Donor efforts have sometimes aggravated matters. They do not recognise the interface between sector-based support through line ministries or NGOs, and the District Assembly even when all activities are funded by the same donor in the same sector. As a result, activities in one area often appear to nullify the other. In addition, this promotes competition for scarce resources and authority, which results in increasing conflict and overlap. Consequently, it is becomes increasingly difficult to coordinate development

activities because stakeholders have divergent interests. This complex relationship is depicted in the schematic diagram below.

FIGURE 8: MODEL OF COORDINATION OF DEVELOPMENT ACTORS AT THE GRASSROOTS
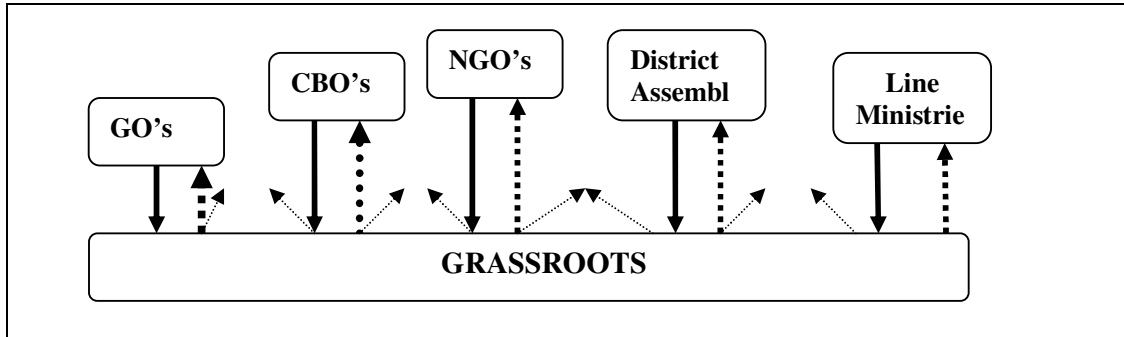
The model presents a picture of the situation in the grassroots as far as the coordination of actors is concerned. The model indicates lack of coordination of actors. Development actors implement their projects independent of each other and in the process create several user committees which themselves do not coordinate although their activities do have some mutual impact (indicated by the side arrows). In the ideal case where the actors coordinate, there is both vertical and lateral relationship. The vertical relationship is very strong because there is one central body (the DEC) that coordinates development activities. Figure 4 depicts this ideal case of coordination.

FIGURE 9: **IDEAL MODEL OF DISTRICT COORDINATION**
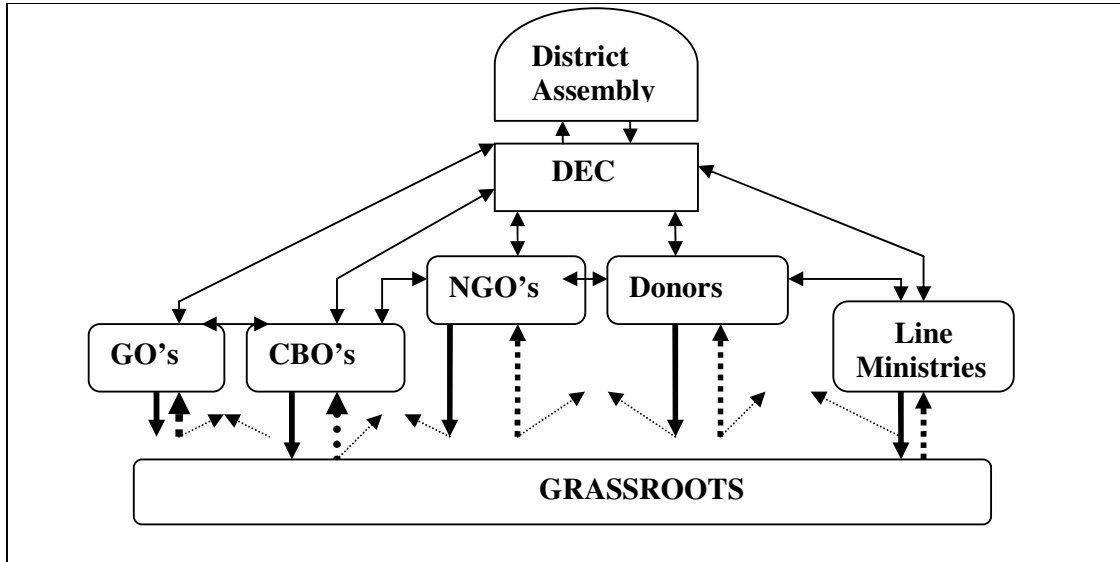
The mandate of the District Assembly is to facilitate development in the district and through the District Executive Committee; the District Assembly coordinates development activities. However, the potency of the DEC depends on the will of the District Assembly to make it work effectively because the Assembly funds the DEC. It follows, therefore, that failure by the Assembly to support the DEC, will in turn inhibit the DEC's capacity to perform its functions of coordinating development. In this case, it can be argued that the lack of coordination among development actors in the district is to some extent attributed to the Assembly's failure to adequately support the DEC.

4.2.1.1 User Committees vs. Formal Development Institutions.

User committees are seen as convenient tools for implementing development projects, in that they are easy to assemble and manage. Consequently, NGOs find it more convenient to create single purpose committees to implement development projects. However, evidence also reveals that user committees have a damaging impact on formal multi-purpose bodies such as the VDCs and the ADCs. This impact is shown in several ways: the user committees have assumed the roles and functions of the VDCs; in this regard, the

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VDCs are deprived of the revenue, which would accrue to them if all development actors were using them. In addition, due to neglect and relegation they are not able to build their own capacity to effectively implement development projects. Further, the proliferation of user committees has fragmented popular participation, making it less coherent and effective. The user committees are single purpose committees whose benefits are usually short term as such, members are more interested in reaping the benefits and in this quest, they tend to exclude the most vulnerable groups such as women, children and the elderly. Conversely, the increase of user committees has increased transactional costs of communities in participating in and negotiating for development projects for it involves attending so many different meetings, visiting different offices and involves traveling. Thus, the costs are incurred in terms of both cash and time.

4.2.1.2 Relations of Development Players.

Popular participation is also affected by the relations of various players on the ground. This section considers three relations namely: the councillors vs. the Members of Parliament, the Traditional Authorities vs. all elected leaders and the traditional authorities vs. the people.

4.2.1.3 Councillors versus Members of Parliament.

The relationship of the councillors and the members of parliament is wrought with both overt and covert antagonisms, which takes the form of power struggle. Where the councillor and the MP are from different parties, the antagonism is more serious and sometimes irreconcilable. One group discussion was very elaborate in its description of the relationship of councillors and MPs:

"The relation of the two groups is in most cases unpleasant and marred by mistrust. This is apparent when implementing development projects; they usually differ on who should get the credit for bringing a project to the people. For the opposition MP, it is accorded to his ingenuity and effort. For the councillor from the ruling party, it is due to the goodwill and efficiency of the ruling party. Similarly, to the opposition MP, failure of development activities is attributed to failure of the ruling party to deliver, but for those on the government side, they blame the MP for inefficiency. The toll that this exacts on the people is confusion, demoralisation and polarisation on political lines".[17]

The relationship can also be tense even when both the councillor and the MP are from the same party, especially when the councillor is interested to run for a parliamentary office. This threatens the position of the reigning Member of Parliament. It is however comprehensible for the MPs to feel threatened, as most of them began their career as councillors.

4.2.1.4 Elected Political Leaders versus the Traditional Authorities

The relationship of the elected leaders and the Traditional Authority is heavily dependent on whether the Traditional Authority and the MP or councillors share similar social and political interests. For example, if the TA favours the policies of the party which the MP represents in the area, the relations will be good and the vice versa. However, sometimes it is due to personal reasons, struggles for power and the inefficiency of the MP or councillors. Superficially, the Traditional Authority is more powerful than the elected leaders.[18] However, the MPs and councillors have their mandate from the people. In case

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[17] Group discussion, Kaoche VDC.

[18] Traditional Authority institutions (chiefs) have been operating at the local level since the District Administration (Native) Ordinance of 1912, which provided for demarcating administrative units and the establishment of a 'native' or local administration controlled by the traditional leaders (Tindall 1985). Their

of the MPs, by virtue of their unchallenged possession of vast political power and financial resources, they automatically become potential contenders for the influence and authority of the Traditional Authority. Thus, although coordination and discussion are usually anticipated between traditional leaders and elected representatives, in most cases both institutions tend to enviously guard their independence and emphasize their autonomy. The relationship between the elected leaders and the traditional authority system is particularly complicated and misinterpreted by some traditional leaders, especially those who do not appreciate the responsibility of councillors and MPs or who misunderstand the decentralisation process[19]. In some areas such as in Traditional Authorities Malili, Masula, Mazengera and Kabudula there are strong antagonisms between the TA and elected leaders be it MPs or councillors, which deteriorate into petty detrimental rivalries for power, duplication of effort and wastage of resources.

Due to the interest in development 'chitukuko' by both traditional and elected authorities, an overlap of leadership responsibilities in relation to local communities is often inherent. Currently, the Area Development Committees and Village Development Committees (ADC/VDC) are representative bodies whose membership incorporates ward councillors, representatives of political parties that are in parliament, and members of parliament, among others. At the local level, almost any project done requires the blessings or endorsement of the traditional leader if any success and effective mobilisation of people is

functions were to administer local affairs on behalf of government. These include being custodians of customary land and customary rites and more recently promoting development in their areas. At district level, the 'Traditional Authorities' are members of the Assembly; and in the absence of councillors for approximately six years prior to local polls in November 2000, the chiefs were directly involved in the approval of projects for funding through the District Development Committees and the District Development Fund.

[19] Traditional authorities covertly resent the introduction of councillors seeing it as a move to reduce their authority especially in development matters.

to be achieved during implementation. Therefore, the conflicts between the MPs and councillors on one side and the Traditional Authorities on the other manifest the climax of the contradictions and paradoxes of putting together democratic and 'neo-autocratic'[20] institutions to work jointly in the promotion of local development. Implicitly, elected institutions are subjected to unelected institutions or in other words, democratic institutions are subjected to 'ascriptive'[21] institutions. In this way, one would argue that the decentralisation policy has created another parallel local governance structure in the grassroots where it has serious implications on local participation for development.

4. 2.1.5 Traditional Leaders versus the People

The relationship of the rulers and the ruled in Lilongwe District heavily depends on the legitimacy of the ruler. Traditional Authorities in Malawi are hereditary chiefs, whose leadership is endorsed by clans after which the president crowns the endorsed leader. In some cases, not all clans endorse the chief but he/she might still be enthroned because the ruling party favours him. This brings apathy and resentments among the people. Generally, the style of leadership of the Traditional Authorities has autocratic leanings. They are more powerful because they have the mandate to hire and fire all the lesser chiefs in their areas. In this kind of leadership, policies and decisions are usually handed down in a top-down fashion. The relationship of the Group Village Headmen and TAs takes the form of master-servant. The same applies to the relationship between the GVH and the VH and in turn, the VHs tend to be autocratic on the people. Paradoxically, it is to this monolithic autocratic institution that local democratic institutions are subjected in order to promote participatory development.

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[20] By the term neo-autocratic I mean an institution that has autocratic leanings in the way communal activities are conducted and which is for that matter less participatory.
[21] Traditional Authorities are selected by ascription hence 'ascriptive'.

The broader picture in this section reveals that the concept of participation in the district is associated with development planning and implementation. In this area some successes have been achieved. Nevertheless, participation has essentially remained an episodic process and not forming part of the day-to-day operation of communal activities, which means that participation, has not been institutionalised. Local level structures that were supposed to facilitate participation are not working effectively. There are fragmented developments efforts resulting from a proliferation of user committees, which is the very thing that the decentralisation policy sought to, abolish. In this way, participation is not coordinated and therefore less effective. In addition, the relations of actors are not favourable for increased participation. The conflicts depict the selfishness and self-interestedness of these actors in the pursuance of their own ambitions at the expense of popular interests. Furthermore, Community power structures are less participatory and even more autocratic, reflecting the political designs that created them in the first place; however, village life gravitates around these structures.

In sum, although participation could be said to have increased with the advent of decentralisation, it has not been adequate to empower the people. Participation has not been institutionalised and it remains fundamentally episodic and fragmented. For participation to achieve the desired results, it has to encompass all the three facets, that is, it should be a continuous process, empowering those that have hitherto been disenfranchised from the decision-making processes and finally it should be both a means and an end. It should go beyond development planning and encompass all communal decision-making structures and processes. Therefore, from the data above one can infer that in relation to development planning, decentralisation has had some positive impacts. On the contrary, with regard to general day-to-day decision-making processes decentralisation has not done much to improve participation.

4.3 ACCOUNTABILITY

Accountability exists in three forms: vertical downward accountability: elected council/councillors to citizens; horizontal accountability: officers to elected councillors and vertical upward accountability: local councils to higher levels/central government.

4.3.1 Vertical Downward Accountability

Downward accountability is defined as the ability of citizens to hold the local authority to account (World Bank, 2002). The current councillors were elected in 2000 and they are supposed to hold office until 2005. These were the first Local Government Elections after decentralisation was reintroduced. Nationally, the elections were marred by dismal turnouts of 14% of all the registered voters (Fozzard & Simwaka, 2002). In some voting centres in Traditional Authority Kalolo, voter turnouts of as low as 2% were reported.[22] This, as Cross and Kutengule (2001:17) rightly noted, "…was attributed not so much to poor publicity as to cynicism and apathy…" This means therefore, that from the outset the mandate of the councillors over the people was compromised. Matters are again aggravated on one hand by the working conditions of the councillors and their credentials on the other.

The office of the councillor has no stipend, but a token of K1000 (US$9) per month, which is not always regular. For the most part, they survive on personal economic ventures and small allowances, which they receive for attending the Assembly or Assembly committee or sub-committee meetings. Therefore, the expectation that councillors can conduct meetings throughout their respective wards in the absence of money to support this task is rather naïve and indeed an unfair expectation from the

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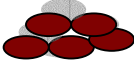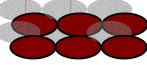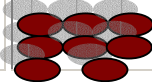[22] Lilongwe District Assembly, local elections data, 2001.

public. In comparison to the Members of Parliament, councillors are politically inexperienced and lack exposure, but most of all they are financially handicapped.

Moreover, it was discovered that the apathy in the Local Government Elections was largely due to the disappointing performance of Members of Parliament such that people wondered how councillors without resources could manage to deliver if MPs with all the resources, influence, power and authority at their disposal failed to deliver the promises of their campaigns. Sarcastically they invoked the Chewa proverb 'chalaka bakha nkhuku siyingatole' (literally meaning what a duck has failed to pick [its beak is big] a chicken cannot pick it too [as its beak is small]). Thus, people diverted their attention from political participation to other ventures, which they felt were worth investing time for such as farming or other small-scale economic activities.

The fears of the people that as Members of Parliament, Councillors too would not perform seem to have been vindicated. After almost four years in office, there seems to be little in the field of development that councillors have successfully delivered. Evidence reveals widespread disappointments with the performance of Councillors. The extracts below show the answers collected at different levels on the performance of Councillors. The first evidence is an example of a community workshop in Kaoche VDC, where participatory rural appraisal tools of collecting data were used in this case it is depicting the ranking of stakeholders. Extracts from separate transcriptions on a similar question follows this example.

Question: Which of these stakeholders conduct development meetings with the people   in this area? (Please share the 20 stones among them. Whoever conducts more meetings gets more!)

TABLE 3. COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT OF DEVELOPMENT ACTORS

Councillor	MP	NGOs/ Donors Other Govt. Agents	District Assembly	TA, GVH, VH
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Stones for Scoring: Community workshop, Kaoche VDC (02/ 2004):

Could you please comment on the work of councillors in your area?

"…Councillors are not accountable to the people. No contact or proper communication with the people is made. Councillors do not seek views from the people nor do they convene a meeting to solicit views of the people on development matters nor do they make an effort to brief the people on whatever transpires in the Assembly meetings, which they normally attend. In addition, Councillors are in fact not representatives of the people but their parties. They joined politics with the intention of eventually becoming MPs. For them promotion comes when you serve the Party not the people; but we have learnt a bitter lesson for not taking the vote seriously, next time we will vote with our eyes wide open."[23]

"I do not see the benefits of having Councillors. In all the development activities that have been happening in my area they have not been coming; in fact, having Councillors is just a

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[23] Interview with Traditional Authority Malili (12/2003).

waste of time, but the previous ones were more effective" (previous ones means councillors in the old District Councils before the current decentralisation initiatives)[24].

It is clear from the extracts that the traditional leaders and NGOs are rated highly by the local people and then follows the Assembly. The councillors and the MPs on the contrary, are rated low. Thus, the people's view of the performance of councillors and MPs indicate a great deal of dissatisfaction. One FGD member observed that: "…councillors have only succeeded in making the political temperament in the grassroots more interesting as opposition MPs and Councillors of the ruling party usually waged a war of words against each other struggling to get cheap popularity from us."[25] When asked what they intend to do to improve the situation, they affirmed they will vote for new but competent people in next elections.

In some cases, the fate of the local people is decided in an Assembly Meeting with the Councillors, Members of Parliament and chiefs acting unilaterally on the assumption that they know what the people want. A visit to one school project site in Traditional Authority Kalumbu's area revealed that people knew nothing about the project until contractors were recruiting people to work on the project, yet the Councillors, MPs and the Traditional Authority of the area deliberated on the project during an Assembly Meeting.

Another cause of concern was the local leaders' attitude of monopolising contracts of local development projects. In view of their access to information, connections and resources, local leaders such as MPs, councillors and other political leaders hijack local contracts that were meant for the people. People gave examples of DDF school projects (Five of which were awarded to Councillors and MPs), MASAF public works projects (two of which

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[24]Interview with Group Village Headman Mbwatalika (12/ 2003)
[25] Focus Group Discussion, Mpingu area (12/2003).

were awarded to prominent politicians) and several Food for Assets projects whose supervision tended to be given to political leaders. Whether this was wrong or right is beyond the scope of this study. However, according to the DDF manual (2001), contracts of local projects should be awarded to local contractors following an open and transparent tendering process. The District Assembly's standing orders stipulate that if a councillor intends to bid for contracts tendered by the Assembly, he/she must declare his/her interest; but with regard to the above contracts no councillor declared his or her interest before being awarded the contract. Another example of elite domination was manifested in Traditional Authority Tsabango's area, where interests of an MP clashed with those of the people regarding the routing of a village access road. The MP wanted the road to pass through an area closer to his village, while the people wanted the access road to join another road, which leads to a grinding mill and a clinic. Due to the dispute that erupted between the MP and the people, the project had to be stopped temporarily. MASAF officials were asked to intervene, but in the end, the MP got his way. Thus, although the people continued to work on the project, they did so in protest

4.3.2 Horizontal Accountability

The relationship of the Assembly's management and the Councillors is characterised by mistrust. The Assembly members feel cheated because the Secretariat in most cases does not implement the decisions agreed by the Assembly members. There is also a constant wrangle over the administration of funds, which the Assembly members allege are being misused. Conversely, the Assembly chairman is usually accused by the Assembly management for attempting to usurp the executive functions of the District Commissioner, which places the two officials at loggerheads. Superficially and even legally, the Assembly members are the policy makers. However, their powers over the District Assembly executives are limited in that they can neither hire nor fire any of the top

management officials nor can they discipline them; this function is reserved for the Ministry of Local Government, which not only appoints but also pays them. The section that empowered Local Authorities to hire top management staff was revoked by parliament in 2001 (Act no.5 of 27 January 2001). The grounds for the repeal are not very clear, but speculation has it that the Ministry of Local Government feared that there would be arbitrary hiring and firing of staff, which would create instability in the Assemblies. It could also be interpreted as an attempt by MLG to control the district managers. What this means is that the District Assembly is just a workstation and the officials can be transferred any time at the discretion of the Ministry. This, therefore, drastically reduces the authority of the Assembly members on the top management. Similarly, it poses accountability problems. The management pays more allegiance to the Ministry of Local Government- their employer, other than to the District Assembly. Evidently, all the Members of Assembly whether permanent or ex-officio resent the situation as the following extract indicates:

"…you see, the Assembly secretariat (or management) is now more powerful and therefore more difficult to discipline: powers are not given to members of the Assembly to employ the staff so that they could be accountable to them. As such, the employees sometimes abuse their power. Instead of them serving us we serve them; that is what the Ministry of Local Government and the MPs wanted." (i.e. such a provision was repealed by parliament therefore according to them; the MPs should share the blame for voting for the bill).[26]

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[26] An informal discussion with Traditional Authorities and Councillors, before an Assembly Meeting, (01/2004).

4.3.3 Vertical Upward Accountability

Upward accountability denotes the degree to which local government performance is supervised by central government (World Bank, 2002). Compared to the other types of accountability, this is stronger as some mechanisms for control are in place; for instance the auditing of all the District Assembly's accounts and request of both financial and progress reports by the Ministry of Local Government through either the Decentralisation Secretariat or the Local Government Finance Committee. In addition, because decentralisation is regarded as an unfinished project, the central government seems to be more interested to know what is happening in the districts. However, Devas (2002:9) argues that 'upward accountability involves monitoring of the actual use – not just budgeted use – of transferred resources'. Thus, going by this understanding, it is clear that the checks fall short of being called genuine upward accountability because most of the checks deal with the question of 'how' something was done in relation to the prescribed regulations, that is, after something is already done not while it is being done. The central government relies on the information provided by the district bureaucrats without real checking, and in most cases, government get inaccurate information.

Extrapolating from the results discussed above, although one of the objectives of the decentralisation policy in Malawi was to enhance accountability in the District Assemblies (DDLGA, 2000); the results indicate that accountability is still a problem. Councillors are more accountable to their parties than to the people, which they represent. Councillors as already discussed, do not have a close relationship with the people as such the people do not have the avenue to hold the councillors accountable. Further, the elected members fail to hold district managers accountable because they do not have the power to discipline them. Instead, the district managers are more accountable to central government that has the power not only to hire and fire but also to promote and demote them. At local level

there are even more problems of accountability for instance, chiefs are not accountable to the people as they are appointed through central government. This is where they tend to align their accountability. MPs and councillors are more accountable to their parties than to the people. The former are hardly in touch with the people because most of them live in urban areas. NGOs which have of late increased their presence in the grassroots and which claim to be representatives of the people have no formal mandate to do so and are accountable to their funders not to the people. Matters are aggravated by the absence of a policy regulating the operations of the NGOs in the grassroots.

Further, there is a disturbing scenario of the manifestations one of the dreaded negative effects of decentralisation - elite capture. The decentralisation process has been captured by local elites at all levels. At district level there is a clique of bureaucrats who are hired and paid by the Ministry of Local Government and whom the District Assembly has no mandate to either hire or fire. As depicted above these dominate the Assembly business. At area level councillors, MPs, Traditional Authorities and other political functionaries are at the helm of communal affairs. These are preoccupied at advancing own agendas. Having access to information, networks and resources and to some extent power, they utilize public resources for their benefit, leaving out the most vulnerable in the process. Viewed in this way, the decentralisation process has brought unintended negative impacts at lower levels.

In conclusion, accountability in the District Assembly remains a problem. The problems are associated with the design of the decentralisation reforms. Therefore, with participation not empowering the people, it is difficult for the community to confront these elites or indeed summon them to account for their actions thus the people are again isolated and excluded from the decision-making processes.

4.4 TRANSPARENCY

In Lilongwe District Assembly, the issues of transparency displays mixed results. For instance, in relation to budgeting and accounting procedures the processes are generally seen to be transparent by both the District Assembly staff and the councillors. The District Assembly budgeting process is participatory at all levels, that is, at both local and district levels. At district level, the Director of Finance prepares the budget in collaboration with the Director of Planning and Development and the Director of Public Works. The budget is then forwarded to the Finance Committee of the Assembly for comments and for more inputs. Then the Budget is presented before the full Assembly for approval. If the Full Assembly is satisfied with the budget, it approves it, but if it is not satisfied, it may empower the Finance Committee to make appropriate adjustments to the budget, before it can be implemented.

Locally the budgeting process is limited to development projects. Budgeting for development projects follows a bottom-up and participatory approach that begins from the village level. The community identifies projects and the VDC prepares project proposals including cost estimates, which are then submitted to the Area Development Committee for appraisals and further prioritisation. These are then submitted to the Development Committee of the District Assembly. Furthermore, all financial issues including accounting, procurement of materials, tendering and general financial management are drafted in a handbook called "District Development Fund Financial Management and Accounting Procedures Manual"[27] (Decentralisation Secretariat, 2001).

In terms of transparency in decision-making, it is problematic in that although the decisions are made openly, for example in the Assembly meeting, the implementation of

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[27] In short , it is called 'the DDF Manual.'

those decisions is not always transparent. The councillors usually complain that the Secretariat does not usually implement the decisions as agreed by the Assembly members. They claim that in implementing the decisions the Secretariat advances its own agendas. For instance, the councillor of Demera ward reaffirmed that although it was resolved in an Assembly meeting that project materials that have been left over from a project in a given area be used on another project within the same area, the Secretariat was seen transferring these materials to other sites without prior approval. They did not even take an effort to explain their action. Several instances were indeed cited in this regard. As a result, having been dissatisfied with the work of the Assembly Secretariat, the councillors have set up a task force to monitor whether the Assembly Management is carrying out the decisions of the Assembly Members. The Management Information Systems Specialist confirmed the existence of the taskforce and described the relationship of the Secretariat with the Assembly Members as tense.

At a local level, transparency is even more difficult as information flow is limited because most councillors do not have means of transport and a budget[28] to conduct meetings throughout their respective wards, as such although the rhetoric of "power to the people" seems to be well understood at district level, the same is not the case in the periphery. One councillor openly confessed, "Many people do not know the meaning of 'power to the people' even us councillors we don't really understand it"[29] The problem of information flow is exacerbated by the interface of councillors and Members of Parliament both of whom pose to the people as 'champions' of development projects. These monopolize information and they choose which group to share their information to, usually it is to their supporters.

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[28] The councillors are not remunerated. Instead they only receive a monthly allowance of K1, 000(US $9) and could also get allowances of the same figure if they attend an Assembly meeting.
[29] Interview with Councillor Mthobwa, Nsambe Ward (01/2004).

Apparent in the above discussion are mixed results of decentralisation on the promotion of transparency. On a positive note, transparency has been promoted through participatory processes in development planning and in budgeting, and the convening of the Full Assembly, where members deliberate openly on issues affecting the district. However, on a negative note, problems exist in the implementation of the decisions of the Assembly and the secretariat is usually the culprit. This indicates that the agenda of the Members of Assembly and that of the Assembly Secretariat are conflicting, or it indicates the discrepancy between mere policy promulgation and the technicalities involved in implementing that policy. For the Members of Assembly it is easy to pass a resolution, but for that resolution to be implemented a lot of ground work has to be undertaken by the Assembly Secretariat and in the ensuing delays the secretariat is seen as not willing to implement the decisions. Further, the problem is also compounded by the education gap between the District Assembly Managers and the Councillors resulting in misunderstandings.[30]

At local level, transparency is exacerbated by high illiteracy rates, powerlessness and very limited flow of information. Councillors and MPs have forged their own patron-clientele relationship and information flow tends to be biased towards these networks. Thus existing in the grassroots are pockets of communities, which monopolise information and use it for their own benefit, while marginalizing the rest of the population. Due to lack of information to a larger part of the population, people do not participate in policy formulation, which affects their lives and remain ignorant of the decentralisation policy six years after its implementation. Most decisions councillors make in the Assembly are made without proper consultation with the people. Instead, decisions are made on the assumption that they the councillors, know what the people want.

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[30] The District Managers are well educated most of them posses post graduate degrees. These deal with councillors whose average education level is a Junior Certificate.

Transparency depends on two things: the willingness of the elected leaders to share information to their electorates in such a way that the electorates are part of the decisions that their representatives deliberate and resolve at the District Assembly and secondly, the effectiveness of participation. If people are empowered, they will be in a position to question the decisions made by their representatives purportedly on their behalf. Thus, without a culture of information sharing between the representatives and the people, transparency cannot be promoted in the district. In the same vain, if participation cannot be empowering, people will not only be ignorant of their rights but also be powerless to question an elite for inappropriate decisions made. Evidence reveals that this is the situation in Lilongwe. Participation is not as empowering as envisaged, elected representatives forge patron –clientele relations through whose networks information tends to flow and in the process, denying information to the bulk of the population. Yet it is only when this information is well communicated that people will respond to the decisions.

4.5 EFFICIENCY

In relation to efficiency of the District Assembly, the results indicate that the Assembly is efficient in some areas. These include the administration of marriages, registration of births and deaths and other day-to-day activities performed in the office. Further, the Assembly is also seen as being efficient in its administration of open markets, where it derives most of its revenues. The only concern expressed by the people was the issue of public toilets and disposal of refuse where services were seen to be inadequate.

However, with regard to development projects, people had some reservation on the efficie6ncy of the District Assembly. They claimed that it took a very long time for their proposed projects to be accepted if they are accepted at all. As such, this frustrates the

communities that work very hard preparing for the projects[31]. In addition, councillors complained that there is inadequate supervision of ongoing development projects, which was seen as something that compromises the quality of the infrastructures that are created. In the same vain, the frequency of field appraisals for proposed projects has declined considerably from at least two a month to one in three months, largely due to lack of transport and financial resources. The Full Assembly, which is supposed to meet every month in normal circumstances, spends some months without meeting for example as of December 2004, the Full Assembly was last convened in September when it was approving MASAF projects. The lack of meetings is the same with subcommittees, let alone the DEC. This means that policies and decisions take a long time to be generated whereas absence of meetings for the DEC entails lack of supervision and coordination of development activities in the district.

Since 2003, the Assembly has been rocked in serious financial problems, which also has negatively affected service delivery. Largely the problem came because of financial mismanagement in the office of the Director of Finance as the following extract reveals:
"This happened after the previous Director of Finance (Mr. Mhango) was transferred to another district. After that, we began to see the Assembly' accounts running dry. The officer (name withheld) who replaced Mr. Mhango was so wasteful that he had to be dismissed. He never banked the collected revenues; instead, he began to spend them right away. Vouchers were prepared to employees to be paid by the revenue collectors in the markets…"[32]

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[31] Communities are supposed to make material contribution towards a proposed project as an indication that they are serious, thus if the project is not approved they feel that they had laboured in vain.

[32] Group Discussion with Councillors, Lilongwe, (12/2004).

In view of the lack of adequate funds, only few vehicles of the Assembly are running some of which are long overdue for service. The Assembly has seven vehicles, of these, only three are running (as of December 2004), but two of those running are overdue for service. All the six motorcycles that the Assembly has are overdue for service and only three of them are running now. The scenario is the same with computer equipments, printers, copiers and faxes. During the time of the research, of the two heavy-duty copiers that the Assembly has, none was working because either toner had finished or due to total breakdown of the equipments, as a result documents had to be photocopied elsewhere at a considerable fee. There are neither email, fax nor internet facilities. In addition, the computer network is incomplete because the Assembly ran out of funds in order to pay the contractors to finish the configuration. Table 5 below summarises the status of these resources as of December 2004.

TABLE 4: THE DISTRICT ASSEMBLY ADMINISTRATIVE RESOURCES

RESOURCE	STATUS		
	Qnty	Total Running	Not Running
Vehicles	7	3	4
Motor Cycles	6	3	3
Computers	5	5	-
Photocopiers	2	0	2
Photo Copiers (Heavy duty)	1	0	1
Printers (Heavy duty)	1	0	1
Printers	1	1	0
Fax	1	1	0
Email	0	0	0
Internet	0	0	0

Internal Network	0	0	0

Source: compiled by author.

In terms of congruence of the District Assembly's policies to the people's needs, the results are positive. This is depicted in the list of projects contained in the District Development Plan. These projects came from the community after a comprehensive situation analysis at both district and local levels. The councillors, chiefs and Members of Parliament reaffirmed that the projects contained in the medium term District Development Plan reflect the genuine needs of the people. However, it is the implementation of those plans, which is a problem. Almost all of the projects contained in the District Development Plan depend on donor funds, which are not always adequate. Consequently, when the District Assembly receives funds from donors for these projects, it reprioritises them and implements only those projects, which are regarded as priority. For the local people who have no adequate information and who have not received feedback of what has become of their projects, this is interpreted as the District Assembly's lack of consideration for their projects.

In a nutshell, the data reveals that the District Assembly is efficient in some areas, most of which apart from markets are ironically not very essential in poverty reduction; generally, the Assembly is less efficient in delivering services that are more connected to development. The issues of delays of project implementation, lack of funds to do field appraisals and to hold Full Assembly meetings are raised in the results. What this means is that decisions take a long time to be generated and to be implemented, which in the end frustrates the people who are waiting for the Assembly to act on their development needs.

In addition, delays in implementing development projects entails to some extent, lack of pro-poorness of the decisions taken thereafter. For instance, some projects are seasonal or

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dictated by the season or time, such as bridges, that by the time the Assembly responds, it may be difficult to carry out the project or the pressing needs of the people may have changed; thus, the project may in the end be irrelevant. The issue of efficiency of the District Assembly is complicated by the fact that the Assembly has only two sources of revenue namely government grants and own revenues collected from the taxes, rates and sale of its services and both of these sources are not adequate to run the internal business of the Assembly efficiently. Development projects, however, are solely dependent on donor funds, as such due to the limitedness of these funds, development projects in the district, are in turn limited. Therefore, as long as the District Assembly will remain solely dependent on the donors for its development, its efficiency will remain in jeopardy, as donor support is unpredictable and heavily dependent on political factors prevailing in the country.

4.6 EQUITY, INCLUSIVENESS AND GENDER SENSITIVITY

A society's well being depends on ensuring that all its members feel that they have a stake in it and do not feel excluded from the mainstream of society. This requires all groups, but particularly the most vulnerable, have opportunities to improve or maintain their well-being.

In line with this thinking, local leaders in Lilongwe District are advocating for equal representation of both sexes in development committees. Interviews with Councillors, Traditional Authorities and Group Village Headmen revealed that in some cases committees run by women are more effective and efficient than those ran by men. Some of those committees that women do well are those concerned with welfare issues such as caring for orphans and people living with HIV AIDS. However, community workshops revealed a different perspective of the participation of women in development activities.

The results indicated that most of them are excluded from the decision-making processes and that even in the committee meetings men tend to dominate as one woman laments: "Even if a woman gives wise suggestions of the course of action men tend to ignore or overrule that decision and replace it with their own; so what can a woman do if not to gracefully withdraw?"[33]

The above scenario transcends the traditional leadership and political arenas, where women representation is dismally low. For instance, out of 42 councillors only 2 are women, whereas of the 18 MPs, only one is a woman; while of the 17 Traditional Authorities, only 2 are women. Several factors impinge on the effective participation of women in development activities. These include factors such as low education status, inexperience and lack of confidence in political debating and campaign, poverty and cultural issues. The literacy rate for Lilongwe District is lower among females than males, i.e. 33.4% and 26.5% respectively (NSO, 2000). There is also a growing number of female-headed households (FHH), which extrapolating from the figures of the NSO (2000), is currently at about 30,000; these households tend to be very poor. Culturally, there prevails a strong tradition that a woman's place is the kitchen and she is not very capable of making important decisions. Ironically, the number of women participating in development activities outstrips that of men by colossal margins. This is due to the fact that men's occupations tend towards casual labour; locally known as 'ganyu', or any other economic venture that accesses money quickly. The women are left at home and often they bear the burden of mobilising materials for the projects.

The study has revealed that women remain one of the most vulnerable groups in Lilongwe District, who are disenfranchised from the decision-making processes. The paradox

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[33] Interview with Mai Chingondo of Mbwatalika ADC, (12/ 2003).

though is that women participate more in development projects than men do. Therefore, by excluding women from the decision-making arenas, the district loses valuable information on how best to tackle the problems of poverty, which are born disproportionately by women. Further, the exclusion of women is a retrogressive move towards empowerment as this leaves women powerless to voice their development concerns let alone to hold local elites accountable.

4.7 CONCLUSION

The preceding Chapter has given results on the achievement of decentralisation on governance, which is identified as the missing link for poverty reduction. To this effect, the Chapter revealed the status of participation, accountability, transparency, efficiency, and equity and gender sensitivity. In summary the results reveals that Participation is more an episodic phenomenon that a process, whereas accountability reveals various results. These include elements of elite capture, less contact between elected officials and the electorates and somewhat turbulent relationship between the councillors and the District Managers. Transparency shows some improvement as exemplified by participatory budgeting, discussion on financial and progress reports by all Members of Assembly, the holding of regular Assembly meetings and an open financial audit system. With regard to efficiency, the Assembly still has some problems to implement projects timely due to lack of funds and inadequate resources. As for equity and gender sensitivity, the rhetoric surpasses the actions. Much is said but little is done .Lilongwe manifest elements of a steadfast patriarchal culture where women are excluded from decision-making circles.The next chapter will summarise the main findings and place them in the wider context of the discourse of decentralisation.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5. INTRODUCTION

The objective of this Chapter is to synthesise the main findings of the research. It highlights the major points of the research as discussed in the preceding chapters. In addition, it provides possible areas for further research and recommendations for improving local governance in Lilongwe District. In the final analysis, the Chapter places decentralisation in the broader context to properly interpret the meaning of the results of the study.

5.2 OBSERVATIONS

The following section presents some of the major observation of the study on the impact of decentralisation on good local governance using indicators of participation, accountability, transparency, efficiency, and equity and gender sensitivity.

5.2.1 Participation

In relation to participation, the study found that community participation is understood in the context of development planning and implementation. It relates to involvement of people in development projects through contributions of labour and materials towards development projects and in the general preparations of projects. However, the normal day-to-day decision-making processes remain less participatory. Participation is in some cases *ad hoc*, episodic and not institutionalized which reduces its efficacy for community empowerment. This is compounded by weak institutional structures and poor coordination of actors at the local level. Moreover, people are not aware of the decentralisation policy and its implications on their lives. Consequently, they do not take the initiative presented to them by decentralisation. However, the research also found that the problems hampering community participation are not permanent and could easily be ironed-out if

dialogue and communication are promoted between and among the actors; further community participation is likely to increase with the increase of resource flow to the local level.

NGOs though among the highly regarded institutions by the people, are less integrated into the local governance system and their developmental activities are less associated with decentralisation. Thus, although the objective of decentralisation in Malawi was to catalyse participation processes in communities by enforcing good local governance through District Assemblies and effective service delivery by public agents at local levels, the mechanism and tools for implementing such ambitious projects are not adequate. In this, the government envisaged a strong partnership between the public, civil society and private sector institutions, but the results reveal that such partnership is problematic in Lilongwe District Assembly. Instead, a plethora of disjointed development activities without proper coordination exists. The problem is made worse by the Assembly's lack of financial resources to fund the District Executive Committee, which coordinates district development and the absence of formal policies governing the work of NGOs in the rural areas. However, the study also found that NGOs are eager to work within the formal structures of the District Assembly if the structures are properly instituted to deal with all categories of projects.

5.2.2 Accountability.

On accountability, four main issues stand out. Firstly, there is some evidence of elite capture: District Assembly Managers, councillors and other local elites control the resources of the District Assembly in a way that harms the poor. This is the case because local people are not adequately empowered to hold these elites accountable for their actions. Thus, it is believed that with time this problem would vanish as the people

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become more and more empowered as result of increased participation and information flow. In addition, the government has just enacted a Procurement Act, which will henceforth reduce corrupt practices associated with procurement on the part of the elites.

Secondly, the research found that there is little contact between the elected members and the people, in some instances the people have not even seen their councillor for his/her entire tenure in office. The problem is however aggravated by poor resource base of the councillors. Without proper remunerations, the councillors lack the resources for running their respective wards effectively.

Thirdly, the councillors owe their allegiance more to the parties, which sponsored them in office as a result they tend to be more preoccupied with political issues than looking after the needs of the people who elected them in office.

Fourthly, the relations between elected members and the District Assembly Management is tense and is exacerbated by the councillors' inability to discipline the senior management officials, which are not paid directly by the District Assembly. The Central Government regained control of senior District Assembly managers following a reversal through parliament of an act that gave the District Assemblies unlimited powers to employ their entire staff. This reflects government wishes to recentralise some of the decentralised functions.

Fifth, financial accountability has improved. Auditors audit District Assembly accounts regularly, malpractices are exposed and corrective measures applied. This is reinforced by the issuing of accounting guidelines by the central government and the continuous monitoring by the finance committee on how Assembly resources are being spent.

5.2.3 Transparency

The study observed that transparency in the decision-making processes and financial planning especially at the district level has improved tremendously with the advent of Decentralisation. Participatory budgeting process and examination of financial reports have improved the understanding of the councillors on how the Assembly's revenues are collected and spent. Through Full Assembly meetings of people's representatives, policy decisions are deliberated and adopted in a transparent manner. The problem however, is at the local level where information flow is still a problem. Fortunately, the Assembly is aware of the problem and it is planning to embark on civic education campaigns on the decentralisation policy. In addition, the government has introduced a radio programme to make people aware of the implications of the decentralisation policy in their respective areas.

5.2.4 Efficiency

The Assembly is efficient in the delivery of services that directly involve the office and markets where revenue is collected, but it is less efficient in the delivery of development projects. The main problem that affects efficient delivery of services is lack of funds. As due to lack of funds, the Assembly fails to fund the DEC to either conduct field appraisals or supervise development projects and is less responsive to the people's requests.

5.2.5 Equity and Gender Sensitivity

On equity and gender sensitivity, the study found that women continue to be excluded from the decision-making circles. Although the rhetoric of women empowerment is commonplace, little has been done to improve their status; women's under-representation in the District Assembly proves this fact: out of 77 members of the Assembly (which includes both voting and non-voting members), only 5 are women, 3 of whom are non-

voting members[34]. Of the 42 voting members, only 2 are women. This means women are almost totally excluded from the decision-making circles.

5.3 THE SIGNIFICANCE OF DECENTRALISATION

In the light of the identified problems, is decentralisation worth canvassing for in Malawi? The answer to the question is simple. Although the study has revealed some negative aspects of decentralisation in the Lilongwe District Assembly, this is not to say that decentralisation in its ideal form is a bad thing per se, but that in practice there are some tensions and trade offs in realising these ideals. Indeed, as the World Bank notes, "Decentralization itself is neither good nor bad. It is a means to an end …The issue is whether it is successful or not" (World Bank, 2000:107).Thus, if properly implemented and requisite institutions developed decentralisation has benefits.

For Lilongwe District Assembly, decentralisation has the potential to generate allocative and productive efficiencies in the use of public resources; more significantly, it has the potential to promote greater community participation for people to determine their development and well-being. Participation has the effect of empowering the people especially the poor and those previously disenfranchised from the decision-making processes because it creates avenues for inclusion. In addition, decentralisation promotes horizontal, vertical upward and vertical downward accountabilities. However, for decentralisation to deliver its inherent benefits, appropriate and functioning structures at all levels have to be guaranteed.

For the government, decentralisation is good for the promotion of good governance in the country. Decentralisation presents an opportunity for government to rise above the

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[34] Two are Traditional Authorities who are non-voting members, whereas one is an MP who is also a non-voting member.

rigorous restrictions of centralised planning and management. Further, decentralisation lessens the over-concentration of power, authority, and resources at the centre and permit closer contact between government and the local people. It enhances greater representation of various political, religious, ethnic and tribal groups in the decision making process, which enhances its legitimacy. Decentralisation promotes equitable allocation of resources and improves the efficiency and delivery of services. Politically, decentralisation could relieve the alienation of opposition parties and social groups that lack influence in central government, by giving them opportunities to hold power at the lower level. Equally, through participation in local politics, the frustrations of people with political ambitions at lower levels have been reduced by permitting them to play official roles. In this way, government would gain more legitimacy. Further, the physical proximity of leaders to the grassroots makes it easier for citizens to hold local officials accountable. Indeed, decentralisation is a useful apparatus for local governance and power sharing in Malawi where hereditary chiefs are still playing an active role in local politics and in administrative matters.

For Africa, decentralisation presents a good apparatus for running the state machinery efficiently. Given the apparent failure of centralised states decentralisation seems to be the only option for African countries to improve service delivery to the people and diffusing tribal divisions by letting regions decide their local affairs. Decentralisation is a means for central governments to relinquish some fiscal and administrative onus to the peripheral units. Further decentralisation encourages popular participation in local politics and encourages democracy in a continent where predatory oppressive governments and anarchism loom large.

5.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

With regard to the virtues discussed above, it is justifiable to proceed with decentralisation. However, some adjustments have to be effected to arrive at desired results. The following section presents some recommendations towards reorienting decentralisation processes in the Lilongwe District Assembly to promote good local governance.

5.4.1 Participation.

- The District Assembly should consider realigning development institutions with the wards so that councillors should do their work effectively. This will not only reduce the conflicts of local actors, but also avoid further creation of parallel structures, which the decentralisation policy intended to abolish. In addition, it would increase participation because unlike Traditional Authority Areas, wards are small and therefore relatively easier to spur local development.

- The District Assembly should issue rules or bylaws stipulating the roles of councillors, MPs and Traditional Authorities so that they should not encroach on each other's responsibilities. Furthermore, there should be clear separation of political and development matters from administrative ones such a move will automatically distinguish the roles of the actors.

- The government should consider introducing a policy to govern the activities of NGOs at the local level to make their actions accountable to the people. The introduction of a code of conduct for NGOs will make them operate within the decentralised structures of the District Assembly resulting in controlled proliferation of user committees.

- The DEC should be semi-independent and should be liberated to seek funds from all sources besides the District Assembly. This will empower the DEC to coordinate district development effectively and efficiently. While as a technical arm of the district Assembly, it would enhance the capacity of the Assembly to deliver services efficiently as the Assembly would have enough information on the status of the grassroots. Equally, the improvement of information flow to the local bodies would increase participation of the local people who would in turn get empowered in the process to hold district and local elites accountable. Therefore, in general it would enhance good local governance, which has implications on development and poverty reduction.

- The District Assembly should consider embarking on capacity building campaigns. Capacity building is essential because it is pointless to transfer power resources and functions to institutions that have no capacity to manage them. At the district level, capacity building should be concentrated on partnership building and networking in development management.

5.4.2 Accountability

- The District Assembly should continue with civic education campaigns on the decentralisation policy to make the people aware of its implications on their lives. This will in turn empower the people and be able to hold elected leaders accountable.Through civic education the government should endeavour to create critical citizenship which is courageous enough to lobby for its rights and strong enough to challenge elite domination. This can be done by involving the civil society in many of the decentralisation initiatives.

- The government should introduce positive incentives to the office of councillors so that they should be dedicated to the job for which they are elected.

- The central government should find a way of managing the conflict between elected leaders and the District Assembly managers who are not controlled by the elected leaders so that there should be harmony between the two groups.

5.4.3 Transparency.

- The District Assembly should increase and improve channels of communication to the grassroots by promoting civic education projects. Through the acquisition of right knowledge, people will demand their rightful services and the elites who usually monopolise information will not have a chance of diverting resources to sustain their interests.

5.4.4 Efficiency.

- The central government should increase allocation of funds and equipment to the District Assembly especially funds for Development projects to improve timely delivery of projects to the people.

5.4.5 Gender Equality.

- The government should continue its policy on gender mainstreaming in development activities. Although the rhetoric of gender empowerment is common at the district level, in the villages women continue to be excluded in the decision-making processes. Therefore, the District Assembly should promote women empowerment activities in the grassroots through civic education and a deliberate policy of women involvement in all development committees; women should be

included in the top positions. As has already been proposed above, the composition of committees should be 50% for both sexes.

- The government, the Assembly as well as all political parties should consider creating special quotas of Assembly seats and constituencies to accommodate women. Currently in Lilongwe District Assembly, of the 42 councillors only two are women, the scenario is the same with the MPs, where of the eighteen MPs only one is a woman, whereas of the seventeen traditional authorities only two are women. Consequently, the general impression that one would get here is that women are totally excluded from both the political and development decision-making arenas. In this way, a fundamental tenet of good local governance is breached.

5.5 AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

- One central reason why decentralisation is advocated is service improvement, but little research has been conducted to determine whether decentralization indeed increases the level of services delivered and their quality.
- Should devolution of functions be done only when the bodies to which the functions are to be devolved have gained enough capacity to handle or manage the functions and responsibilities or the vice versa or should they be done simultaneously? This is a raging debate of decentralisation in Malawi and it has to be investigated. The capacity argument is often invoked by some line ministries who are reluctant to decentralise some responsibilities to the District Assemblies; or indeed, NGOs which are hesitant to work within the District Assembly structures.

- It is also necessary to investigate what should be the new roles of traditional authorities now that councillors have been reintroduced to assume the development functions, which the traditional authorities had hitherto performed.

5.6 CONCLUSION

- The research has shown that although there are some problems, it would be wrong to consider decentralisation as a total failure or for that matter unnecessary. For it is also visible that people in Lilongwe District and Malawi as a whole, have benefited from it. Decentralisation has deepened democracy by extending representative politics to lower levels and has broadened opportunities for people to participate in decisions affecting their lives. Further, by drawing on local knowledge and preferences about development, it has enhanced congruence between people's preferences and decisions made by the District Assemblies and the central government to satisfy them. By promoting monitoring, planning and evaluation from below, decentralisation has created a sense of ownership of development projects, thus making projects more sustainable than before. It has improved accountability and promoted partnership between the state and society by facilitating cooperation between government and lower level associations and NGOs. Similarly, to some extent it has enhanced the accountability of bureaucrats, elected representatives and political institution.

- It is revealed that successful decentralisation would depend on government commitment to capacity building of the district assemblies and the district assemblies' commitment to build the capacity of the local institutions. Further, successful decentralisation will depend on the institutionalisation of community participation in such a way that it becomes part of the day-to-day community-

decision making processes. Participation will increase with increased flow of resources to the local level and awareness campaigns. Eventually people will be empowered to hold local elites accountable. In the long term, genuine sustainable development will be attained if decentralisation will be implemented. As already noted, decentralisation provides requisite environment for sustainable development as it enhances ownership of development projects, through participation, empowerment and equity.

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