



Zimbabwe Economic
Policy Analysis and
Research Unit

Challenges posed by the non-alignment of central government and lower tiers of government's planning and budget cycles in the implementation of devolution

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ZEPARU Discussion Paper

by

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Executive Summary

This paper identifies the need for a shift in policy focus and discussions under devolution towards ensuring effective policy formulation and implementation. It raises issues which need to be addressed to ensure that there is harmony in economic policy formulation and management across all the tiers of government, with a view to contextualise economic devolution within the context of a unitary state. Devolution is coming at a time when national policy formulation and implementation have mainly been an exclusive function of central government with limited involvement of the provincial and local authority levels. Resultantly, there is a disconnect between the national level economic policies and the strategies developed at the local government level. If this were to continue going forward under devolution, there would be limitations as far as achieving the envisaged policy impact of promulgated economic blueprints designed to achieve the Vision 2030 targets.

Based on the policy pronouncement from central government, especially under the Transitional Stabilisation Programme, devolution will also involve development planning at both the local authority and provincial levels. However, what is missing in discussions and debates within the context of devolution is a shift from intergovernmental fiscal transfers to discussions on how policy harmony and coordination will take place under devolution. This study therefore undertakes an exploratory analysis of the key issues that would need to be addressed to ensure effective policy formulation and implementation under devolution. The key issues raised in the study include the following:

Policy divergence and convergence under devolution

The study identifies that a topical issue is the extent to which convergence and divergence across the devolved provinces should be balanced. The policy position is that each province has to develop plans based on their own natural endowments, while Zimbabwe is still a unitary state where central government policies should continue to be the guiding factor. This means that while alignment of national development plans and development plans for lower tiers of government is necessary, there is room for modifications to capture specific contexts of the different provinces and local authorities.

Capacity gaps and constraints

Local authorities are currently not actively involved in the formulation or implementation of national economic blueprints, outside their normal roles as service providers. Thus, they lack exposure and capacity in designing and implementing economic policies and developmental plans, which might also affect their own planning processes which has to be linked to the national policy.

Local authorities have a poor consultation culture with other government institutions and service providers whose input in local and provincial plans is a must. Citizen

engagement by local authorities is mainly on service provision issues, with little involvement of citizens on issues to do with priority setting, policy formulation and developmental planning. This points to lack of capacity as consultation is a key pillar in policy formulation.

Misaligned budgetary processes

The budget process at central level and at local authority levels are currently not aligned. This includes the budget cycles (calendar), the content as well as the formulation process itself. Alignment of the budget processes at the national level and the lower tiers of government will improve allocative efficiencies of public resources as well as improve the impact of government interventions.

Based on these key findings, the study also identifies a number of issues which can serve as discussion points in strengthening policy implementation under devolution. These discussions points include the following:

- What needs to be done to ensure that lower tiers of government which are expected to implement the devolved mandates do not miss an important opportunity to feed into and collaborate in the national consultation processes when important policy blue prints that should guide their planning are being crafted and validated?
- Should there be conscious efforts to provide administrative guidelines on consultations to avoid costly duplication and enhance policy co-ordination as the implementation of the devolution agenda is rolled out.
- What is being done/planned to consciously build capacity of the lower tiers of government in economic policy formulation, resource mapping and mobilisation?
- To what extent are central government institutions readying themselves to build capacity of lower tiers of government in areas where part of their mandate is devolved to lower tiers of government to flatten the learning curve and reduce the inevitable cost of mistakes?
- Should the development of guidelines and effective platforms for citizen engagement to inform the development of national, provincial and local authority economic plans be left to each tier of government to figure out what best works for them or there is need for a co-ordinated process?

The study also identifies some issues which stand out as recommendations to address the challenges posed by the non-alignment of policies and processes as the implementation of devolution gathers momentum. These include the following:

- Full operationalisation of provincial and metropolitan councils to ensure that the policy formulation role will have the responsible arms to undertake it;
 - Building expertise and competences of the lower tiers of government with the devolved mandate should be a key priority within the initial years of implementing devolution.
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Thus, clarity in roles and responsibilities in the devolved mandates will facilitate planning of capacity/competence building initiatives;

- There is need for strong partnership across different institutions including government, development partners and civil society organisations working with communities in resolving the emerging challenges that have potential to adversely affect the full implementation of the devolution agenda. Alignment of budget processes and calendars across the three tiers of government to enhance the planning and implementation by the lower tiers of government as well as budgeting and utilisation of intergovernmental fiscal transfers is necessary.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Section 264 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe provides the framework for devolution of governmental powers and responsibilities to lower tiers of government. Tiers of government are identified in Section 5 of the Constitution as the national government, provincial and metropolitan councils as well as local authorities. In general, local authorities are divided into two; urban councils (representing and managing the affairs of people in urban areas) and rural councils (representing and managing the affairs of people in rural areas within the districts into which the provinces are divided).

The implementation of these Constitutional provisions is introducing new dimensions in the country's governance structure which also brings with it new demands for institutional capacities and involvement. In general, national policy frameworks have mainly been viewed by local authorities as a matter only falling under the purview of central government. As a result, there is a general disconnect between the national level economic policies and the strategies developed at the local government level, which limits the policy impact of most of the economic blueprints.

Although the Central Government is pushing for the implementation of devolution, the momentum has not yet been fully embraced by lower tiers of government with respect to strategy alignment to facilitate the full implementation of the devolution agenda. The devolution agenda seeks to transfer resources and power from central government to provincial and metropolitan councils as well as local authorities. Central Government expressed its policy intentions in the Transitional Stabilisation Programme (TSP), by stating that policy planning and implementation would cease to be only a central government function, but would also cascade downwards to local authorities and provincial authorities. In particular, provincial authorities are expected to develop Provincial Economic Development Plans while local authorities are expected to develop Local Authority Economic Development Plans, which have to be based on resource endowments as well as the national priorities¹.

¹ Paragraph 501 of the TSP

Under section 264 of the Constitution, one of the objectives of devolution is to allow the people to participate in making decisions that affect them through the structures within the lower tiers of government. Thus, citizen engagement in the formulation of developmental priorities, plans, strategies and budgets is a new *modus operandi* in the implementation of the devolution agenda.

Section 270 of the Constitution gives provincial and metropolitan councils the responsibility for the social and economic development of their province, including planning and implementing social and economic development activities while also coordinating and implementing the central government programmes in the province. The whole government approach requires alignment of government programmes by different layers and agencies. In this regard, the devolving of responsibilities to develop provincial plans to provincial and metropolitan councils does not remove the responsibility of ensuring that central government policies are also harmonized with the provincial plans. This also explains why section 265 of the constitution provides for an Act of Parliament to provide for the appropriate mechanisms and procedures through which co-ordination among central government, provincial and metropolitan councils and local authorities has to be done.

However, the discussions and debates within the context of devolution to date appears to be mainly confined to intergovernmental fiscal transfers, especially on how resources have to be shared between the local authorities and central governments (formulas and basis for the formulas). As a result, some strides have been made on disbursement of funds, formulas as well as completion of infrastructure projects, which have been facilitated by the disbursement of the funds. While this is positive, there is a general assumption that there is a coherent structure from central level to local authority level with respect to policy implementation. The expectation under devolution that local authorities will localize the national economic blueprints might not be realized if the policy processes at central and local levels are not aligned. In addition, these provincial and local authority level plans/strategies need to be aligned to or anchored with the broad national vision and economic policy blueprints.

Beyond 2020, effective policy implementation of the devolution agenda is expected to be informed and guided by three main policies; the Five Year Development Strategy implemented mainly by Central Government (after TSP); the Provincial Economic Development Plans; and the Local Authority Economic Development Plans. As a result, it is critical that these policies be aligned and harmonized. There are a number of reasons why it is important for these three economic anchor policies to be aligned.

First, the real sector, which is a key determinant of growth, would be the key focus area for the local and provincial development plans. The plans at the provincial and local authority level have to factor in the natural endowments in those areas.

Thus, the real sector has generally been localized and provincialized, an exercise that needs not be duplicated by the national blueprint. This generally implies a bi-directional feedback loop between planning at central government with the other tiers of government. The national blueprints need to be informed by the local policies in terms of harnessing resources for real sector growth. However, the local strategies/initiatives also need to be aligned with the overall national vision and policy thrust in order to enhance the impact of government actions on the welfare of citizens. Divergence between national blueprints on one hand and plans/strategies adopted by lower tiers of government on the other may militate against achievement of national policy targets.

Second, all national blueprints are time bound, with clearly defined timeframes and expected deliverables. As a result, under devolution, these time framed national blueprints' objectives and targets are to be achieved through the efforts of both central government on one hand and local and provincial authorities on the other. However, if the provincial and local level plans defer activities which are considered critical in meeting the national objectives, then it would be difficult to meet the set targets. It is therefore critical that activities towards the attainment of these objectives across these levels be harmonized in terms of both timelines as well as activities.

Third, one of the anticipated benefits from devolution is to enhance citizen engagement, ownership and participation in development priority setting, policy formulation and implementation. In the past there has been limited stakeholder buy-in in government programmes mainly because of inadequate involvement of citizens during the consultative phases of national policy formulation and budgeting processes. Limited participation of citizens in matters/decisions that have an impact on their daily lives, undermines trust/confidence by citizens in programmes/projects implemented across all the tiers of government. Local authorities are best-placed initiators and drivers of processes that involve citizen engagement in shaping the future and designing strategies to achieve them² as they have a more intimate understanding of the communities' priorities through their close linkages with the structures responsible for citizen mobilization. Thus, the national blueprint can best achieve its objectives if its implementation relies heavily on local structures to harness the citizen's voice. Ensuring that citizen participation is mainstreamed across all government programmes/projects facilitates alignment of programmes and activities across all the tiers of government and avoid wasteful duplication of activities or processes. Alignment of programmes will also foster synergies in planning at national, provincial and local authority levels. For examples, priorities identified during consultations at the local authority level can inform priority setting of targets within the national economic blueprints rather than participating in parallel processes.

Fourth, one of the critical elements of devolution which central government has been emphasizing based on the Constitution is the indivisibility of Zimbabwe. While

² See *United Cities and Local Governments (2016). The Role of Local Governments in Territorial Economic Development. UCLG Policy Paper*

economic devolution has been embraced, the country remains one unitary state, as central government remains responsible for the overall policy direction of the country. However, if each province and local authority develops plans that are not based on the national vision and priorities, it would be difficult to achieve the upper middle income status. It is therefore critical to ensure that there are common guiding principles and agreed national priorities that inform the development of provincial and metropolitan/local authority specific plans/developmental strategies that respond to the specific needs within their jurisdictions. This can best be done by ensuring that the programmes/projects at the provincial and local authority levels are not divorced from the main policy priorities at the central government level.

Fifth, while policy implementation at the provincial and local authority levels has to be done using locally available human resources and expertise, such expertise generally needs to tap into the existing expertise at the central government level. This is mainly to ensure that the implementation does not depart from the initially desired objectives. It is therefore important to ensure that there are some overlaps and complementarities that should be leveraged upon in policy implementation across the three levels, which can be easier if there is alignment in the programmes and strategies..

Sixth, policies are refined through learning and expertise would not be distributed evenly across the 92 local authorities and the 10 provinces. However, there is a high chance for policy implementation diffusion if the policies being implemented are related, which can best be done if they are all anchored on the national economic blueprint. Ensuring policy harmony thus would go a long way in ensuring that the country is able to build and share enforcement expertise across all the areas of the country.

This paper is an exploratory study, focusing on identifying the need for a shift in focus under devolution towards identifying bottlenecks that need to be addressed for effective policy planning and implementation. The paper is focused on raising issues which need to be addressed to enhance harmonious implementation of the devolution agenda across all the tiers of government.

1.2 Objectives of the study

The study is generally aimed at highlighting the need for harmony between central government and the lower tiers of government in formulating and implementing policies and developmental plans that enhance the attainment of the devolution policy objectives. Specifically this can be achieved by:

- Identifying the areas of misalignment between local and central government budget processes;
 - Identifying the misalignment in terms of focus areas of policy implementation at the lower tiers of government;
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- Highlighting misalignments in the development planning and budgeting processes that can militate against the achievement of the devolution policy objectives.

2. Policy alignment and harmony: The Issues

What is commendable is that government has embraced decentralized economic development planning. Decentralised development planning has a number of advantages, which include³:

- Allocative efficiency, given that local authorities are more sensitive to local priorities and needs, and can modify service provision to reflect this;
- Information provision, as local government can keep people informed, taking advantage of being in direct contact with users of services;
- Responsiveness, as their proximity to service users means that they can be more responsive to local needs than central government;
- Accountability, as communities can apply more pressure on local authorities than central government given their proximity.

Given the benefits of decentralised planning, the natural expectation is that the focus of debate and discussions within the policy fraternity in Zimbabwe would be more on the following, which are all critical issues on devolution⁴:

- Clear division of roles, responsibilities and powers between levels of government;
- The transfer of adequate financial resources to the local level;
- A clear distinction between the roles of elected councillors and technical officials at the local level; and
- Capacity for planning, budgeting and project management.

The requirement for provincial authorities to develop their own development plans in Zimbabwe can be argued to be similar in approach with the Kenya devolution principle, where each devolved county has powers to, among other functions, receive and approve plans and policies for the management and exploitation of their resources⁵. However, what is not easily available are concrete examples on how policy planning and implementation between central government and devolved jurisdictions have been harmonised for Zimbabwe to follow. Although devolution examples from Europe, especially in the United Kingdom are available in literature, they are based on a more deeper level of autonomy, where the devolved jurisdictions are relatively more independent and actually stand as independent economies, which is a different context from the Zimbabwe scenario.

However, there are two main questions that need to be answered in policy harmony between the central government and the devolved jurisdictions. To what extent should policy divergence across the provinces and local authorities be accepted?

³ See Hadingham, T (2003), 'Decentralisation and Development Planning: Some Practical Considerations', at website http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@ed_emp/@emp_policy/@invest/documents/publication/wcms_asist_8213.pdf, accessed 10 April 2020

⁴ See Watson, D (2002), 'Issue Paper No.3: Pro-poor Service Delivery and Decentralisation', Fifth Africa Governance Forum, Maputo, Mozambique, May 2002.

⁵ See Hope K. R., (2014), 'Devolved Government and Local Governance in Kenya: Implementing Decentralization Underpinned by the 2010 Constitution', *African and Asian Studies* 13 (2014) 338-358

This is particularly within the current context where each province has to develop plans based on their own natural endowments. And secondly, what level of policy convergence should be aimed for? This mainly arises from the perspective that despite devolution, Zimbabwe is still a unitary state and central government policies should continue to be the guiding factor. This implies that there is some balancing act needed.

Devolution implies that central government facilitates the development of the national vision and priorities and gives policy direction through the development of overarching development plans/policies. While there is need for alignment of national development plans and development plans for lower tiers of government, there is broad scope for modifications to capture specific contexts of the different provinces and local authorities. This is already recognised in the Transitional Stabilisation Programme (TSP), which highlights the need for the provincial development plans to be based on natural resource endowments in the provinces. Policy divergence is more common in jurisdictions with more autonomous devolved tiers of government like in the United Kingdom. A number of factors⁶, explain some policy differences that exist across the devolved governments, which include the following:

- Governance dynamics within the devolved jurisdictions, based on different governance ideologies in terms of citizenship rights and differences in responses to public opinion and accommodation;
- Different political parties in existence influence the policy processes and the resultant policy choices;
- Differences in sources of funding influence the scope of developmental programmes and strategies.

However, devolution still allows for hierarchical planning, where higher-level plans should have a reciprocal relationship with lower level plans⁷. Under this type of planning, central government plans rely on trends identified in the lower level plans to inform the development of policy and strategic decision-making. On the other hand, lower level plans in turn are guided by the strategic direction set by the higher level plans.

Devolution in policy making therefore offers an opportunity for the provinces and local authorities to ensure that their strategy designs, even though underpinned by the national plans, are distinct, supported by a public discourse and perform well, building on performance satisfaction among citizens⁸.

⁶ See Muir J (2012), 'Policy difference and policy ownership under UK devolution: social housing policy in Northern Ireland', Working Paper No. 5, Institute of Spatial and Environmental Planning, Queen's University Belfast

⁷ See Hadingham, T (2003), 'Decentralisation and Development Planning: Some Practical Considerations', at website http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@ed_emp/@emp_policy/@invest/documents/publication/wcms_asist_8213.pdf, accessed 10 April 2020

3. Areas of misalignment in Zimbabwe policy landscape

3.1 Misalignment in terms of approaches

Hitherto, local authorities were seldom directly involved in the formulation or implementation of national economic blueprints, outside their normal roles as service providers. This therefore implies that when they have to produce their own plans, they will use a different approach to central government unless there are deliberate efforts at capacity building. To be specific, about 54% of local authorities do not have experience in national economic blueprint formulation or implementation⁹ outside utility and service delivery (Table 1). It is quite apparent that they do not have the necessary competences on economic policy formulation and implementation.

Table 1: Local authority involvement in national economic policy implementation

	Percentage
None	36.5
Minimal	17.6
Involved	45.9

Source: ZEPARU (2020)

In addition, requiring local authorities to craft economic development plans at their level also pre-supposes that they have a good consultation culture with both citizens as well as the other government departments and institutions that play complementary roles. It is critical that the local authorities have a good consultation culture with other government entities to ensure that the economic developmental strategies and initiatives at the local level adequately capture the realities on the ground with respect to service provision. Critical institutions which would need to have a close working relationship with local authorities with respect to agriculture matters include the Agricultural and Rural Development Authority (ARDA), and the Agricultural Technical and Extension Services (AGRITEX). However, only 6.8% of local authorities in Zimbabwe have established any consultation mechanisms with ARDA, while only 12.2% have some consultation mechanisms with AGRITEX (Figure 1).

The same is also true with respect to mining. There is a very poor consultation culture between the local authorities and the Mining Affairs Board as well the Geological Survey Department. Less than a fifth of local authorities have any engagement mechanisms with these institutions. This implies that the two critical areas of the real sector, namely agriculture and mining, are not expected to be adequately

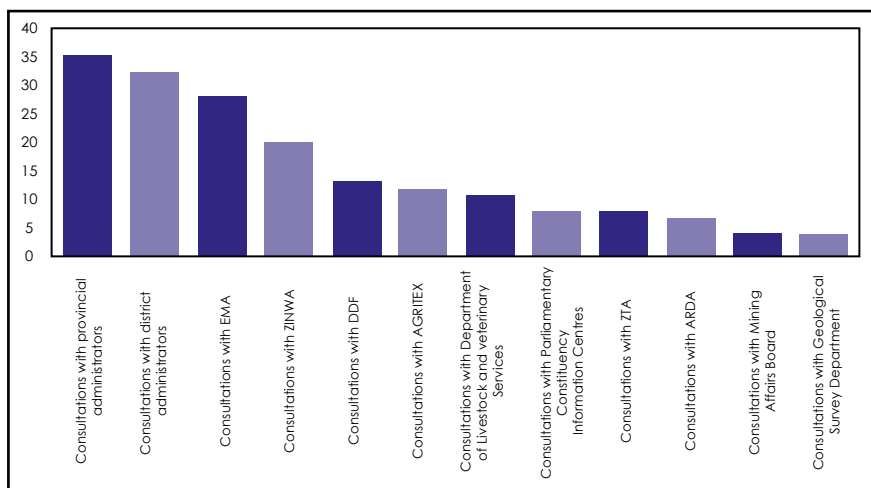
⁸ See Dupuy, C. & Van Ingelgom, V. (2014). *Social policy, legitimization and diverging regional paths in Belgium*. In S. Kumlin & I. Stadelmann-Steffen (eds), *How welfare states shape the democratic public: Policy feedback, participation, voting and attitudes*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.

⁹ Including both ZimAsset and TSP

mapped into the local economic development plans, unless consultations improve. In addition, the local authority and the provincial development plans have to be in sync, which also requires close working relationship between the local authorities and the provincial authorities. Although the provincial and metropolitan councils as envisaged by the Constitution are not yet in place, the office of the provincial administrator is already in place, which coordinates government programmes in the provinces. However, less than 50% of local authorities engage in consultations with provincial administrators, which would need to change if plans that are in harmony are to be developed. Despite the critical services provided by the Environmental Management Agency (EMA), the Zimbabwe National Water Authority (ZINWA) and the District Development Fund (DDF), only less than a third of local authorities have consultation mechanisms with these three institutions. This would also result in a poorly crafted local authority development plan unless relations improve. This is also an indication that there are some turf issues that might need to be ironed out as a way of improving working relationships among the institutions that will play a huge role in shaping the local development plans.

Given that one of the objectives of devolution is to ensure that the general citizenry are given an opportunity to participate in policy making, the requirement for local authorities to develop local economic development plans is a great opportunity to ensure that policies with citizen buy-in are developed. The traditional top-down approach in policy formulation has to be replaced by a bottom-up approach, where development activities are implemented with active involvement of the local people¹⁰. Involvement of the citizenry in policy processes that directly impact them results in wider acceptance of the policy interventions by the citizens, enhances ownership and sustainability of the project as citizens become responsible for the different interventions¹¹.

Figure 1: Local authority consultation experience with critical government institutions



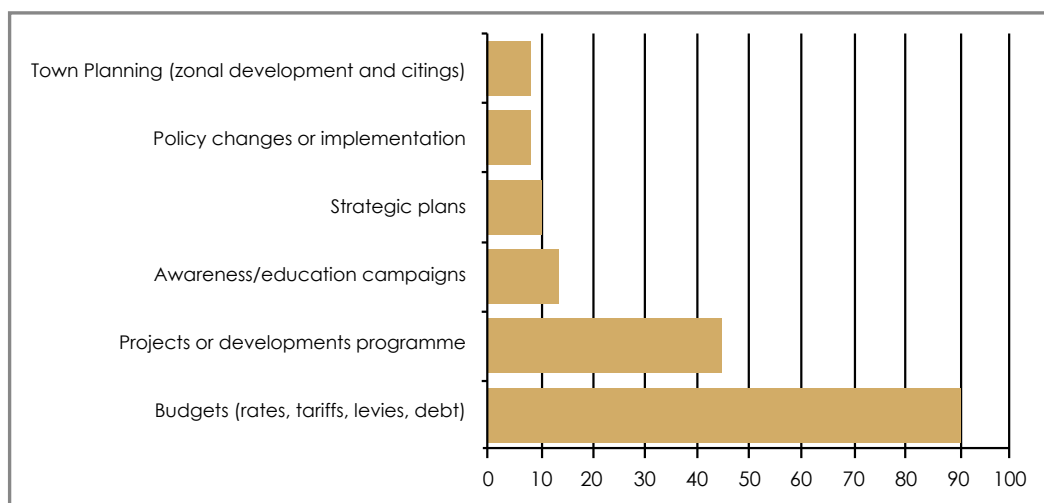
Source: ZEPARU (2020)

¹⁰ See UN Habitat III Secretariat (2017)

¹¹ See Bassler, Brasier, Fogle, & Taverno (2008)

However, citizen engagement by local authorities is currently centred on issues to do with budgets, particularly tariffs, rates, levies and debt issues, which is mainly due to fulfilment of legal obligation under the Urban Councils Act. However, matters to do with priority setting of developmental projects including infrastructure development, policy adoption and implementation are done with minimal involvement of the citizens. For example, only 8% of the local authorities engage citizens over policy implementation or amendments (Figure 2). Even critical issues such as strategic and town planning are done with little involvement of citizens. This also demonstrates that there is still a lot of capacity building required for successful development and implementation of the local authority development plans.

Figure 2: Policy implementation or policy issues not prioritized for citizen engagement by local authorities



Source: ZEPARU (2020)

Currently, there are no efforts by both government as well as developing partners working on devolution to ensure that the existing structures at provincial and local authority level are capacitated to adequately perform the roles envisaged under devolution. In other words, the devolution preparedness in Zimbabwe is overlooking a critical component such as capacitating local and provincial authorities to adequately perform their roles as policy authorities under devolution.

3.2 Misalignment in budgeting

The national budget is generally the main instrument for implementing national economic blueprints. Thus, it should be expected that if the local and provincial economic development plans are aligned to the national plan, then the main instruments should also be conscious of the national budget. Specifically, the local

authorities' annual budgets as well as the provincial authority annual budget should be framed in such a way that they speak to the national budget. There are two main perspectives in which the budgeting processes would be expected to be aligned. The first is the budgeting process, while the second is the budget cycles.

Budgeting processes

The budget process at central level is currently not necessarily cognizant of the local authority budget process. As a result, local authorities also craft their budgets with little regard to the national budget. Under devolution the intergovernmental fiscal transfer that are disbursed through the National Budget will increase the resource envelope of local authorities and these need to be adequately budgeted and accounted for. Thus, aligning of the budget processes at the national level and the lower tiers of government will improve allocative efficiencies of public resources as well as improve the impact of government interventions.

Before the Ministry of Finance prepares the national budget, they prepare a Budget Strategy Paper (BSP), which generally reflects the aims and aspirations of the budget. The BSP was developed to underpin participatory democracy, inclusivity and ownership in policy formulation¹². Thus, the extent to which local and provincial authorities are interested in the BSP and utilize it in their own budgeting processes would be very reflective of the ease with which they would be able to align their own budget processes to the national budget.

However, in 2019 only about 10% of local authorities had knowledge of the BSP, while even those with knowledge did not use it in their budget consultation and formulation processes¹³. Local authorities are neither availed with the BSP nor consulted when it is being developed, with access being on the internet¹⁴, which would also explain the absence of any sense of ownership and interest in the document. On the contrary, the budgeting process for local authorities is based on a circular released by the Ministry of Local Government and Public Works, which does not necessarily incorporate issues raised in the BSP. If officials responsible for budget crafting at the local level do not have sight or utilise the BSP, then it follows that the focus of the local authority budgets and those of central government are not linked. Under devolution, such an approach would not yield the best results, as the budgets at these two levels remain the main avenue through which the economic development plans are financed and implemented.

The national level budget consultation process would stand a better chance of including more citizen participation if it is harmonised with the local authority budget process. Local authorities generally serve as the first contact point between citizens and government, and the structures at the local authority level tend to be more effective in facilitating citizen engagements compared to the central government process. Thus, the extent to which the national budget implementation process is linked with the local authority budget process also has a bearing on the level of citizen engagement at the national level.

¹² Foreword by the Ministry of Finance in the inaugural 2012 Budget Strategy Paper presented by the Ministry of Finance in August 2011

¹³ See Zimbabwe Coalition on Debt and Development (ZIMCODD) 2020 report, 'Zimbabwe Open Budget Survey' at website <http://zimcodd.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Zimbabwe-Open-Budget-Survey.pdf>, accessed 08 April 2020

¹⁴ Ibid

Misalignment of processes can therefore be reflected on the extent to which institutional expertise at the local level is harnessed in central level budget processes. The national budget level consultation process does not leverage on the local level structures, hence local authorities generally play no role in the national budget consultation processes. Local structures can be looked at from two perspectives. This first perspective is the institutions that represent the interests of citizens. Representatives of citizens, including the residents associations at each local authority, are not involved in facilitating consultations. This also includes enhancing access to the BSP, as only 1.7% of the citizens would be aware of the BSP, with even a lower number aware of its contents, which affects the quality of discussions in consultations¹⁶. Although the budget timelines are standard, only 3.8% of them would be aware of the budget presentation period and consultations¹⁷, hence over 57% of citizens have never participated in pre-budget consultations¹⁸.

In addition to exclusion of citizens and their established structures, the national level budget process does not utilise the local authority structures to enhance reach to the ordinary citizen. Since devolution appreciates that local authorities are closer to the grassroots, then the expectation would be that going forward, central government utilises existing structures at the local authority level in consultations. However, local authorities mainly learn about the consultations for the national budget through adverts in the press, indicating that a venue in their locality has been identified for budget consultations. Councillors and representative of residents in the area are not specifically identified as critical for residents' mobilisation in national budget consultations¹⁹. Under devolution, it would not be ideal for the national level consultations to by-pass the structures at the local level who would also be expected to come up with policies that help achieve the aspirations of the central government policies.

Budget cycles

Budget cycles at the central government and local authority levels are different. This makes it difficult for the budgets to become tools to achieve similar objectives as one would expect under devolution. At the central government level, the budget calendar starts in April when the BSP is prepared and ends in November when the national budget is announced. However, in preparation for the 2019 local authority budgets, the circular from the Ministry of Local Government and Public Works was only circulated on the 3rd of September 2018²⁰. Even if the circular were to incorporate the BSP, by this time a lot of consultations would have taken place to such an extent that the focus area of the budget could have changed.

Under devolution, it is expected that the local authority budgets would be useful tools in the implementations of the local authority economic development plans. Since these development plans would be anchored on the national plan which is implemented using the national budget, it is better if these budget cycles are also harmonized. In particular, the local authority budget cycle needs to follow the central government cycle, which is already legislated for through sections 10 and 11 of the Public Finance Management (General) Regulations, 2019.

¹⁵ See ActionAid (2014), 'The Dynamics of Devolution in Zimbabwe: A briefing paper on local democracy, at website https://www.ms.dk/sites/default/files/udgivelse/zimbabwe_report_2014_finale_lav.pdf

¹⁶ See Zimbabwe Coalition on Debt and Development (ZIMCODD) 2020 report, 'Zimbabwe Open Budget Survey' at website <http://zimcodd.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Zimbabwe-Open-Budget-Survey.pdf>, accessed 08 April 2020

^{17, 18, 19} Ibid

4. Conclusion

It is quite apparent that there are important issues that need to be further interrogated and discussed on with regards to policy formulation and implementation under devolution that are being left out of the current devolution discourse. Ideally the devolution discourse should be structured bearing in mind the economic devolution model being adopted by government which leaves Zimbabwe a unitary State. In this regard the three tiers of government should work in harmony with the central government giving the overall policy direction and guidance for the country's development. This implies that provincial and local authority development plans have to be guided by the agreed national developmental priorities while they take into consideration specific province resource endowments and needs of the citizens residing within the province.

However, since each local authority and province has to take into cognizance resource endowments, this also implies that the provincial and local authority plans should also inform the national development plans. It is expected that the post-TSP development plans/strategies should see greater coordination and harmony between the provincial and local development plans/strategies and the national economic blueprints.

What is worrisome though is that there are already areas of disharmony in the processes at national and local authority levels which would also need to be addressed to ensure that national objectives easily cascade downwards to the grassroots. The level of disharmony is quite apparent from two perspectives. First, national policy making and consultations do not utilise the local structures, including the local authorities as well as the citizens. If this were to continue under devolution, national objectives would not be met. Second, the budget processes, arguably the main tools for policy implementation, are currently not in sync, including both the budget cycles and the process itself.

5. Discussion Points

From this discussion, a number of discussion points, which are expected to be topical in the devolution discussions going forward, arise. These include the following:

- What needs to be done to ensure that lower tiers of government which are expected to implement the devolved mandates do not miss out an important opportunity to feed into and collaborate in the national consultation processes when important policy blueprints that should guide their planning are being crafted and validated?
- Restructuring the consultation processes to work through the local and provincial structures could increase the level of policy harmony and co-ordination. Should there be conscious efforts to provide administrative guidelines on these

²⁰ The circular sent by the Ministry to local authorities for the 2019 budget guidelines was dated 3rd of September 2018

consultations to avoid costly duplication and enhance policy co-ordination as the implementation of the devolution agenda is rolled out?

- It is quite evident that there are capacity deficiencies within the provincial and metropolitan councils as well as local authorities. These capacity deficiencies will militate against development and implementation of sound developmental plans/strategies within these tiers of government.
 - What is being done/planned to consciously build capacity of the lower tiers of government in economic policy formulation, resource mapping and mobilisation?
 - To what extent are central government institutions readying themselves to build capacity of lower tiers of government in areas where part of their mandate is devolved to lower tiers of government to flatten the learning curve and reduce the cost of inevitable?
 - What platforms are being designed to facilitate timeous knowledge/information to facilitate seamless implementation of the devolution agenda?
 - To what extent are the academic institutions i.e. Universities within the respective provinces gearing themselves to be part of the solution to the capacity challenges facing provincial and metropolitan councils as well as local authorities. What frameworks and structures should be put in place to facilitate the envisaged Public Private Partnerships (PPP) in capacity building to enhance the implementation of devolution?
- Guidelines and effective platforms for citizen engagement to inform the development of national, provincial and local authority economic plans and strategies are currently missing. Should this be left to each tier of government to figure out what best works for them or there is need for a co-ordinated process?

Addressing the following issues can aid in addressing the challenges posed by the non-alignment of policies and processes as the implementation of devolution gathers momentum.

- Full operationalisation of provincial and metropolitan councils to ensure that the policy formulation role will have the responsible arms to undertake it. Delays in full operationalisation and capacitation of provincial and metropolitan councils (PMC) will limit the benefits of devolution and as is often the case whenever a vacuum arises, new structures and practices can emerge which will be difficult to undo;
 - Building their expertise and competences in the devolved mandate should be a key priority of the lower tiers of government within the initial years of implementing devolution. Thus clarity in roles and responsibilities in the devolved mandates will facilitate planning of capacity/competence building initiatives.
 - Partnership across different institutions including government, development partners and civil society organisations working with communities is key in resolving the
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emerging challenges that have potential to adversely affect the full implementation of the devolution agenda.

- Alignment of budget processes and calendars across the three tiers of government to enhance the planning and implementation by the lower tiers of government as well as budgeting and utilisation of intergovernmental fiscal transfers is necessary.

A key question that remains unanswered is whether the devolution agenda is being given due attention in board rooms, strategic planning sessions, policy debates and consultation sessions, awareness campaigns, resource mobilisation platforms and academic research among others. It is hoped that this note will stimulate further reflections on the challenges posed by the non-alignment of the devolution implementation processes.

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