Int. j. adv. multidisc. res. stud. 2026; 6(1):1540-1551

Received: 10-12-2025
Accepted: 20-01-2026

International Journal of Advanced Multidisciplinary Research and Studies

ISSN: 2583-049X

Examining the Effectiveness of Decentralized Planning Structures in Promoting Participatory Development: A Case Study of Ward Development Committees in Kabwe District

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Abstract

This study is an evaluation of Ward Development Committees (WDCs) of Zambia's Kabwe district in enhancing community participation. In spite of the Zambian government's effort in trying to enhance community participation in developmental projects, active community participation seemed not to be attainable.

The objectives of the study were to establish whether or not selected Ward development committees in Kabwe Constituency promoted community participation, to determine if individual households of selected WDCs of Kabwe District participated in developmental projects and also to identify challenges that were faced by Ward Development Committees so as to determine better ways of enhancing local community participation. The study used both qualitative and quantitative methodologies based on a case study.

Questionnaires were used to collect quantitative data from the local community while semi-structured interview guides were used to collect qualitative data from the District Commissioner, District Council Secretary, Non-Governmental Organizations and WDCs officials who were key informants for the study. Quantitative data was analyzed using the statistical package for social sciences (SPSS). Qualitative data was analyzed through coding and themes. Main findings indicated that WDCs had fair knowledge about committees while the local community had little knowledge about WDCs. Results showed that most developmental projects were initiated by the local community. The findings also showed that the use of WDCs was one of the strategies used to implement the policy of decentralization, which aimed at taking power to the grassroots. One major recommendation of the study involves the need for the Zambian government, through local councils, to recognize the importance of sensitizing the community about community participation and the purpose of WDCs. There is need to carry out a research to find out provisions to be included in a WDC Act that would ensure an all- inclusive and holistic development in the Wards. Research into an allocation formula based on accurate information for the wards should also be carried out.

Keywords: Ward Development Committees, Constituency Development Fund (CDF), Community Participation Response, and Kabwe District

1. Introduction

Chapter One provides a foundational introduction to the study, situating the topic within a broader academic and policy context while narrowing the focus to a local case in Kabwe District. It opens with an exploration of the concept of decentralized planning and participatory development from global, continental, sub-Saharan, and local perspectives. The chapter then outlines the problem statement, clearly articulating the gap between the envisioned role of Ward Development Committees (WDCs) and their practical realities. The research objectives and questions are defined, followed by a detailed presentation of the theoretical framework guiding the inquiry. This section also addresses the significance and scope of the study and offers operational definitions for clarity and conceptual precision. The tone throughout is analytical, reflective, and evidence-based, focusing on both empirical realities and normative aspirations.

1.1 Background

Decentralized planning refers to the process through which planning responsibilities are transferred from central authorities to sub-national units, with the intention of bringing governance closer to the people and enhancing community participation in development decision-making (Smoke, 2015). Globally, this governance model has gained prominence as a mechanism for improving service delivery, accountability, and democratic participation. In several developing countries, the devolution of power has been seen as a pathway toward inclusive development, enabling citizens to shape policies that directly affect their lives (Agrawal & Ribot, 2019) [1]. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development emphasizes the role of participatory institutions in achieving inclusive and equitable development outcomes, particularly under Goals 16 and 17, which advocate for strong institutions and participatory governance (United Nations, 2020). However, while the theoretical benefits of decentralization are well established, the extent to which these goals are realized in practice remains a subject of critical analysis.

At the continental level, decentralization has featured prominently in the African Union's governance agenda. The African Charter on the Values and Principles of Decentralization, Local Governance and Local Development (2014) commits member states to empower local authorities to facilitate citizen participation and responsive governance (Murunga, 2017). Despite these normative frameworks, implementation has been uneven, and evidence suggests that many local planning structures remain weak, underfunded, and lacking in technical capacity (Kauzya, 2019). Political interference and bureaucratic centralism continue to undermine effective decentralization, leading to tokenistic participation rather than substantive engagement in decision- making processes. Moreover, the misalignment between national policy priorities and local needs often hampers the relevance of local development interventions (Otieno & Kinyanjui, 2022).

In the sub-Saharan context, decentralization has been adopted by numerous countries to correct historical imbalances in power and resource allocation. Studies from countries such as Kenya, Uganda, and Ghana have shown that participatory structures, including village development committees and community planning forums, can enhance grassroots accountability when well-supported (Kabemba & Mushingeh, 2018). Nonetheless, sub-Saharan Africa continues to grapple with challenges such as limited fiscal autonomy, overlapping mandates, and the politicization of local governance (Tumushabe & Ddumba-Nyanzi, 2016). These obstacles often lead to the disempowerment of local planning bodies and hinder the realization of community-driven development.

Zambia's decentralization journey has been framed by its National Decentralization Policy of 2013, which aimed to empower lower governance tiers, particularly Ward Development Committees (WDCs), in identifying and executing local development priorities (MLGRD, 2014) [19]. WDCs are designed to function as intermediaries between the local population and district councils, collecting development proposals from communities and ensuring they are aligned with district-level plans. Under the revised Constituency Development Fund (CDF) Guidelines of 2022, WDCs are explicitly mandated to play a pivotal role in project identification, community mobilization, and resource allocation at the ward level (Chikopela, 2023). Despite this promising policy framework, implementation challenges persist.

In Kabwe District, WDCs operate in both urban and peri-urban contexts, often facing limitations in technical capacity, stakeholder coordination, and resource mobilization. According to Mweetwa (2021), most WDCs in Kabwe lack the requisite training in participatory planning methodologies and often function more as ceremonial bodies than as active development agents. Moreover, local communities report limited awareness of the roles and responsibilities of WDCs, leading to low levels of engagement and ownership in development processes (Mulenga, 2022). A recent audit by the Local Government Association of Zambia (2024) found that only 38% of community projects funded through the CDF in Kabwe had any form of meaningful consultation or input from WDCs, revealing a significant disconnect between policy intentions and actual practice.

The persistence of such issues calls into question the functionality and effectiveness of WDCs as instruments of participatory governance. While the structural foundation for decentralized planning exists, its operationalization remains weak. This disjuncture necessitates a rigorous empirical analysis to understand the enabling and constraining factors that shape WDC performance in promoting participatory development, particularly in the dynamic governance environment of Kabwe District.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Despite the Zambian government's commitment to decentralization through the National Decentralization Policy and the operationalization of Ward Development Committees (WDCs), there remains a significant gap between policy intent and implementation outcomes. Empirical evidence indicates that WDCs in Kabwe District often fall short of facilitating meaningful community participation, a core principle of decentralized governance (Mweetwa, 2021). Multiple studies and civil society reports have highlighted challenges such as poor community engagement, limited capacity of committee members, and weak linkages between WDCs and local authorities (Chikopela, 2023; Mulenga, 2022). For instance, a local governance audit by the Local Government Association of Zambia (2024) revealed that only a minority of community projects in Kabwe were developed with actual input from WDCs, reflecting a disconnection between community priorities and funded interventions. The ideal situation, as outlined in Zambia's CDF Guidelines, envisions empowered WDCs acting as genuine vehicles for participatory development. However, the current state suggests that many committees operate with unclear mandates, inadequate resources, and low citizen trust. This discrepancy raises critical questions about the true effectiveness of WDCs and calls for empirical research to assess their performance and uncover factors affecting their functionality in promoting inclusive planning and development in Kabwe District. individual.

1.3 Objectives

The general objective of this research study was to examine To examine the effectiveness of decentralized planning structures, particularly Ward Development Committees, in promoting participatory development in Kabwe District.

Specific Objectives of the Study include the following: To assess the influence of Ward Development Committees in facilitating community participation in local development planning in Kabwe District, to examine the effectiveness of WDCs in influencing project selection, prioritization, and funding under decentralized planning structures and-to evaluate the institutional factors affecting the performance of Ward Development Committees in promoting inclusive and participatory development.

1.4 Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in the Governance and Decentralization Theoretical Framework, with specific focus on the Participatory Governance Model as updated by Cornwall and Gaventa (2019). This model, rooted in the broader theories of democratic decentralization, emphasizes inclusive citizen participation, downward accountability, and co-governance between state and non-state actors in local development processes. The theory posits that when citizens are genuinely involved in planning and decision-making, particularly through representative institutions like Ward Development Committees (WDCs), the outcomes are more reflective of community priorities, equitable, and sustainable (Cornwall & Gaventa, 2019). At its core, the participatory governance model proposes that effective decentralization must be accompanied by empowered local institutions, transparency in processes, and active civic engagement (Bardhan & Mookherjee, 2017). The model identifies key propositions that are applicable to this study: Participation is substantive when institutional mechanisms are inclusive, structured, and recognized in law (Fung, 2015). In the Zambian context, WDCs are legally constituted under the Local Government Act No. 2 of 2019 and are mandated to lead participatory planning at ward level. Deliberative forums such as WDCs only function effectively when actors are empowered through capacity building, information access, and formal decision-making powers (Gaventa & Barrett, 2018). Where WDCs lack these components, they risk becoming ceremonial bodies rather than functional agents of development. Power asymmetries between the state and community actors must be actively addressed through resource transfers, political will, and feedback mechanisms to ensure equitable participation (Ribot, 2016). This is especially important in urban districts like Kabwe where bureaucratic inertia and political interference can limit grassroots influence. The legitimacy of participatory structures increases when they demonstrate tangible development outcomes, which in turn reinforces citizen engagement and trust in the process (Mansuri & Rao, 2015). This speaks directly to the need for evaluating how WDCs translate community inputs into budgeted and implemented projects. In applying this model to the current study, the research conceptualizes the WDC as a participatory governance mechanism situated within Zambia's decentralization framework. The model suggests a three- layered analytical approach: Structure and Legal Mandate: Are WDCs adequately defined, resourced, and integrated into the planning process at the district level? Process and Participation: What kind of citizen engagement is facilitated by WDCs, and how inclusive and continuous is this participation? Outcome and Influence: To what extent do WDCs influence local development outcomes, including project prioritization, budgeting, and implementation? The participatory governance model is highly relevant for the Zambian context, where decentralization has long been viewed as a path toward local empowerment and improved service delivery. However, empirical studies have raised concerns about the superficiality of participation, where WDCs exist but lack capacity, autonomy, or political support to perform their roles effectively (Phiri & Mulenga, 2020; Chinsinga & Andrews, 2021). These findings reinforce the importance of moving beyond institutional existence to examine actual practice and performance. Furthermore, the model enables this research to critically engage with institutional performance factors, such as the quality of training for WDC members, the flow of information from district to ward level, and the alignment between community priorities and funded projects. These aspects form the backbone of Objective 3 in this study. The framework also supports a comparative and diagnostic approach. By applying this model to Kabwe District, the study will identify gaps between intended decentralization outcomes and the lived realities of participatory planning. For instance, if WDCs are found to operate under vague mandates or lack influence in budgeting decisions, the model will help explain why this disconnect exists whether due to institutional weaknesses, political dynamics, or capacity deficits.

The Participatory Governance Model, as an extension of the Governance and Decentralization Theoretical Framework, offers a robust lens for evaluating the effectiveness of Ward Development Committees. It allows this research to go beyond surface-level analysis and explore how structures function, how citizens engage, and how power is exercised and distributed in decentralized development planning. This framework not only guides the analysis but also provides normative benchmarks for what effective participatory governance should look like in a context like Kabwe District.

1.5 Literature Review

Participation is people's involvement in the decision-making process, their sharing in the benefits of developmental programmes and their involvement in efforts to evaluate such programmes. At a community level participation simply refers to members of a particular community taking a responsibility to get involved actively in the public life of the community in which they live. Participation calls for the involvement of oneself in those aspects of life that affect a majority or the entire population of a particular community. It also calls for the identification of oneself with efforts and work to achieve the common good for the benefit of the entire community (FODEP, 2000). The main purpose of getting local people to participate in developmental projects is to allow them to take control of the direction of the projects in their community and assume ownership. This calls for the community to have skill and capacity. In this case, the local people's capacity to participate should be stimulated most importantly, by information about the importance of community participation in which all stakeholders in the community carefully identify and examine what they want and value in the community. To be of value, the information needs to be effectively conveyed to the residents who are the beneficiaries. If this were so, it would be clear that conscientization is very important in the process of succeeding in community developmental projects (Jere, 2012).

The key features of community participation are inclusiveness and involvement. Inclusiveness implies that everybody should be included (directly or indirectly) in the processes that have an impact on their livelihood. For example, Local Authorities should put in place and ensure that various avenues exist through which the citizens/residents in the community can make a contribution in a decision that affects development and policies in their own areas. Most efforts of community participation are concentrated in the construction of basic services infrastructures. Only in two sectors are community-based bodies recognized as playing a role in the operation and maintenance of basic services, namely; in education - the School Management Committees and Parent Teacher Associations, and in health - the Primary Health Units involved in the maintenance of primary health facilities. In other districts, there are also borehole and water management committees. In some districts, there has been exceptional progress. For example, Nebbi District in the north-west of Ghana has attempted to integrate community-based projects through local fund matching. The same district sees considerable potential in user or beneficiary associations as a vehicle for the construction and maintenance of rural basic service infrastructures. It may be concluded that Uganda presents the best overall conditions to support local governance processes via communities and their organisations. The local institutional setup provides important conditions for an effective integration of grassroots and district level development. A central question would be how to ensure that communities contributions to local governance, in terms of development aspirations, knowledge and resources.

The identification of projects is central to the success of CDF projects. The responsibility to identify possible projects lies with many players depending on the context. In Zambia this is the responsibility of community members through organs like the Area Development Committee (ADCs), Ward Development Committees (WDCs) and other representatives of community stakeholders. One way in which the community in Kabwe distrct participates in CDF projects is through project identification. Project identification in Kabwe distrct is done through members of the community having meetings with their respective community leader and representatives. The community identifies the project and appoints the project committee at a public meeting. That project committee then makes the application to the CDF committee on behalf of the community. Studies indicate that past decades have seen many governments especially those in transition advocate decentralization as a means of improving the quality of public service delivery and the role of the citizenry in the development processes. Efforts to promote decentralization by many countries is premised on the assumption that local governments will be more responsive to the needs of the citizens and take their preferences into account in determining the type of services to be provided, the level of resources required, and the optimal means of ensuring effective delivery (Robinson, 2007). This seemingly plausible intent has made decentralization a catchword in today's mainstream development discourse. Notwithstanding the interest and popularity of the term, however, its definition and meaning have been a field of contest with different people attributing diverse meanings to the concept (Conyers, 1984; Robino, 2009). Community participation in local development planning is widely acknowledged as a cornerstone of effective decentralization and governance globally. Participatory mechanisms are intended to democratize decision-making by involving citizens in the identification, prioritization, and implementation of development projects, thereby enhancing transparency, accountability, and ownership (Fung, 2015). As the CDF secretary put it “One of the basic starting points for community participation in Kabwe district is through having the CDF secretary in Kabwe constituency indicated that among these stakeholders that are normally present in these meetings include the ordinary members of the community, business community, churches, politicians, NGO‟s and other influential people within the community (interview with CDF Chairperson 9th July 2014). During project identification stage once projects have been identified, the WDC together with some community members with project proposal writing skills develop project proposals. The Kabwe CDC chairperson explained that after the meetings, once the project proposals are ready, they are submitted to the Ward Development Committees (WDC) in their respective wards. After receiving the proposals, WDC then applies for funds using either the Ward development fund or the Constituency Development Fund (Kabwe CDC chairperson 9 July 2014). The CDF chairperson also indicated that once the proposals for projects have been submitted, CDF committee will then scrutinize all proposed projects from the community and prioritize the projects. The Constituency Development Fund Committees receive project proposals from sub district development structures consisting of Ward Development Committees (WDCs) and representatives of stakeholders from the townships on behalf of communities. On the basis of this, CDF committee select projects and refer them to the Planning Sub-Committee of the District Development Coordinating Committee (DDCC) for appraisal before recommending them to the Council for adoption. The Local Authority notifies the CDF committee on which projects have been approved for funding and implementation. Various studies outside Africa have explored diverse models of community participation, highlighting both successes and challenges. Fung (2015) contends that participatory governance requires institutionalized platforms where citizens can influence policy and resource allocation directly. Employing a comparative case study methodology, Fung demonstrates how participatory budgeting in Porto Alegre, Brazil, effectively empowered marginalized communities, increasing local government responsiveness. The qualitative interviews and budget analysis underpin the claim that sustained community involvement reshapes power relations in governance.

Similarly, Ansell and Gash (2018) examine collaborative governance in the United States, focusing on inter-organizational networks that include citizen representatives in urban planning. Using mixed methods, including surveys and process tracing, they argue that such networks enhance community engagement but face challenges of inclusivity and representativeness. Their findings underscore that effective participation depends on institutional capacity and willingness to share power. Gaventa and Barrett (2019) explore citizen engagement outcomes globally through a meta-analysis of participatory initiatives. They evaluate diverse methodologies ranging from participatory action research to large-scale surveys and conclude that

participatory structures succeed when they integrate meaningful feedback loops and maintain institutional support. Their analysis identifies persistent challenges such as elite capture and tokenistic involvement.

In European contexts, Bovaird and Loeffler (2016) analyze local governance reforms emphasizing coproduction with citizens. Their survey of multiple municipalities finds that participatory approaches improve service delivery and community satisfaction but require clear frameworks to manage expectations and power asymmetries. They further explain that technological innovations, such as e-participation platforms, can broaden access but may exclude digitally marginalized groups. Focusing on Asia, Joshi and Houtzager (2018) assess social accountability mechanisms in India and the Philippines, including participatory planning forums similar to WDCs. Their qualitative study highlights that local political dynamics often undermine genuine participation, with elite actors dominating proceedings despite formal structures designed to be inclusive. The study advocates for capacity- building and institutional reforms to empower vulnerable populations. Nabatchi and Leighninger (2015) provide a foundational exploration of public participation models in North America, synthesizing empirical studies on the effectiveness of citizen engagement in municipal decision- making. They emphasize that participatory forums must be institutionalized within governance structures to achieve sustained impact, and point to the necessity of resources and training to ensure inclusivity. The reviewed literature collectively highlights that while participatory governance is recognized globally as essential for inclusive development, practical implementation frequently encounters barriers related to institutional weaknesses, power imbalances, and resource constraints. These studies offer critical insights into design features that facilitate meaningful community participation, including institutional commitment, capacity enhancement, and mechanisms for feedback and accountability.

These global perspectives provide a useful reference point for examining the role of Ward Development Committees in Zambia, particularly in relation to their capacity to engage communities actively in local development planning and decision-making. In Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), decentralized governance frameworks have increasingly incorporated community-based participatory structures aimed at promoting inclusive development and local democracy. Ward-level committees, similar to Zambia's Ward Development Committees (WDCs), have emerged as pivotal institutions in facilitating community participation in local development planning. Numerous studies conducted across the region between 2015 and 2025 have examined the effectiveness of these structures, highlighting both progress and persistent challenges. Matsheza and Banda (2017) [13] investigate the role of ward committees in Malawi's decentralization system, employing a mixed-methods design involving household surveys and key informant interviews across three districts. They find that while ward committees offer formal avenues for community voices to influence planning, their effectiveness is limited by inadequate training, politicization, and resource constraints. The study asserts that committees with clearer mandates and stronger community linkages demonstrate higher participation levels. consultative meetings within the constituency. During these meetings, the community themselves defines the pressing problems they are facing and would want to resolve in their constituency and develop project proposals (Kanyama Constituency CDF Secretary, 10 July 2014). At the beginning of the year, meetings are held in each ward through the guidance of the Ward Development committees. The meetings are called for the purpose of identifying and prioritizing locally based development projects based on the needs of the people. According the Kabwe district CDF secretary, "if participation of the local people is to be meaningful it must start from the respective zones and wards from which they come from. This is because these are the smallest units that are closest to the ordinary members of the community." (WDC kabwe Ward 10 Vice Chairperson, 10 July 2014). The key informant stated that, "during these meetings, we often have open discussions and everyone was encouraged to come and share ideas with the others in order to come up solutions. (Interview with Kabwe Ward Councillor, 11th July 2014). He further added that during community meetings, every person's contribution is respected and taken note of." The CDF Secretary further explained that the project selection process was done in line with CDF Guidelines; through Ward Development Committees (WDCs) and other relevant stakeholders such as community based organisations. She stated that the process was highly consultative and each year communities that had not benefitted from previous funding were deliberately prioritised. In addition, respective community‟s choice of projects is rationalised by their socio-economic needs. During such meetings stakeholders including ordinary community members, business people, churches, influential people, politicians and NGO‟s are all invited. As such, participation in ward meetings takes place in the form of interaction; it enables people to ask questions on the development projects taking place in the ward as well as propose what problems need to be addressed within the Ward and constituency at large.

It was also established that involving local men and women in identifying and prioritizing projects is very important since the people understand their problems better and they are better placed to come up with lasting solutions for their problems unlike when few people sit and decide, on behalf of the community, the projects to be implemented For instance, due to high levels of crime in Kabwe ward 10, the residents of the area proposed that a community police post be constructed to curb the rising crime levels (Kabwe Ward Development Committee Vice Chairperson, 11th July 2014). This reflects on the importance of having the constituents identify and prioritize their needs to be funded with CDF. Globally, the role of localized committees and participatory governance bodies similar to Ward Development Committees (WDCs) has gained significant attention as mechanisms to enhance democratic engagement and improve the relevance of development projects. Across diverse contexts, studies consistently explore how such grassroots entities influence project selection, prioritization, and the allocation of resources within decentralized planning frameworks. Although a number of organisations have carried out development work aimed at enhancing community participation in Zambia, there is little literature that shows description of community participation in Zambia. These include non-government organisations such as World Vision International, Care International, Plan International, and Women for Change as well as government departments in the Ministry of Community Development,

Mother and Child Health, Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock, and Ministry of Health. All these have been engaged in activities that enhance community participation but there is a dearth of literature on assessment of community in Zambia. However, the study reviewed available literature and came across some challenges that impact negatively on community participation. The following were some of the challenges impacting negatively on community participation in Zambia, identified in the literature reviewed: cultural issues, gender issues, religious beliefs, illiteracy, poverty and inferiority complex. Cultural issues heavily impact on community participation especially in developing countries. This is in line with Kamwengo (2002)'s assertion that the socialization process which transmits from early age values and attitudes, casts females into subordinated roles defining them principally in terms of their role as child bearers. The different roles, rights and resources that both genders have in society are important determinants of the nature and score of their inequality and power. Inequality in access to resources between women and men is most common in developing countries. Gender inequality, refers to inequality in conditions among women and men for realising their full human rights. Failure, of both genders to realise their full potential has effect on their participation in communal activities (Heward, 1999). In a comprehensive study, Smith and Rodriguez (2019) evaluate local development committees in Latin America, focusing on their capacity to guide project prioritization within municipal budgets. Using mixed methods combining household surveys and interviews with committee members in Peru and Colombia, they conclude that effective committees increase transparency and ensure projects align with community priorities. However, institutional weaknesses such as lack of legal backing and limited fiscal authority restrict their influence on funding decisions. The authors argue that without formal integration into budget processes, these committees' roles remain largely consultative. A study by Lee *et al*. (2020) examines neighborhood councils in South Korea, where decentralized planning structures empower local councils with advisory and budgeting powers. Employing a quantitative analysis of council meeting minutes and budget allocation data over five years, Lee *et al*. find that councils significantly shape project prioritization, leading to more equitable and targeted investments in infrastructure and social services. Their research highlights the importance of strong legal frameworks and financial autonomy for local bodies to influence outcomes effectively.

In the context of Southeast Asia, Tran and Nguyen (2021) assess the effectiveness of village development committees in Vietnam in selecting and prioritizing community projects. Using qualitative interviews with government officials and committee members alongside participatory observation, the study reveals that while committees participate actively in project identification, their ability to influence funding allocation is limited due to top-down budgeting procedures and centralized control over resources. The authors contend that decentralization reforms need to focus on enhancing financial devolution to improve committee effectiveness. In a contrasting case, Garcia and Patel (2017) investigate participatory budgeting councils in Brazil's urban municipalities, where community representatives have direct control over portions of the local budget. Their mixed-methods study, combining surveys with participatory action research, finds that councils effectively reflect community priorities in project selection and execution, especially in marginalized neighborhoods. Importantly, the study reports improvements in transparency and accountability, with positive effects on social cohesion and public trust. Across Europe, Johansson and Eriksson (2018) [8] analyze neighborhood forums in Sweden designed to involve citizens in local urban development planning. Utilizing a longitudinal qualitative study including interviews and document analysis, they observe that forums often influence project prioritization through active citizen engagement and collaboration with municipal planners. However, their influence on actual funding remains mediated by higher-level political decisions, reflecting the tension between participatory ideals and institutional realities.

The issue of fiscal decentralization is central to debates on the effectiveness of local committees globally. Kumar and Das (2019) examine community development councils in India, employing a case study approach with interviews and financial audits. Their research finds that the councils' ability to influence project funding is often undermined by limited fiscal autonomy and bureaucratic bottlenecks. The study underscores the need for reforms that grant local bodies greater control over financial resources to realize genuine participatory development. Similarly, a comparative study by Johnson *et al*. (2022) [9] explores community planning committees in the United States across three states with varying degrees of fiscal decentralization. Their quantitative analysis of budget data and community satisfaction surveys reveals that committees in states with higher fiscal devolution have more impact on project prioritization and funding allocation, leading to improved local service delivery and community satisfaction. The authors recommend legal reforms to strengthen fiscal authority at the local level. Governance frameworks also influence committee effectiveness. In Australia, Miller *et al*. (2017) [15] study local advisory councils embedded within Indigenous community governance structures. Their qualitative research highlights how culturally embedded councils effectively prioritize projects aligned with community values and traditions. However, limited funding and administrative support pose challenges for implementing prioritized projects, pointing to systemic constraints beyond committee control.

A meta-analysis by Chen and Wong (2018) synthesizes findings from over 40 studies across Asia and Latin America on community participation in decentralized planning. They conclude that committees with legal recognition, clear mandates, and access to financial resources demonstrate higher effectiveness in influencing project selection and funding. The analysis emphasizes the interdependence between institutional design, community capacity, and political will in shaping outcomes. In Southeast Asia, Nguyen *et al*. (2023) investigate the role of ward-level planning committees in urban Vietnam using a mixed-methods approach. Their findings confirm that while committees participate in identifying local needs, centralized funding mechanisms limit their ability to influence budget allocations. The study calls for greater fiscal decentralization and institutional reforms to empower local bodies.

These community meetings are gatherings that enable MPs, constituents and government officials to identify community needs and develop priorities for local development. They

provide opportunities for constituents to consult with MPs and other officials on the use of CDF funds. These meetings also allow MPs to demonstrate their responsiveness to constituents by publicizing recent activities. Various stakeholders participate in meetings that are called within the constituency. The performance of grassroots governance structures such as Ward Development Committees (WDCs) is heavily influenced by institutional factors including legal frameworks, human capacity, financial systems, intergovernmental coordination, and local political dynamics. Internationally, several studies have critically assessed how such institutional variables either enable or constrain local participatory development, offering lessons applicable to contexts such as Zambia.

In a comparative study from Nepal, Subedi and Paudel (2017) analyzed how institutional configurations affect the performance of Ward Citizen Forums (WCFs), created under the Local Governance and Community Development Programme (LGCDP). Data from 42 WCFs revealed significant variation in functionality, with high-performing forums benefiting from proactive municipal facilitation, access to development grants, and regular capacity-building. The study claims that institutional support structures, including dedicated coordinators and monitoring frameworks, are critical for participatory success. In contrast, forums without such scaffolding remained inactive or elite-driven.

In Pakistan, Ahmed and Rehman (2019) assessed institutional challenges facing Union Councils (UCs), the smallest rural governance units. Based on interviews and administrative records across Punjab Province, the study found that overlapping mandates between UCs and tehsil governments, lack of budgetary independence, and limited gender inclusion significantly impaired performance. The researchers contend that unless clear functional delineation and financial autonomy are embedded institutionally, grassroots structures will fail to reflect community preferences. The Republic of Korea presents a more advanced model of decentralized governance through its Residents' Autonomous Committees (RACs). Ahn and Kim (2023) undertook a policy evaluation using case studies from Seoul and Busan to determine institutional enablers of RAC effectiveness. They found that strong legal mandates, mandatory training for committee members, and budget quotas for resident-led initiatives were central to success. Additionally, performance audits and e-participation tools enhanced transparency and public trust. The authors believe institutional robustness is non-negotiable for community structures to achieve participatory development objectives.

2. Research Methodology

2.1 Research Design/Methods/Approach

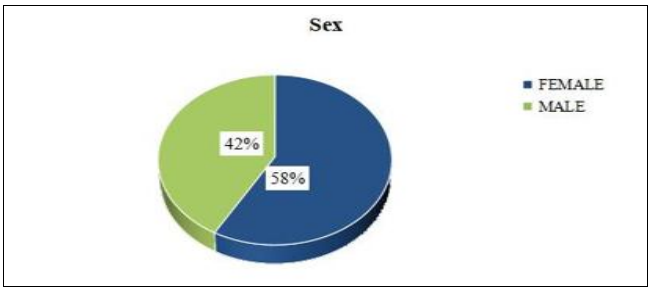
Research designs are differently and largely depend on how different researchers approach their studies from the beginning of the study. Sibwela (2017) described research design as a structural framework within which the study is to be implemented. According to Kothari (2004) descriptive statistics is concerned with the development of certain indices from the raw data collected. Indices that are used for this research are; common measures of central tendency, measures of dispersion, and measure of asymmetry commonly known as skewness. Describing the situation, fits this study at the same time, it gives a relative standing for the variable.

Two types of data were used for this study; qualitative and quantitative. The qualitative and quantitative data collected was primary in nature, primary in that the researcher was collecting the data directly from the sources of the data who are the respondents themselves. Both questionnaires and interviews were administered by the researcher. The researcher also used secondary data from various documents; researched documents, journals, books, unpublished reports mainly for literature review and discussion.

After the quantitative data was coded properly, it was entered into software for analysis called Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 21.0. The purpose was to come up with descriptive statistics. Some statistics were later manipulated with the use of Micro Soft Excel to come up with graphs and figures of the researcher's choice. The statistics was also made into tables so that various graphical presentations were made. Once the statistics were used to make tables, graphs and figures, they allowed objectivity with regard to interpretation, valid conclusion and recommendations. The information collected from Key Informants using an in depth interviews were analyzed qualitatively based on the themes and contents. Content or thematic analysis is good because it grouped similar items or themes together from many voluminous words. An introductory letter will be used; consent forms will be supplied to the respondents; anonymity will be applied, and data collected will be kept confidential and purely used for academic purposes. In view of the above, the researcher will take into account ethical considerations when conducting the research and the following issues will be taken into account to adhere to ethics. Confidentiality-All respondents will be assured that the information collected from them would be used strictly for academic purposes and held in the strictest confidentiality.

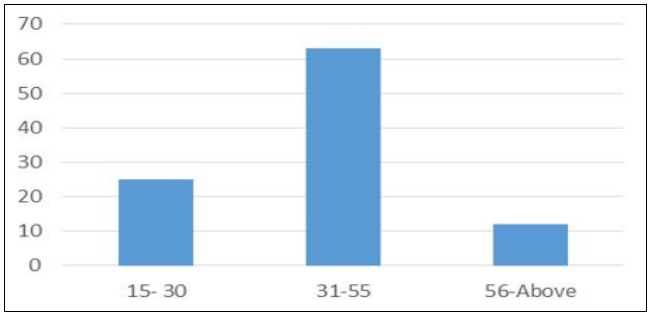
3. Results/Findings

a. Sex of Respondent



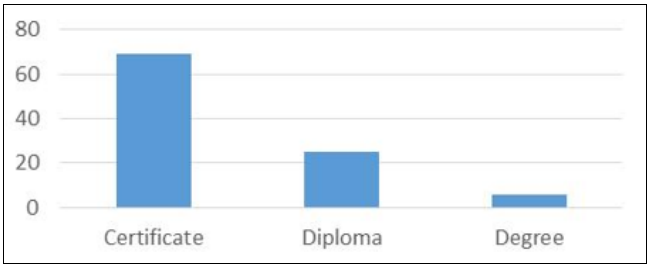
Regarding gender of participants, 42% of total respondents were males while 58% were female.

b. Age group



The tables 2 Participants were of different age categories those who were between the age of 31 and 55 years comprised 58% and those between 15 and3 0 years comprised 25% and the rest representing 17% were between 55 years and above.

c. Level of Education



The table 3 above shows findings on the level of education and 60% of the respondents hold school certificate. Those who hold certificates and diplomas were 20% certificate of diploma holders while those with bachelors comprised 10%.

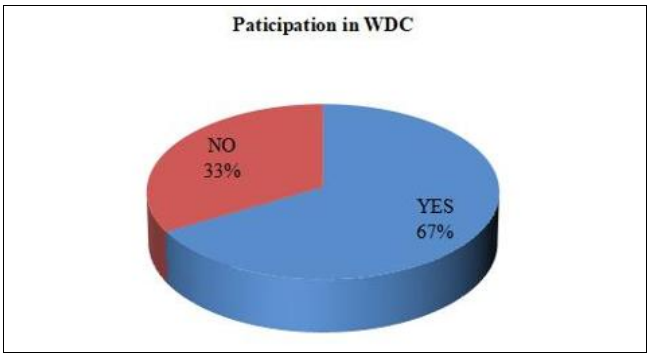


Fig 1: On the influence of Ward Development Committees in facilitating community participation in local development planning

Shows that most of the community members did not participate in community projects. However, some respondents were well-vested with WDCs which they described as an important element of decentralization. Forty (40) respondents said that they participated in WDC and twenty respondents (20) said they did not participate.

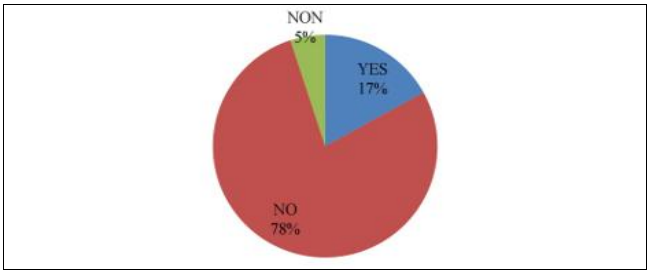


Fig 2: Responses of Community Members who have ever attended meetings to identify projects to be funded using CDF

The study found that attendance of public meetings for identification of CDF projects was low. It was established that only the minority of the household respondents had ever attended public meetings. As illustrated in figure above, out of the 60 sampled ordinary residents, only eleven (18.3%) of the household respondents indicated that they had attended meetings within the constituency where the identification of CDF projects was being discussed, while seventeen six (76.7%) of the household respondents indicated that they had not attended any meetings within the constituency and fifteen (5 %) of the household respondents did not give a response on whether had attended these meetings or no.

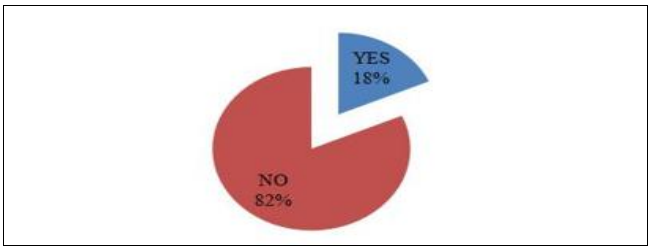


Fig 6: Responses showing respondents who have ever participated in implementation of CDF projects

Respondents were asked if they had ever participated in CDF projects implementation or if they knew anyone from within the community who had participated in CDF project implementation. The study found that out of 60 respondents 11 (18.3 percent) respondents mentioned that they had participated in the implementation process of at least one development project funded using CDF. Whereas 49 (81.7 percent) had never participated in the implementation of any CDF projects.

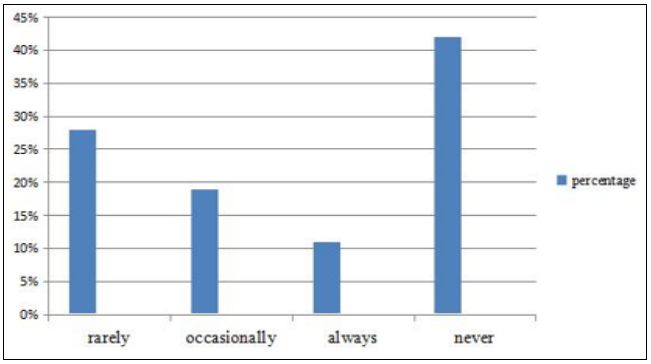


Fig 4: Responses of respondents who have contributed labor to CDF projects

It is evident that 17 (28%) said that community members are rarely given jobs on CDF projects, 11(19%) indicated that they are occasionally provided with jobs, 7 (11%) said that they are always given jobs while 25 (42%) indicated that they have never been offered employment by CDF committees. This shows that some of the projects being implemented in Lusaka constituency do not employ locals or in some cases they are given lesser roles as opposed to other people outside the constituency. This could impact on the completion and sustainability of projects.

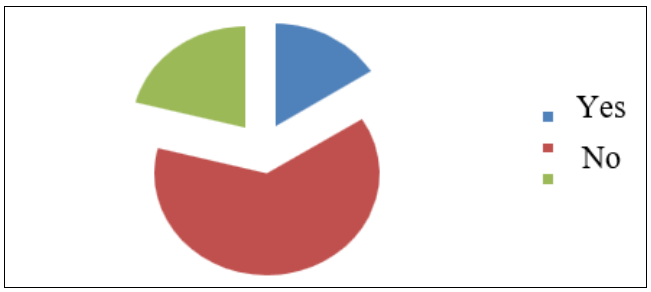


Fig 7: Responses of respondents who have participated in monitoring of CDF projects

The responses shows that 38(63%) of respondents said that they have never been involved in monitoring of CDF projects, 10 (16%) said that they have involved in monitoring; whereas the rest 12 (21%) acknowledged that they did not know. The results show that there is low community members involvement in CDF project monitoring.

Table 1: Institutional factors affecting the performance of Ward Development Committees in promoting inclusive and participatory development

Response	Frequency	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
Yes	29	48.3	48.3	48.3
No	31	51.7	51.7	100
Total	60	100	100	

As illustrated in Table 4.1 above, it was found that out of 60 respondents 31 (51.7%) were not aware of CDF while 29 (48.3%) where aware of CDF. The findings show that majority of the respondents did not know or had not heard about CDF.

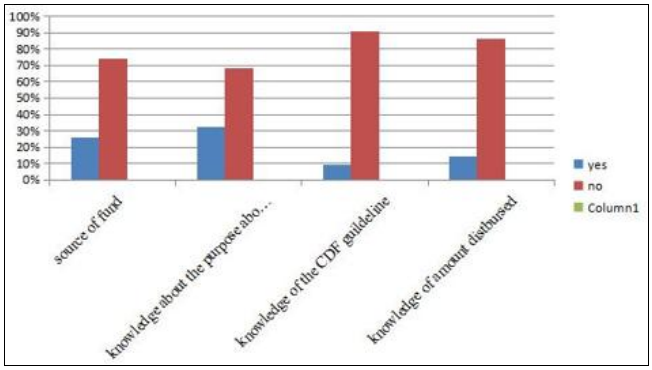


Fig 9: Responses showing community knowledge about CDF

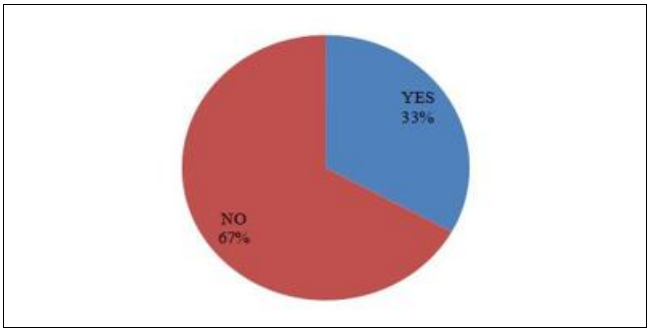


Fig 10: Are you aware of structures that you can use to participate in CDF projects

The results reveal that 33% are aware of the structures that they can use to participate while, 67% said they were not aware. The fact that 67% are not aware of the structures available for them to participate in CDF projects suggests that to a great extent these institutions are not visible to the ordinary members of the community.

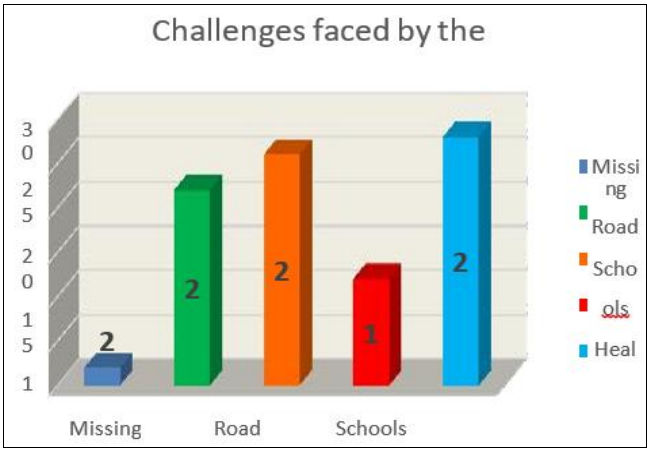


Fig 11: Challenges faced by the community

Figure 17 shows that the community faces a number of challenges and among them are; poor road network, inadequate schools, poor health services and lack of clean water and sanitation.

When asked about the challenges faced by WDCs, a WDC official explained that one of the challenges that they face in promoting people's participation in development projects was lack of information flow among stakeholders.

3.2 Background characteristics: Below is the summary of the background characteristics:

3.3 Discussion and Implication of Findings

According to the table above, 58% of the respondents were aged between 31 and 55, 25% of respondents aged between 15-30, while a small proportion of the respondents (17%) were aged 55 and above. On the gender of the respondents the distributions below were observed. The results are shown in the study revealed that majority of the respondents (88%) were male while the rest, 12% were female. The study further sought to find out highest academic qualification of the respondent. The findings were as recorded below. In terms of academic qualifications, 68% had certificates, 27% had diplomas whilst 6% had degrees.

Respondents were asked to identify types of copying strategies of families with mental health patient, majority 50% said religious copying, 33% said social support from hospitals, 10% said used problem focused copying and 6% said they use emotion focused strategies. Support group is a gathering of people facing common issues to share what's troubling them. Through the sharing of experiences, they're able to offer support, encouragement, and comfort to the other group members, and receive the same in return.

When you're going through a challenging or traumatic time, family members and friends may sympathize, but they don't always know what to say or the best ways to help. Doctors and health professionals may sometimes offer minor emotional support, but their primary focus is always medical.

Support groups developed to join people together who are dealing with similar difficult circumstances. That may be coping with a specific medical condition, such as cancer or dementia, a mental health issue like depression, anxiety, bereavement, or addiction, for example, or caring for a family member or friend facing such a problem. Whatever issues you or a loved one are facing, though, the best medicine can often be the voice of people who have walked in your shoes.

A support group offers a safe place where you can get information that's practical, constructive, and helpful. You'll have the benefit of encouragement, and you'll learn more about coping with your problems through shared experiences. Hearing from others facing similar challenges can also make you feel less alone in your troubles.

While it's perfectly normal to feel reticent, anxious, or apprehensive about joining a support group, it can help to dispel some of the common myths and misconceptions about these groups and how they operate. In some circles, there's still a stigma associated with mental health problems, which extends to attending support groups for those problems. Some people see reaching out to others as a sign of weakness, while others believe confiding in others is a waste of time and won't achieve anything.

Majority 45% church support was more effective, 33% said social support from family and friends including the hospital were ideal and 22% said there is a need to solve problem right at home. There is a growing global mental health movement around the world today;[1] and the global church is beginning to recognize mental health problems, which are the leading cause of disability worldwide—more disabling than such conditions as heart disease, stroke, or diabetes[2]—as a major ministry priority. Mental health problems are usually the result of a combination of many factors, including family environment, biology, personality, spirituality, and challenging community contexts, including poverty and violence. Increasingly, the impacts of traumatic events such as childhood abuse, interpersonal violence, or natural disasters are being recognized as major causes of mental health problems. In the New Testament, we see that, 'Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness' (Matt 9:35).

The main aim of this research was to find out the effectiveness of WDCs in enhancing community participation in developmental projects in Zambia. This chapter discusses findings of the research in relation to the research objectives and research questions.

This study establishes that people cannot be forced to 'participate' in projects which affect their lives but should be given the opportunity where possible. This is held to be a basic human right and a fundamental principle of democracy. Community participation is especially important in emergency sanitation programmes where people may be unaccustomed to their surroundings and new sanitation facilities. Furthermore, this study has established that community participation requires some form of motivation and through community engagement; communities are enabled to participate in public affairs. The citizens are directly involved in the formation of policies and designing of developmental projects. Additionally, they will also be involved in the monitoring and evaluation of projects to ensure that desired goals are achieved. However, if the community is not engaged and decisions about the design of the project are not in the hands of the community as has been the case with top-down approaches, the objectives of development usually remain unchanged (De Beer, 1998).

Respondents in this study suggested that there was need for improvement in the WDCs. They argued that there was need for sensitisation to the members of the community if the objectives of WDCs were to be achieved. The community needs to learn basic civic literacy skills meaningfully by practising actively in the civic affairs of their community. Civic literacy skills include inquiry strategies, critical and creative thinking, decision making, resolving conflict and collaboration. The methods used in the teaching of Civic Education should attract the learners to participate in community affairs through proper guidance. In order for communities to participate in public affairs, the capacity building becomes a requirement as wellas strategy for effective participation in public affairs. Capacity building is an on- going process of increasing the ability of citizens, groups and organisations to control and manage all the important areas of their lives or operations (Fawcett *et al*., 2007). Capacity building and empowerment are the best means to achieve sustainable community development. Capacity building and self-reliance help community to be empowered, and finally contribute towards sustainable community development. This is in line with Feire theory of conscientisation that if individuals can be trained to regain their human potential through the process of conscientisation, they will be in a state of intransitive consciousness. This process is empowering as it introduces human agency in the affected individuals to the local community and enable them to act in their challenges they face. Mbozi (2013) confirms the theory that the consequence of conscientisation is social change. When the community work together, participate in local decision making and share roles, what comes out is development.

From the findings, it was observed that many people are not aware of WDCs. This has been noticed from where residents report to whenever they have problems such as break down of mono pumps, rehabilitation of roads. The other problem is that the community does not know the Wards to which they belong. In view of this, it becomes difficult for the community to know where to report the problems they have in their community areas. The lack of awareness has a negative effect on people's participation in projects undertaken by WDCs. From the above, it can be clearly noted that the majority of the residents are not aware of WDCs. This can be seen from the participation of the community in the projects. The findings depict low participation in meetings. This is in line with Freire's theory of conscientisation that if the community is enlightened, they will take actions as a consequence of transformed perspectives. Consequently, they start to be more active in their daily activities. The community become more critical of their practices following the educational intervention (Shor, 1992). The benefits of community participation in public affairs cannot be over emphasised. This study has shown that when communities are directly engaged with government, policy and decisions made are seen as more legitimate, are challenged less frequently and policy initiatives have a greater success rate (Holzer, *et al*, 2002). The right of local authorities to manage the affairs of the community and to form partnerships, networks and associations to assist in the management of their respective

districts and further their development is recognised (Constitution of Zambia, 2016). The study established that there are a number of projects identified in kabwe which are currently spearheaded by WDCs. These include; drilling of boreholes, water network rehabilitation projects, the building of schools, clinics and grading and upgrading of township roads which are aimed at uplifting the living standards of the people in the community.

Respondents also indicated that government and other players designed and implemented their programmes according to the specific target audience. That meant, therefore, that, audiences were identified with whom the players needed to communicate in order to achieve their mandate. The audiences ranged from the media houses, learners and educators, governmental institutions, civil societies and mere members of the public. This was with the understanding that poverty reduction programmes are to be designed and implemented to suit the levels of understanding of the selected audience. This was in line with UNEP (2007) which recognised that most programmes are often successful when they are targeted at specific groups because information can be tailored to the activities, needs and challenges of the group. Although local government reforms have brought about significant changes in policy frameworks and institutional structures in order to facilitate and anchor effective delivery of socio-economic development services, local authorities are faced with difficult constraints and challenges in implementing and prioritising the process of WDCs (Simbeye, 2016). The strength of decentralised local governance remains limited. For decentralisation to be effective, not only should local governance be downwardly accountable, but other central government agencies and bodies at district level should also be accountable to local government. The argument that democratic decentralised local government can deliver services more efficiently and more responsively depends on the adequate provision of resources. Yet the lack of financial resources continues to constrain the effectiveness of local authorities. The failure to fully empower local authorities undermines the effectiveness and legitimacy of WDCs. Lastly, the Ministry of Finance and National planning does not release the grants on time as specified in the 1991 Local Government Act (Central Statistics Office, 2000). The conscientization theory used in this study fitted well in this study because it points out that participation can only occur when people are enlightened. The enlightened community will then be able to make decisions and ensure effective participation for personal and community development.

This chapter has presented a discussion of findings of the study by addressing each research objective. It started with the players involved in WDCs and their management roles. It further addressed the strategies used in community participation. The third section tackled the successes and challenges of the WDCs. The last section discussed the suggestions on how the WDCs can be improved. The next chapter presents the overall conclusion of the study. It further provides recommendations and suggests for further research emerging from the findings of this research.

4. Conclusion

The research question that sought to determine the extent to which Ward Development Committees enhanced community participation in developmental projects in Zambia was answered. The general picture from the study was that the community was not knowledgeable about WDCs. This was determined by the community' response to where they reported whenever they were faced with a problem in their residences. The projects that were undertaken were not sustainable and people are still dependent on the government to improve their communities. The other objective and the research question that sought to assess the participation of individual households in developmental projects of their residence were also answered. The study revealed that few of the households had participated in the developmental projects undertaken by WDCs. This was because most people lacked sensitization while others with knowledge about the WDCs had little or no time to participate in the developmental projects, hence poor participation. On the other hand, Ward Development Committee officials indicated that it was not their responsibility for people's low participation in developmental projects but rather due to challenges that include political interference, lack of public acceptance, lack of information flows among stakeholders and the vastness of the areas that the WDCs covered. In view of this, the WDCs did not effectively enhance community's participation in developmental projects. This, subsequently, led to the change of the Residence Development Committees (RDCs) to Ward development Committees (WDCs) in order to enhance community participation which the RDC failed.

Based on the findings, the study has established the nature of community participation in CDF funded projects in Kabwe District. As discussed on page 42, the study has established that there were four main ways in which the community participates in CDF projects. Project proposals come from grassroots based organizations such as the Area Development Committees (ADCs) and Ward Development Committees (WDCs) or other community stake holders as much as possible communities are expected to actively participate in the identification of projects; The implementation of the projects also involves community participation in form of labor, both skilled and unskilled use locally available materials (stones, sand etc.); The beneficiary community also monitor project implementation. Community participation is also guaranteed through representation by community leaders who seat on the Constituency development fund committee. The study established that during the project identification stage, community participation is in the form of consultative meetings within the constituency.

Discussions on page 42 show that during these meetings, the community themselves define the pressing problems they are facing and would want to resolve in their constituency. In addition, community participation during project identification also takes place through development of project proposals which is done by different groups who are members of the community. The study also established that community participation in CDF projects is also assured through the local representatives who sit on the CDC, membership on project implementation committees. The study has also concluded that participation in decision making process is mainly representational through the Ward Development Committees (WDCs) and CDF committees. This form of participation has shown to offer limited space for local communities to engage themselves in the development process, and depends on how well representation takes place. As discussed on page 47, the study established that there are three main ways in which the

community participates in CDF projects implementation. Firstly through the use of local labor, secondly through the respective community's contribution of materials to the projects and thirdly through the use of local contractors. It was also established that during CDF project implementation, emphasis is placed on using local labor and materials and local representatives to assess progress.

Based on the finding, the study has established that the community participation in CDF projects in Kabwe district also takes place in through the local community taking part monitoring of CDF projects. Discussions on page 52 shows that the study established that regular meetings were held with community members to appraise the project progress and in this way they are able to be involved in the monitoring of the project implementation. In addition to that, local residents also scrutinize the work that is been done and report any suspicious activities to the community representatives.

5. Acknowledgments

We are indebted to Zambia Research and Development Center (ZRDC) for providing guidance and resources which have made this project successful. We are also thankful for the energy expended by Information and Communications University (ICU) Students in data collection process.

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