

Establishment of new districts in Zambia- “An opportunity for visionary, Innovative, and creative leadership”

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Abstract

In this paper let us examine and reflect on issues relating to creation of districts. In recent years many countries across the world, especially in Africa, have created large numbers of new local administrative units. To examine this phenomenon, I take the case study of Zambia, one of the more prominent country in creation of districts in recent years. Alongside large-scale economic and political dispensation, Zambia has also experienced a near explosion in the number of districts (the highest level of local government), from until 2013, Zambia was subdivided into 72 districts. However, since 2010 a number of new districts have been created bringing the total to 117 as of 2018 in less than a decade.

I examine a variety of potential reasons or decision why these districts might have been created, to de-linking, aligning and re-aligning of districts and argue, through the use Republican Constitution of Zambia and the National Decentralization Policy. Why it provides an “An opportunity for visionary, Innovative, and creative leadership” and also taking into consideration some challenges in the process. I conclude with reflections on the relationship between decentralization and economic development as well as political will in the development. This paper does not claim to be the definitive guide to all things “establishment of new districts in Zambia- “An opportunity for visionary, Innovative, and creative leadership” but rather to present some of the most significant approaches and discussions in creation of new districts.

Keywords

Creation of districts, Decentralization, Visionary, Innovative, Creative leadership

BACKGROUND

Local authorities in all parts of the world play an increasingly important role in the fundamental basic public services delivery. However, authorities similarly face great challenges. Most local authorities in developing countries are facing increasingly bigger challenges as a result of rapid and chaotic planning, urbanization and due to the impacts of frequent natural disasters caused by climate change. The recent global financial and economic crisis has further aggravated these challenges.

The fundamental problem confronting most local authorities, especially those managing cities in developing countries, is the widening gap between the availability of financial resources and municipal spending needs. One of the main reasons for this increasing fiscal gap is the rapid growth of urban populations, which creates an ever-increasing demand

for public services, new public infrastructure, and its maintenance.

Leadership is clearly one issue that local authorities have to realistically address if they are to survive and succeed in today’s turbulent environment. The local authorities needs a crop of individuals who, while operating within the framework of the rule of law, are able to apply visionary leadership skills and innovation in tackling extraordinarily difficult challenges. In anticipating and responding to these challenges a call for rare competencies, especially those of strategic visioning and leadership, partnership building, resource mobilization and management, as well as ethical evaluation is inevitable.

CREATION OF DISTRICTS

The decision to de-linking, aligning and re-aligning of districts has received mixed feelings among different people some have expressed fears and negative

sentiments while others have expressed goodwill and positive sentiments.

The Republican Constitution of Zambia provides for creation of new districts and creation of new districts is one of the important aspects of decentralization.

In November 2002, the Government of the Republic of Zambia adopted the National Decentralisation Policy whose vision is “to achieve a fully decentralised and democratically elected system of governance characterised by open, predictable and transparent policy making and implementation process, effective community participation in decision making, development and administration of their local affairs while maintaining sufficient linkages between the centre and the periphery”.

The PF manifesto 2016-2021 section 4 LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND HOUSING DEVELOPMENT states and I quote *“The Patriotic Front recognises the critical role of local government as an engine of delivering services, infrastructure and development to the communities. The Patriotic Front is committed to promoting decentralisation, democracy and good governance through local authorities and strengthening their financial capacities. In line with our Decentralisation Policy, the Patriotic Front Government has in the last five years established 33 new districts across the country with the objective of bringing services closer to the people.*

Furthermore they have stated that they *will establish a system of local government which will promote local economic development, improved delivery of essential infrastructure and services through local self-government.*

As a signatory to the Habitat Agenda and the Istanbul Declaration of 1996, Zambia committed itself to promoting decentralization through democratic local authorities and work to strengthen their financial institutional capacities.

It is envisaged that the creation of new districts will bring about effective administration and service closer to the people, allow people to participate in economic development at local level and the creation of employment.

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

The creation of new districts provides a challenges and opportunities for visionary, innovative and creative leadership and stakeholders. The cities created will have to develop urban centres and create excellent communication capabilities, raise their profiles and

create drastic raise in their economic fortunes for the coming years.

Proper planning is a very critical aspect and an opportunity for setting standards for new cities. So lets us look at some of the issues which may be required to be done by the new districts.

The organization plans and realistic development strategic objectives needs to be identified , these will have to include support to urban and rural economy development, new investment opportunities and the organisation of city council services. There is also need to support the creation or revitalisation of existing industries, rural economy and council services inherited from the previous councils .This will require careful assessment of risks and remedies involved especially takeover of human capital or employing human capital.

The action plans relating to many objectives within the organisation and strategic plans need to be proposed and investment plans developed to give an indication of the financing that may be needed.

Financing for Development

The approach should be that the city council should be proactive and take a lead in requesting for assistance for development funds from both Central Government and Donor organisations. On the holistic approach the city council need to adapt its procedures to carry out their enabling role, working closely with the private sector in service delivery.

As you aware city councils in Zambia have undertaken a series of strategic planning exercises however the challenge has been the implementation of activities set out in the plans.

In order to create ownership and support it is very important to bring together and involve relevant local stakeholders from public and private sectors to develop a Local Economic Development (LED) master plan.

Participation of stakeholders is important in programme analysis because it enhances the quality of the programme design and improves the outcome of the analysis. Participation also minimises risk by improving the quality of the information that goes into the decision being made. Participation is a conceptual stance that starts with the programme analysts willingness to listen and consult, and ends with the stakeholders sharing control of all phases of the programme. City council need to share and give feedback to the community on the developments taking place in the city.

Social, Economic and Financial policies

There is need for the new districts to review their existing social, economic and financial situation and policies. It is worth to note here that a series of policy decisions at national level by central government will have an impact on the transformation of the districts. Therefore adequate good policies will guide the districts properly to understand government direction and decisions.

Challenges

There has been a trend of councils not able to pay their staff on time, let alone provide adequate services hope that this will be a thing of the past with new districts if they are visionary, innovative, proactive and creative.

The new districts should also be aware of environmental damage which may relate to declining local economy, increased urban poverty, and increased conflict over the natural resources base already experienced in some districts, poor management of the limited resources available to city councils e.g. Land. There may be also rigorous pressures on land for cultivation, forest reserves and water resources. Most districts levels of water supply and sanitation are not adequate, poorest services found in unplanned areas and compounds. In most districts there will be increase in air pollution and solid waste due to industrialisation urbanisation and increased economic activities. This means that the councils will need to have a dynamic capability to efficiently and effectively implement environmental policies and laws. People need to enjoy the benefits of well-planned garden city appearances.

One of the **key challenges** for the new districts is to respond to the new initiatives and in order to do this there is need to strengthen councils in relation to institutional effectiveness and also create good financial position. It is important to create institutional framework within which staff members and stakeholders can operate and relate effectively.

I hope the new councils like many existing councils will continue to embrace their function from being a direct provider of services to that of facilitator or enabler i.e. facilitating the provision of services provided by the private sector while ensuring that acceptable standards of the services are met.

City councils can promote LED in many ways , for example , by acting as co-ordinator of cross-sectoral strategies for economic development , poverty alleviation ,creation of youth employment etc., as a facilitator , for example , by streamlining the development process ; and as a stimulator for example , by creating a data base for potential investors (both local and foreign) in the city.

City councils may also use some of its assets in form of land, buildings and equipment to raise finances and reduce its financial burden. Councils also need raise their profile through credit rating schemes such as Credit Reference Agency and get certification for credibility to enable them to get financing for development projects.

Strategic objectives

What are some of the envisaged strategic objectives which may assists new councils to create LED.

Strategies:

- To create employment
- To alleviate poverty
- To exploit opportunities
- To support new investment
- To support formal manufacturing sector
- To develop MSMEs
- To overcome institutional weakness
- To promote and practice democracy and good governance introducing more responsive and accountable governance practices and
- To facilitate the provision of sustainable basic services such health, water and sanitation, education etc.
- To mainstream cross-cutting issues (HIV/AIDS and Gender) in the operating environment and development

For each strategy objective need to develop specific objectives, target group, description, activities, responsible person/section of the action and key performances indicators. Performance indicators will assist to monitor progress and the performance on each action or activity.

The prioritisation of Action plans is based on but not limited to the following criteria

- Economic impact
- Availability of funding
- Capacity of the Human capital
- Revenue impact

Based on the Action plans prioritising and scheduling a detailed implementation programme can be developed. From the detailed programme the city council may further derive and develop the following items:

- a list of required skills and qualifications
- and Out-put based Job description inclusive of performance indicators
- Organisation structure example it may include an Economic Development and Research Unit (EDRU), GIS Unit etc.

The role of Politics, Resources and leadership

The performance of development programmes is influenced by more than quality of management. While management interventions are an important determinant of performance, political commitment and support, resource availability and the quality of programme leadership plays a critical role in facilitating successful outcomes.

All public decisions are in final analysis, political. Currently political will and commitment is seemingly there, and we need to see support of development programmes by government of the day. When a President, a Minister, Cabinet or other key groups which wield political power are seriously committed to a programme, many external and internal obstacles which normally constrain good performance can be removed or weakened. How a programme is set up tells us much about the political commitment behind it.

Local authorities need the capacity and political will to implement reforms and plans. Currently there is political will and support in many instances. For instance the President of the Republic of Zambia His Excellency Mr. Edgar Chagwa Lungu in his speech on the occasion of the Joint 63rd Annual Conference of the Local Government Association of Zambia and the 16th General Assembly of the alliance of Mayors and Municipal Leaders held at New Government Complex, Lusaka on 6th May, 2019 he stressed and I quote ***“As far as my Government is concerned, there is no alternative to decentralisation. This is a recipe for good and responsive governance.”***

In the implementation of the development programmes, there is a need to look for good leaders otherwise programmes will suffer.

The development programmes especially large ones need good leadership for some reasons:

- a) **Planning and initiation of new programmes require entrepreneurship thinking.** The

person picked to lead or manage a programme, therefore, should have entrepreneurial characteristics such as strategic vision, creativity, initiative and willingness to take risks and try out new solutions

- b) He or she should be capable of mediating between the political leaders and the environment of the programme on the one hand, and the programme’s administration on the other. The council is one the example of an institution which has such organisational dynamics.

The choice of the programme leader in institution such as the council is directly related to the degree of political commitment and support attracted by a programme. When top political leadership is strongly committed to a development programme, the search for a suitable leader will usually also be seriously undertaken. A person thus identified is more likely to enjoy the trust of the political leadership than the one selected routinely without active support from the top.

Political commitment, resources and leadership do not guarantee success. Nor can well-planned management interventions alone guarantee good performance, but only those programmes which have both good management and proper enabling conditions are likely to succeed.

Thus as seen above political commitment and support, resource availability and leadership are enabling conditions and their presence facilitates the contribution that management interventions can make to improved performance. When the basic national policies are in disarray, there is a shortage skilled human resource; financial resources are inadequate, lack of political commitment and support, the city council will have difficulties to get its programmes off the ground.

CONCLUSIONS

The main objective of this paper was to provide a review of strategies to serve as a reference for designing and implementing local authorities’ development programmes for fundamental basic public and improved service delivery.

In conclusion as stated above the creating of new districts by itself may not transform into improved service delivery, unless it is accompanied with a number of other things such as quality management, political commitment and support, resource availability and the quality of leadership. At this moment, Zambia as a country has inadequate human and financial

resources in local authorities .The quality of service delivered will also depend on how prudent the national policies such as decentralisation are efficiently and effectively implemented. There seems therefore an urgent need to have an open debate on how councils should be structured for improvement of service delivery from a non-partisan and a political manner.

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