Insights into the Governance and Management of Ward Development Committees in Zambia

Learning Paper

August 2023

Local Government Association of Zambia

Table of Contents

Preface

This publication, produced by the Local Government Association of Zambia (LGAZ) with support from GIZ, provides insights into the governance and management of Ward Development Committees (WDCs) in Zambia. It highlights key lessons from case studies and makes recommendations to address the challenges affecting the operations of WDCs.

WDCs have been established in all the 1,858 wards countrywide and are key to facilitating structured community participation as espoused in the Republican Constitution and key policy documents such as the National Decentralisation Policy. Community participation is at the core of actualising decentralisation.

Although similar in terms of their organisation structure and ascribed functions, WDCs' performance varies due to distinct approaches being adopted to streamline their operations. As such, understanding the different approaches and their implications is crucial especially in the quest for measures to enhance performance of WDCs.

Thus, the publication highlights useful insights from selected districts on the operations of WDCs focusing on community service, development coordination, leadership, economic empowerment, organisation of meetings and capacity building. It further highlights challenges and offers alternative measures to enhance the operations and performance of WDCs.

We hope that you will find the publication useful.

Mpatanji Namumba (Ms)
Executive Director

1.0   Introduction

The National Decentralisation Policy emphasises the importance of community participation in the development process. In this regard, the policy outlines specific measures to ensure enhanced citizen participation in national development. One such measure is the establishment of Ward Development Committees (WDCs) as sub-district structures which serve as legal platforms for people's participation in local development at ward level.

Community participation is at the core of decentralisation and local governance as it enables individuals or communities to assume responsibility for their welfare and contribute to the development of their communities. Oakley and Marsden (1987) described community participation as an active process whereby beneficiaries influence the direction and execution of development. Therefore, community participation enables the involvement of local people in the decision-making process and evaluation of development projects and is associated with empowerment and the respect for the use of local knowledge (Marsland, 2005).

Local government exists to enable people and communities at the local level manage their affairs. Its objective is accomplished when communities are involved in the governance process. Community participation is therefore important as it promotes accountability, transparency, and good governance. Where there is accountability, citizens would be able to hold their local leaders answerable for their decisions and actions.

The establishment and operationalisation of WDCs is therefore, crucial to promote community participation in the development process at ward level. The need to establish WDCs stems from the fact that, for sustainable development to be achieved, citizens should be given the opportunity to participate in planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of interventions meant to improve their well-being. This in turn promotes a sense of ownership of development programmes.

2.0   Legal Framework for Ward Development Committees (WDCs) in Zambia

The Local Government Act No. 2 of 2019 provides the legal framework for WDCs in Zambia. Section 36 prescribes the composition of WDCs as captioned below:

EXTRACT FROM THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT NO.2 OF 2019

PART V WARD DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

36. (1) There is established in each ward a Ward Development Committee in the area of a local authority consisting of the following part time members appointed by the Town Clerk or Council Secretary:

(a)   an elected zonal representative from each zone;

(b)   an extension officer from the department responsible for agriculture, fisheries and livestock or economic sectors appointed based on the economic activity predominant in the ward as determined by the local authority;

(c)   an extension officer from the department responsible for education;

(d)   an extension officer from the department responsible for health;

(e)   an extension officer from the department responsible for community development;

(f)   a representative from a local non governmental organisation in a ward;

(g)   a representative of the Zambia Agency for Persons with Disabilities;

(h)   a representative from a marginalised group;

(i)   a representative of the Chief in the ward;

(j)   Ward Councillor;

(k)   a trustee from the local authority;

(l)   a youth, sports and recreation focal point person; and

(m)   a gender focal point person.

The Act also prescribes the functions of WDCs which include:

37. The functions of a Ward Development Committee are to:

(a)   prepare annual ward development plans;

(b)   collect revenue, levies and fees on behalf of a local authority on appointment by resolution of the council;

(c)   monitor and evaluate ward development projects;

(d)   promote community engagement in ward development planning;

(e)   formulate and submit project list and budget proposals to the Constituency Development Fund Committee established under the Constituency Development Fund Act, 2018;

(f)   support research on an area of study for the advancement of the local community;

(g)   facilitate the identification of potential areas of investment and promote sustainable local economic development;

(h)   promote and participate in the co management of natural and trans-boundary resources between or among wards;

(i)   provide a forum for dialogue and coordination on ward development issues;

(j)   identify areas for capacity building within the ward;

(k)   promote and encourage village regrouping and urban renewal activities;

(l)   identify in the ward, and submit to the local authority, potential areas of revenue sources likely to broaden the revenue base of the local authority;

(m)   prudently manage resources allocated to the ward by the local authority in line with principles of public financial management;

(n)   manage and keep a record of resources allocated to the Ward Development Committee;

(o)   prepare quarterly reports on developmental activities within the ward to the appropriate committee of the local authority; and

(p)   develop and maintain a ward-based database as guided by the local authority

Further, Part V of the Act sets out procedures for dealing with vacancies and dissolution of the committees among others. The Act also provides that when formulating by-laws, the process should take into consideration submissions from WDCs. Further, section 4, of the Fourth Schedule states that: *A member of a Ward Development Committee who attends meetings and activities of the Ward Development Committee shall attend that meeting or activity on a voluntary basis and shall not be entitled to payment of any allowances or fees.* This implies that the work of WDCs has no monetary benefits.

3.0   Key Lessons

The following are some of the lessons learnt in the management and operations of WDCs in Zambia from sample districts:

3.1 *WDCs as Custodians of Information*

Community members and stakeholders should have easy access to WDC members as first point of contact at ward level. Community challenges relating to water, roads, crime, healthcare, natural disasters, dispute resolutions and others should be channelled through WDCs. As custodians of information on all development programmes being undertaken at ward level, WDCs should have first-hand information because it is at that level where solutions to local challenges are better formulated. Further, this improves project implementation and ownership which is key in sustaining such programmes beyond the project cycle.

Case Studies
In Livingstone, WDCs act as a liaison between the community and private companies that are engaged in solid waste management. They encourage community members to make prompt payments and check on service providers to ensure they are delivering to the satisfaction of the community. Similarly, in Choma, WDCs were engaged to sensitise their communities to participate in the 2022 Census of Population and Housing after the programme faced resistance in some communities. This intervention made it possible for census enumerators to do their work. Similarly, in Mporokoso, the local authority includes WDC members on their panel of presenters on radio when conducting sensitisation programmes. Sensitisation programmes have proved to be more effective when jointly conducted by the local authority and WDC members. This is because communities easily appreciate issues when explained to them by people they regularly interact with.

In Lusaka, WDCs played a fundamental role in mitigating the impact of floods which rocked parts of the city during the 2022/23 rainy season. For example, the WDC Chairperson for Kamwala Ward 5 stated that, "affected families would come to our homes even at night to report on floods. It was us who were providing the authorities with first-hand information for them to provide relief to the flood victims." As a result, some WDCs worked hand in hand with the Disaster Management and Mitigation Unit (DMMU), the District Commissioner (DC), Zambia National Service (ZNS), the local authority and the area Member of Parliament (MP) in responding to disasters caused by floods. Similarly, when the Zambezi plains experienced floods in Mongu, it was one of the WDC Chairpersons who reported the disaster to the DC's office and played an active role in management and mitigation efforts, such as recording names of affected families, surveillance of community needs as well as distribution of relief facilities to flood victims.

3.2 *WDCs as structures for coordinating community centred development programmes*

WDCs can effectively perform their coordination role when actively involved in all local development programmes. Further, local authorities play a key role in facilitating synergies at community level.

Case Studies
In Choma, the Ministry of Community Development and Social Welfare has set up a Social Protection Single Window Initiative, to enhance coordination among service providers and increase access to social protection services by bringing together a cross section of stakeholders. Each Ward in the District has a social protection single window committee which reports to the WDC. The initiative has helped curb duplication of effort and ensures efficient and effective use of scarce resources among stakeholders. As explained by a member of one WDC, "the single window comprises the Camp Agriculture Committee (CAC), Health Centre Committee, Parents Teachers Committee, Community Crime Prevention Unit, Ward Nutrition Committee, Community Welfare Assistance Committee (CWAC) and Church organisations among others. WDCs work hand

in hand with the single window and report to the Community Development Social Welfare Office on activities pertaining to the work of the forum. This has enabled us as WDCs to be actively involved in all developmental activities in our ward."

In Mbala, the District Planning Officer (DPO) had this to say, "we advise all Non-Governmental Organisation (NGOs) which come through the Council to involve WDCs in their work." Self Help Africa, the only active NGO we have in the district always engages WDCs when undertaking field work. Further, the local authority encourages line ministries during committee and Council meetings to incorporate WDCs in their community structures. This has culminated into active involvement of WDCs in activities of various government departments at ward level. As such, one WDC chairperson remarked: "We are always invited to all stakeholder meetings which take place in the ward, such as village meetings, health centre committee meetings and camp committee meetings under agriculture and others because we are well connected."

3.3 *Leadership experience in community and public service is a key success factor in managing WDCs*

WDCs Chairpersons and Secretaries who are retired from public service or those with experience in community work were more effective at managing affairs of WDC in terms of planning, coordinating, reporting, and directing their activities. In rural areas, the work of some WDCs is constrained by low levels of literacy and lack of leadership experience. In Mongu, the DPO observed that, "the performance of rural WDCs is generally poor, even when you train them, they struggle to discharge their duties. However, those in the urban area are more assertive when discharging their functions, they can easily engage stakeholders and lobby for development in their wards."

Case Studies
In Mporokoso, ex-official representatives of line ministries have been appointed as secretaries to improve operations of WDCs. They provide guidance in the identification of local needs and overall management of WDCs. The appointment

of civil servants as secretaries of WDCs was hailed by one WDC member who said, "we need a secretary who is able to take minutes and advise us on government operations." While one WDC Chairperson (a retired head teacher) in Mbala stated that, "to get into something, you must understand what it is and why you are doing it. My experience as a former teacher makes it easy for me to lead the WDC and connect with the community."

3.4 *WDCs as avenues for leveraging on existing social-economic opportunities.*

There are several opportunities existing in wards which once effectively utilised could change the lives of people. Tapping into such opportunities calls for proactiveness on the part of WDCs' understanding of key developments and establishing strategic partnerships with stakeholders operating within their respective wards.

Case study
In Chipangali Ward, the WDC engaged Kuma Investment Limited, a company mining granite, to support the community with construction of a bridge. Through this rapport, the company has constructed *Chamatunda* bridge. On the other hand, Kambule WDC in Mongu managed to secure a contract for community members to supply material for road construction to the company constructing the Mongu -Limulunga road.

Section 8 3.5 Engagement of WDCs in service delivery and income generating activities is key in sustaining their operations.

Empowering WDCs through various approaches such as service delivery creates income generating opportunities to sustain their operations. Further, this contributes to inclusive local development and job creation.

Case Studies
Mulamatila WDC in Petauke responded to a call for solid waste management by the local authority and was awarded the contract. The WDC Chairperson lauded the initiative when he said, "managing solid waste on behalf of the local authority has enabled our WDC to have

money. We have employed youths to participate in garbage collection and when the council pays us, we pay those we have employed." In Lusaka, the Chairperson for Nkholoma Ward 5 disclosed that his WDC was given a tractor by the local authority to use for garbage collection. However, due to mismanagement, the local authority withdrew the tractor. The significance of this venture to the WDC was underscored by the Chairperson when he revealed that, "the time we had the tractor and were managing garbage collection, our WDCs did not have a problem of money to manage our affairs. For example, we were able to attend to logistics for our members whenever they attended to WDC business." Based on this case study, it is important for WDCs to ensure prudent utilisation of resources availed to them.

3.5 Unused Council infrastructure can be used as offices for WDCs

To support the work of WDCs, Councils with unused infrastructure could consider availing such facilities to WDCs. Further, stakeholders could be approached to avail free space in their facilities, departments, organisations, or institution to support community work.

Case Studies
In Lusaka, old Council buildings dotted around the city have been allocated to WDCs as offices. The Chairperson for Munali ward mentioned that, "Lusaka City Council has several buildings which were built sometime back for various purposes. The Council has allocated this infrastructure to be used by WDCs in their respective wards." In the case of Chipangali, one community applied for construction of a WDC office from the community project component under CDF. The project was funded, and the building is nearing completion. While Mulamatila ward in Kaoma has been allocated office space by the area Member of Parliament (MP) at the national assembly constituency office.

3.6 Regular Capacity Building of WDCs enhances their operations

Collaboration between local authorities, NGOs, and donors is key to building the capacity of members of WDCs. The one-off orientation programmes which local authorities provide to WDC members are inadequate for them to effectively understand and discharge their diverse functions effectively. Networking with NGOs and cooperating partners can enable WDCs acquire skills through tailor made programmes which will enable them perform their duties with a measure of success.

Case Studies
In Mbala, members of WDCs have been trained as Community Champions in forest regeneration, out grower schemes, and cooperatives alongside other community members under the Transforming Livelihoods for Resilience and Development (TRALARD) project. Consequently, WDCs are now contributing to natural resource management as well as identifying potential areas of investment to curb climate change and promote sustainable local development. This was underscored by a member of the WDC when she said, "we were dormant as WDCs in matters of environmental management, before the TRALARD training, there was nothing we could do."

In Kaoma, WDCs have developed Ward Master Plans through skills acquired from working with Keeper Zambia and World Vision. In Livingstone, Namatama ward managed to develop a workplan and budget using the knowledge WDC members acquired by working with Environmental Africa. Further, WDCs in Southern province have been capacity built by GIZ in planning, monitoring and evaluation, budgeting, and records management among others. These are essential skills needed for WDCs to effectively perform their functions.

3.7 Effective approaches to organisation of zonal meetings

WDCs face logistical and geographical challenges in convening zonal meetings. As such, regrouping zones and streamlining the way meetings are conducted make it easy to engage with community members. These innovations avert the challenge for WDCs to cover long distances to hold meetings and helps foster identification of community projects with bigger impact.

Case Studies

In Lusaka, the WDC Chairperson for Munali ward explained that although the Ward has eleven (11) zones, they have clustered them into two (2) based on geographical locations for them to effectively hold meetings. This reduces on the distance to be covered by the WDC members. Similarly, in Chipangali Ward, villages are regrouped for purposes of holding zonal meetings and identification of CDF projects. One WDC Secretary observed that, "when each village submits a list of priorities, it reduces the chances of many people benefitting. Merging villages helps to reduce competition for scarce resources, ensures the benefits of CDF are spread and reduces complaints of not benefiting from the fund."

On the other hand, Batoka WDC in Choma has delegated the holding of zonal meetings to zonal leaders. Each zonal leader together with the WDC zonal representatives hold zonal meetings. Zonal Chairpersons in turn present minutes of their zonal meetings to the WDC through their zonal representatives. This approach has averted the difficulty for frequent meetings, as all zones in the ward simultaneously hold meetings on the same day. It also helps to instil confidence in zonal leaders by offering them an opportunity to preside over zonal meetings.

4.0 Challenges

4.1 *No legal provision for incentives*

Currently, there is no legal provision to facilitate the payment of remuneration to members of WDCs. This demotivates them to effectively perform their functions especially that they end up using their own resources to fulfil their roles. The increase in the amount of CDF has drastically increased their responsibilities and volume of work. A WDC representative in Mporokoso disclosed that, "people had other expectations beyond developmental when they were elected as WDC members. We looked forward to being compensated for the expenses we incur from our own meagre personal resources." Because of this unmet expectation, some WDCs rarely hold meetings. There is apathy among members such that it is difficult to form a quorum for the meeting to take place. In Livingstone, one WDC secretary lamented that, "we break the regulations for us to hold a meeting, members are resigning because of pressure of work." He also revealed that in some cases, the chairperson and secretary have literally been left to work on their own. In addition, the absence of offices for holding WDC meetings and storing ward documents and communications has proved to be difficult. As such, tracing reference documents for development programmes is impossible as office bearers keep such documents in their homes. In certain instances, meetings take place under trees. Once established, these offices will be utilized by WDCS including Ward Councillors, who are also using their homes for official work such as meeting members of their wards as well as storing documents, among others.

4.2 *Poor Communication between the local authority and WDCs*

Effective communication was cited as one of the major challenges between the local authorities and WDCs. As such, for communication to be effective it is important that both parties actively engage each other.

4.3 *Undue Political interference*

Undue Political interference by Members of Parliament and Councillors impede the work of WDCs. Some WDCs reported having bad working relations with their Members of Parliament. It was revealed that MPs wanted "their people" recommended for CDF projects at all costs. This created friction between the two. Further, although community members are supposed to submit CDF applications to WDCs, WDC chairpersons were sometimes forced to sign forms from the MP's office.

It was further revealed that there were poor working relations between some WDCs and Councillors. This requires harmonization to ensure a cordial atmosphere without which development efforts will be compromised.

4.4 *Lack of Training and Understanding of WDC Functions*

Most WDC members are only familiar with their CDF functions. However, when asked about other functions they are expected to perform besides CDF, one WDC member in Mporokoso said, "we only know of CDF. Even if we knew the other functions, we don't have the resources and appropriate training to enable us perform them." Consequently, WDC work has in most cases become synonymous with CDF. There are no reports or plans being submitted by most WDCs to local authorities except those to do with CDF.

5.0 Conclusion

WDCs are the link between local authorities and communities. To enhance their performance, some WDCs have adopted distinct approaches to community service, development coordination, leadership, economic empowerment, organisation of meetings and capacity building which have helped to streamline their operations. However, lack of training, poor information flow between WDCs and local authorities, lack of incentives and political interference are the major constraints impeding the effective functionality of WDCs.
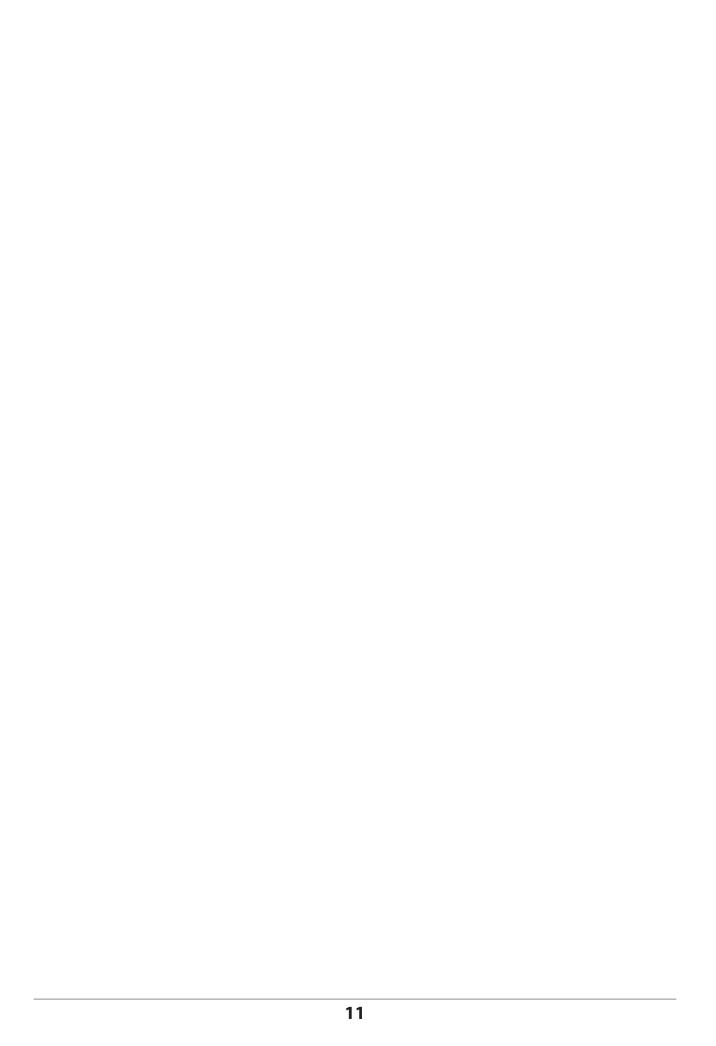
6.0 Recommendations

6.1. Local authorities should regularly train WDCs in all functional areas stipulated in the Local Government Act as a way of enhancing their capacities. In view of the limitations in resources, the trainings could be conducted twice annually in collaboration with stakeholders. Once trained, such members would serve as resource persons in the operations of WDCs way beyond their term of office.

6.2 The Single window service delivery model should be encouraged in all wards to enable WDCs effectively coordinate development.

6.3 To enhance feedback mechanism, a special desk officer at local authority level, should be established to be the link between the local authority and WDCs. The desk officer should work closely with the Public Relations Unit as the Institutional Spokesperson to facilitate timely dissemination of relevant information to members of the public.

6.4 WDCs should be encouraged to run income generating activities to sustain their operations.

6.5 In line with Article 148 (2) of the Republican Constitution, WDCs should be provided with adequate resources to perform their functions.

References

1. *Government of the Republic of Zambia Constitution (Amendment) Act No. 2 of 2016.*
2. *Government of the Republic of Zambia, the Local Government Act, 2019*
3. *Ministry of Local Government and Housing, 2012. Guidelines on the Establishment Management and Operation of Ward Development Committees (WDC), Lusaka: Decentralisation Secretariat (Planning Section).*

Local Government Association of Zambia
Independence Avenue, Civic Centre, 4th Floor, New Wing
P.O. Box 33718
Lusaka, Zambia
Tel/Fax: +260 211 256766
Website: www.lgazambia.org.zm