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ISTANBUL AYDIN UNIVERSITY

INSTITUTE OF GRADUATE STUDIES

CITIZEN PARTICIPATION IN LOCAL GOVERNANCE - A CASE STUDY OF THE BLANTYRE DISTRICT, MALAWI

MASTER'S THESIS

Ibrahim YASSIN

Department Of Political Science And International Relations

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September, 2022

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APPROVAL PAGE

DECLARATION

I hereby declare with respect that the study "Cıtızen Partıcıpatıon In Local Governance - A Case Study Of The Blantyre Dıstrıct, Malawı", which I submitted as a Master thesis, is written without any assistance in violation of scientific ethics and traditions in all the processes from the Project phase to the conclusion of the thesis and that the works I have benefited are from those shown in the Bibliography. (.../.../20...)

Ibrahim YASSIN

FOREWORD

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my Father for his ongoing support and to my Mother who could not see this thesis completed. I am grateful to my sister Yasmeen for always being there for me, my cousin Fazeerah for the help she rendered to me during this study, and my brother Ishmael for his encouragement throughout the research process.

Finally, I want to express my gratitude to my supervisor, Dr. NESLIŞAH, for providing me with guidance and enabling me to complete my study.

September 2022   Ibrahim YASSIN

CITIZEN PARTICIPATION IN LOCAL GOVERNANCE – A CASE STUDY OF THE BLANTYRE DISTRICT, MALAWI

ABSTRACT

The government of Malawi is using decentralization as a strategy to speed up development and alleviate poverty. To accomplish this, local participation structures such as Village Development Committees (VDC) and Area Development Committees (ADC) were established to increase Citizen participation and facilitate a demand-driven approach to development.

This research examined the effectiveness of VDCs and ADCs in Decentralization. The study examined the methods of citizen participation in Malawi and analyzed the awareness levels and attitudes of citizens in the rural areas of the Blantyre district. It assessed the roles of citizens in influencing participation in local governance through the local development fund (LDF) and Community development fund (CDF) projects.

The study employed qualitative research methods to acquire and analyze data. Document review, semi-structured interviews with key informants, and focus group discussions were used to collect data.

The study reveals that the decentralization process has encountered several challenges in terms of representation, implementation of accountability, and mobilization of local citizens to participate in the decision-making process. Citizens in the rural areas of the Blantyre district are not empowered by the district council to demand transparency and accountability from duty bearers. As a result, the ADC and VDC lack the autonomy to act as guardians of development or to foster citizen participation. Factors such as the lack of capacity of citizens, lack of adequate project funding, the politicization of development projects, and the undesirable attitude of elected leaders have contributed to the poor implementation of decentralization reforms. Overall, therefore, the study recommends that all

development institutions reorient their decentralization efforts to support effective local governance.

YEREL YÖNETİMDE HALKIN KATILIMI – Malavi, BLANTYRE BÖLGESİNDE BİR VAKA ÇALIŞMASI.

ÖZET

Malavi hükümeti, yerelleşmeyi kalkınmayı hızlandırmak ve yoksulluğu azaltmak için bir strateji olarak kullanıyor. Bunu başarmak için, Vatandaş katılımını artırmak ve kalkınmaya talep odaklı bir yaklaşımı kolaylaştırmak için Köy Geliştirme Komiteleri (VDC) ve Alan Geliştirme Komiteleri (ADC) gibi yerel katılım yapıları kurulmuştur.

Bu araştırma, VDC'lerin ve ADC'lerin Adem-i Merkeziyetçilikteki etkinliğini inceledi. Çalışma Malavi'deki vatandaş katılım yöntemlerini incelemiş ve Blantyre ilçesinin kırsal alanlarındaki vatandaşların farkındalık düzeylerini ve tutumlarını analiz etmiştir. Yerel kalkınma fonu (LDF) ve Topluluk kalkınma fonu (CDF) projeleri aracılığıyla vatandaşların yerel yönetime katılımı etkilemedeki rollerini değerlendirdi.

Çalışma, verileri elde etmek ve analiz etmek için nitel araştırma yöntemlerini kullanmıştır. Veri toplamak için doküman incelemesi, kilit bilgi kaynaklarıyla yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmeler ve odak grup tartışmaları kullanılmıştır.

Çalışma, ademi merkeziyetçilik sürecinin temsil, hesap verebilirliğin uygulanması ve yerel vatandaşların karar alma sürecine katılmaları için seferber edilmesi açısından çeşitli zorluklarla karşılaştığını ortaya koymaktadır. Blantyre bölgesinin kırsal kesimlerindeki vatandaşlar, bölge konseyi tarafından yükümlülük sahiplerinden şeffaflık ve hesap verebilirlik talep etme yetkisine sahip değildir. Sonuç olarak, ADC ve VDC, kalkınmanın koruyucuları olarak hareket etme veya vatandaş katılımını teşvik etme özerkliğinden yoksundur. Vatandaşların kapasitesinin olmaması, yeterli proje finansmanının olmaması, kalkınma projelerinin siyasallaşması ve seçilmiş liderlerin istenmeyen tutumu gibi faktörler ademi merkeziyetçilik reformlarının yetersiz uygulanmasına katkıda bulunmuştur. Bu

nedenle, genel olarak, çalışma tüm kalkınma kurumlarının yerelleşme çabalarını etkin yerel yönetişimi desteklemek için yeniden yönlendirmelerini tavsiye etmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Ademi merkeziyetçilik, İyi Yönetişim , Yerel Kalkınma, Yerel Yönetim, Vatandaş Katılımı, Yoksulluğun Azaltılması,

TABLE OF CONTENT

ABBREVIATIONS

ACB : Anti-Corruption Bureau

ADC : Area Development Committee

AEC : Area Executive Committee

CDF : Constituency Development Fund

DC : District Commissioner

DCT : Development Communications Trust

DDC : District Development Committee

DDF : District Development Fund

DDF : District Development Fund

DEC : District Executive Committee

FGD : Focus Group Discussion

IMF : International Monetary Fund

LDF : Local Development Fund

MASAF : Malawi Social Action Fund

MCP : Malawi Congress Party

MLGRD : Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development

MP : Member of Parliament

NGO : Non-Governmental Organization

NICE : National Initiative for Civic Education

T/A : Traditional Authority

UDF : United Democratic Front

USAID : U.S. Agency for International Development

VAP   : Village Action Plans

VDC   : Village Development Fund

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

I.   INTRODUCTION

Malawi, historically Nyasaland, is a landlocked country in Southeast Africa that shares borders with Tanzania to the north, Zambia to the west, and Mozambique to the south, and east. Lake Malawi is Africa's third-largest lake, and it stretches along the majority of Malawi's eastern border. The country is divided into 28 districts that are grouped into three regions: north, central (where Lilongwe, the capital, is located), and southern. Malawi covers an area of 118,484 km2 (45,747 sq mi) and has a population of 19,4 million people (2022).

Malawi has been in multi-party politics for about three decades. Malawians exerted tremendous pressure on Dr. Kamuzu Banda's leadership after years of one-party rule. Malawi's embryonic democracy has had a winding road to consolidation. In certain areas, significant progress has been made, while in others, substantial obstacles remain. Overall, Malawians have been able to resolve political conflicts through constitutional methods, unlike in other African countries where contestation for state control has devolved into brutal military conflict (Chirwa, 2009).

The government of Malawi has implemented structural and economic reforms to achieve economic growth. Despite this, the country remains one of the world's least developed countries, with an economy based primarily on agriculture. With a per capita GDP of $340, the country is third among the world's poorest nations (NSO, 2018). Approximately 39% of Malawi's population, according to statistics from the government of Malawi (GoM, 2015), is considered to be living in poverty (below USD 1.75). Subsistence farming is practiced by almost 80% of the country's population. Due to economic problems, the poor country is forced to rely heavily on foreign aid to meet its development goals. Climate shocks such as floods, heavy rains, and drought are also a threat to the country ("overview," Nov 23, 2021, para 3). Malawi has one of the highest HIV prevalence rates in the world, with a rate of 9 percent, according to the World Health Organization (WHO). As a result, the labor force has shrunk, while government spending has increased.

Figure 1 Showing map of Malawi

Source: Nations online website. Retrieved from https://www.nationsonline.org/oneworld/map/malawi-administrative-map.htm (Accessed March 18th, 2022).

For over a century, Malawians lived in a closed community. The colonial period which lasted for seventy years (1891-1961) was immediately followed by a one-party system of government that lasted for thirty years (1961-1993). After attaining independence in 1964, the country experienced one of the stiffest and most internationally secluded dictatorships in Africa. During this period, opposition politics were not permitted and there was no space for independent civil society organizations. All aspects of political life were controlled by the Malawi Congress Party (MCP). Democratic elections did not take place between 1961 and 1994 (Chirwa, 2014:3). Dr. Hastings Kamuzu Banda of The Malawi Congress Party dominated and ruled the country with an iron fist until 1993. Msewa (2005:1, Chirwa, 2000:93, *Africa Watch*), asserts that the country had one of the most oppressive governments in Eastern, Central, and Southern Africa. Magolowondo (n.d.), describes the 30 years of Banda's leadership as the most severe dictatorial period Malawians had to deal with after attaining independence from the British in 1964. The constitution of Malawi declared Banda life president in 1971, and any

force deemed as opposing his leadership was faced with political prosecutions and detentions without trial. Political activists were forced into exile. The authoritarian rule ended in May 1994 following a referendum that took place in 1993, and Bakili Muluzi of the United Democratic Front (UDF) assumed power as the first democratically10497159 elected President of the Republic. Malawi's political landscape has changed dramatically since the introduction of multi-party democracy and the passage of a new constitution based on participatory democracy ideals. There have been several steps taken to consolidate and institutionalize the newly attained political freedom. Chirwa (2009:19), acknowledges that the country has undertaken efforts through decentralization to improve governance as part of enhancing the democratization process.

Malawi's Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development articulates the government is committed to decentralizing political and administrative authority to the local level as part of the country's democratic consolidation process and as a strategy for achieving the country's development goal of poverty eradication (MLGRD, n.d.). The government of Malawi passed the Local Government Act (LGA) and a National Decentralization Policy (NDP) in 1998. According to Chirwa (2009), these two documents laid the political and legal groundwork for the devolution of power from the central government to local government units. The local government legislation united the district councils and the district administration into a new local authority structure called the district assembly (Chirwa, 2014:20). Therefore, the responsibility of promoting local participatory democracy falls under the assemblies through community representatives. Malawi has 39 single-tier local authorities (councils), including 1 municipal council, 4 city councils, 28 district councils (mostly rural), and 1 town council. The average population per district is 320,000, with the capital city of Lilongwe having the largest district at about 1,122,000 people (2022). Blantyre, which has a population of about 809,397 (2022) is the largest city assembly. There is one councilor (representative) from each of the 462 wards in the nation in each assembly. In addition to elected voting members, councils have non-voting members (ex-officio), such as local traditional leaders and national assembly members, whose constituents are represented by the local council.

In a quest to achieve good governance and enhance service delivery, development actors such as Non-Governmental Organizations have rolled out projects aimed at mobilizing communities and building the capacity of citizens to empower them to demand transparency and accountability from duty bearers. Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) have developed parallel structures in a deliberate attempt to enhance the attainment of sustainable development and promote active citizenship as the central government through councils is not doing enough. With funding from international donors such as USAID, UNDP, OXFAM, and UNESCO, the Nonprofits have embarked on a mission to empower citizens to actively perform their citizenship. The organizations operate in rural areas where demands for public services are high and citizens feel excluded from local decision-making processes. Among organizations working closely with the local communities in rural areas of Malawi is Development Communications Trust (DCT). DCT is a non-profit organization in the area that focuses on development communication, community awareness outreach campaigns, and active citizenship in influencing governance issues on service delivery. The organization was registered under the Trustees Act of the Malawi government in May 2008. DCT is governed by a Board of Trustees and has a well-qualified and skilled staff, which are experienced in community mobilization for action and behavior change communication strategies through the use of a rights-based approach framework. Radio Listening Clubs, which are community-based structures, are used to carry out the organization's projects. These structures are parallel to the government's established VDC and ADC. DCT currently has over 600 Radio Listening Clubs spread across Malawi. DCT works with rural communities to empower them to demand transparency and accountability from public service providers. The organization employs a system known as Development Through Radio (DTR), which involves satellite community groups known as Radio Listening Clubs (RLCs) that lead their communities in demanding development from service providers and overseeing the initiative's implementation. RLCs are trained by DCT officers who also provide technical support. The majority of the project's outcomes are in the areas of infrastructure, agriculture, health, fair trade practices, and other forms of economic empowerment.

In 2017, I worked as an intern with the DCT team, performing the tasks of a field officer in the Blantyre district of Malawi. During this period, I noticed with

grave concern that community members in the district lacked a basic understanding of how the local government system works. The citizens demonstrated that they were unaware that the government collects money from them through taxes to be used for development projects in their areas. This was unacceptable to me because I believe that Citizens are supposed to have a fair share of knowledge concerning how the local development process works. Under decentralization, every district council has a budget that allocates the revenues collected from citizens through rents to constituencies, to enable the facilitation of development projects through funds such as the Local Development Fund (LDF) and the Community Development Fund (CDF).

A. Background of the Study

According to the Malawi Guidebook on Local Government System, decentralization is defined as the process by which the central government gradually delegates some of its political power, duties, and financial resources to local governments. Local governments are given the ability and resources to deliver vital services in regions under their control through this process (Malawi Government, 2013). Hussein (2005:33-34) defines decentralization as the movement of authority and power to plan, make decisions, and manage resources from the top to the bottom levels of an organizational structure to allow efficient and effective service delivery. Hussein highlights that the procedure not only gives local governments the authority to receive and handle financial resources from the central government but also to mobilize their resources as well. However, studies have shown that the decentralization process in Malawi has not been implemented as it was originally intended. Chinsinga (2005), reveals some of the root causes that have led to the seeming lack of conclusive progress in the implementation of decentralization policy reforms as follows: First, there has been a failure to build and institutionalize participatory structures at the local level to act as means for representation, participation, and accountability, as they have mostly just existed on paper. Second, there is widespread tension and conflict among key political actors at the local level, such as councilors, chiefs, and Members of Parliament (MPs), eclipsing the prospects of the poor and marginalized sections of the population of transforming decentralization policy reforms into channels of power and influence (Ed & Ed,

2008:75).

In general, scholars agree that the building of decentralized institutions is not enough to ensure long-term development. Msewa (2005:7) states that when it comes to decentralization, much emphasis has been placed on increasing the ability of district councils to perform their tasks, whereas the capacity of ordinary citizens at the grassroots to engage in decision-making processes through the participatory structures has been overlooked. He believes that there is a great need to build the capacity of citizens at the local level for them to have a positive impact on the development processes. Msewa stresses that active and effective citizen participation is an important component of democratic governance because well-informed citizens make sensible decisions that assist their communities in finding answers to everyday difficulties. According to Bahrami (2019), Institutionalized information exchange, consultation, dialogue, representation, volunteering, questioning, and monitoring are all kinds of citizen participation. However, in Malawi, the chasm between the electorate and elected officials continues to widen, owing to the government's failure to provide citizens with basic goods and services, as well as discriminatory governance policies.

This study, therefore, aimed to assess the ways of citizen participation in Malawi, as well as the levels of awareness and attitudes of citizens in the Blantyre district. The study's objective was to identify variables that stifle citizen participation in local governance. The study also sought to determine the role of citizens in influencing development projects in local governance through the Community Development Fund (CDF) and Local Development Fund (LDF). In Malawi, the LDF plays a critical role in promoting participatory democracy. It is the primary source of discretionary financing for community development. The fund intends to promote local governance and development management, as well as reduce poverty and improve service delivery, by allowing local populations to participate in decision-making processes (Neil & Cammack, 2014).

It is necessary to examine citizen awareness and attitudes in rural areas because recognizing and comprehending the variables that impede citizen participation in local governance will enable me to suggest some solutions to the problem. Indeed, we can only give practical remedies to an issue after we've completed some kind of diagnosis.

According to data, and my experience working with the local citizens of the Blantyre district in the area of Traditional Authority (T/A) Kuntaja, indeed, there is a lack of capacity and awareness among the local populace. For one, I observed that governance failures stem from the council as citizens are not empowered to participate in community development projects. Revelations of various studies have demonstrated that there is weak communication between the Blantyre city council and city residents. For instance, the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-HABITAT, 2011:16), observed that there is no service charter in the Blantyre district which has resulted in the lack of accountability by the council in the delivery of public services. On the other hand, citizens fail to demand transparency and accountability from the councils as they are not aware of their rights to do so. I conducted initial interviews with several individuals in the community with this early knowledge in mind. It was after I concluded these interviews that I discovered that prominent heads, members of the Village Development Committees (VDCs), and Chiefs had minimal knowledge of how the Local Development Fund (LDF) is used in their area. Other members of the community demonstrated they did not know that the government collects money from citizens through value-added taxes, and reallocate the same money to the council as grants and funds to be used for development projects in the district. Indeed, these are concrete proofs that there is a lack of capacity and awareness by locals on decentralization and the role they have in influencing local development in their areas.

I performed another round of interviews and observed the situation of members of other communities in the area to confirm the information acquired during the initial interviews and observations. On the one hand, I found out that citizens were affected by political decisions made by elected leaders such as members of parliament. My observations confirm remarks of a report by UN-HABITAT (2011:15), that some of the improper decisions being made come as a result of Political interference in technical matters. Other studies have also shown that politicians capitalize on the knowledge gap local citizens have on the guidelines, the use and allocation, and expenditures of public funds. Based on their political interests, politicians decide to allocate funds to areas where they enjoy popular support. This has created *Client-patron relationships* that have shaped the social contract between the state and society in Malawi. According to Chirwa (2014:35),

Malawi is one of the world's least developed countries, with a big population of extremely poor people. He states that political participation in Malawi is impacted negatively as people are vulnerable to political patronage**.**

Given the above discussion, it is evident that there are indeed citizens in the rural areas of the Blantyre district who are experiencing challenges hindering them from participating in local governance. As illustrated by Jütting et al., (2011:5), good governance, participation, and efficiency of public service delivery can be significant variables for eradicating extreme poverty. Therefore, we can conclude that lack of effective citizen participation and awareness of citizens in local governance has negatively affected the stride to achieving good governance and the enhancement of quality public service delivery in the district. Again, it is for this reason that I attempted to determine the lived experience of residents in the rural area of the Blantyre district who appear to be constrained from participating in the LDF-funded development activities.

B. Objectives of the Study

The study analyzed the various methods of citizen participation and looked into the levels of awareness and attitudes of local citizens in the rural Blantyre district. Citizen participation is frequently regarded as an essential component of democracy. Many scholars argue that citizen participation through decentralization improves the quality of democracy, the quality-of-service delivery, as well as poverty reduction. In the Blantyre district, this study looked into the possibility of these claims for local participatory structures. The study aimed to learn more about citizen participation through VDCs and ADCs in project identification, implementation, and monitoring. It also attempted to answer questions about the CDF's and LDF's use and efficacy.

C. Research Questions

The study will try to find answers to the following question:

i. What is the effect of decentralization on post-colonial countries?

ii. How effective are the CDFs and LDFs in facilitating development?

iii. How effective are sub-district structures; VDC and ADC in enhancing citizen

participation and local development?

D. Significance of The Study

Most democratized nations, including Malawi, place a lot of emphasis on decentralization. Many Scholars share the belief that decentralization and active citizen participation in planning and monitoring of development projects may contribute to both local and national development, thus reducing poverty. Bessette (2004:17), emphasizes the difference between participation and consultation. According to him, citizens ought to be active in recognizing development issues, developing answers, and deciding how to put those solutions into action. In his view, participation will to some extent promote good governance and improve public-service delivery. However, the success of decentralization depends on the ability of institutions to follow guidelines, and in the case of Malawi, the ability of sub-structures such as VDC and ADC to function effectively in service delivery. There is a ton of literature about decentralization in general that focuses on its principles, successes, and difficulties. Additionally, more research has been done to assess how well the district councils have functioned during a specific period. However, very little data exists regarding the precise effectiveness of local structures in promoting decentralization and citizen participation. This study thus helps close the information gap that is currently present. There is optimism that the data collected in this research will be crucial for decision-making in government and civil society organizations. The VDCs, ADCs, District Councils, government departments, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), and citizens who will access this document or part of the information, will benefit from the results of this study. This is to make sure that VDCs and ADCs perform better and/or work more effectively, especially in the targeted districts. The information gathered from this research will also draw useful conclusions for relevant policymakers concerning designing changes to streamline the LDF and CDF management and utilization to enhance development.

E. Geographical Scope of the Study

According to Simon & Goes (2013:1), The parameters under which a study will be operating are referred to as the scope of the study. The study was conducted in the Blantyre district. Initial interviews were conducted in the areas of Chileka and

Machinjiri. According to Development Communications Trust, these are areas where citizens have a knowledge gap and lack empowerment. It is for this reason that DCT in partnership with Local Government Accountability and Performance (LGAP) implemented a social accountability project called making local government work for citizens - *'Tichitepo Kanthu.'* I worked for DCT as a field officer intern in these areas.

F.   Limitation of the Study

As a study, it must be viewed in light of some limitations. Firstly, financial restrictions prevented me from selecting a large sample because it was difficult to finance the many costs associated with data gathering. The initial interviews were conducted during a period Malawi was heading toward elections. As such, any gathering was deemed political and attracted mixed reactions from respondents. Because the information gathered was related to government performance and elected officials' behavior, it was expected that some respondents would refuse to provide complete information. The respondents, therefore, were informed of the anonymity of the information provided to encourage participation and honesty. Finally, several of the interviewees were unwilling to be questioned due to the innovative Covid-19.

G.   Operational Definitions

There are a few terminologies and statements used in this study that require some clarification. Therefore, the following concepts, words, or phrases are defined in this study:

1.   Local Government

According to Chandler (2002), in Britain, local governments refer to authorities established by the national assembly (Parliament) to provide a range of specific services and represent the general needs or demands of an area under the jurisdiction of a locally elected council. Bailey (1999:5), defines local governments as a "means of accommodating pluralistic views within society." Local government in Malawi refers to the branch of government that is closest to the people and where elected officials have specific authority over predetermined territories (Chiweza, n.d)

2. District Council

According to Cloete (1993:45-46, Hussein, 2017:3223), District councils, also known as local government authorities in Malawi, are important organs or entities in the local government system, with significant fiscal rights, including the ability to set their budget, levy taxes, collect fees for services delivered, and incur debt. Councils aid in the delivery of public services, the mobilization of local resources, and the absorption of local knowledge and priority demands into policy formation and local development planning implementation.

3. Ward Councilors

Every Local Government Area (LGA) in Malawi is divided into numerous smaller areas (wards), each of which elects a delegate to represent them at council sessions. A ward councilor is a member of the council who represents a ward in local government (Malawi Government, 2013).

4. Traditional Authorities (T/As)

Chirwa (2014:23), states that T/As are "Managers of customary land, custodians of customary law, and guardians of tradition and culture." They are in charge of development projects and chair Area Development Committees (ADCs). The T/As are local leaders who have a great deal of power over their constituents, mobilizing them to participate in development activities.

5. Group Village Headman (GVH)

Is an intermediary between traditional authorities and village headmen and their main role is to facilitate various forms of administrative transactions for the T/As over their respective areas.

6. Village Development Committees (VDCs)

The VDC, which is a structure closest to the grassroots in Malawi, is a committee made up of members from a village or group of villages. It enables easy project identification and implementation at the village level (Malawi Government, 2013).

7. Area Development Committees (ADCs)

The local Government system Guidebook in Malawi defines the ADC as a sub-district structure that operates under the jurisdiction of a Traditional Authority (T/A) and represents all VDCs in their area (Malawi Government, 2013:38).

H. Composition of The Study

The first Chapter states the background of the study, objectives of the study, research questions, significance of the study, scope, and limitations of the study, as well as operational definitions of terms used in the study.

The second Chapter offers the study a conceptual and theoretical framework to develop a greater grasp of the conceptual and theoretical elements within which decentralization is explored. The chapter gives a general background to the decentralization process in southern Africa and examines all aspects of the complex idea of decentralization, which contributes to the eradication of poverty. It shows how decentralization, through local governance, promotes the eradication of poverty.

The third chapter presents a broad overview of the institutional frameworks for local governance in Malawi and the Blantyre District, as well as the roles played by various local government entities. The chapter provides examples of how the grassroots are doing concerning the decentralization policy's goals.

The fourth Chapter looked at how decentralization reforms affected the Blantyre District's efforts to promote effective local governance. It gives information on the state of local governance at the local level as well as the many forces that affect or shape it. Through cross-references, the chapter also relates theory to practice in the case study. The outcomes are then examined and explained.

The last Chapter summarizes the research findings and new themes that emerged in the study. It makes inferences and recommendations for improvement. The Chapter also suggests areas for further research.

II.   DECENTRALIZATION IN THE AFRICAN CONTEXT

This chapter presents the conceptual controversies that surround the concept of decentralization which is in tandem with the topic at hand. The purpose of evaluating these concepts is to provide a general framework for comprehending and assessing the research findings. Furthermore, the chapter justifies the use of these ideas and notions by demonstrating their relevance and applicability to the current research.

A. The Concept of Decentralization

Decentralization is the gradual transfer of some of the central government's political power, responsibilities, and financial resources to local governments. Local governments are given the ability and resources to deliver vital services in regions under their control through this process (Malawi Government, 2013). Decentralization is also defined as the transfer of planning, decision-making, and resource management authority and power from higher to lower levels of the organizational structure to allow efficient and effective service delivery (Hussein, 2005). It allows local governments the authority to not only collect and manage financial resources from the central government but also to raise their resources. According to Meinzen-dick et al. (2008:1), three main categories of decentralization can be recognized, based on the specific functions being transferred from central government authorities: Administrative decentralization delegates administrative procedures to local entities; political decentralization delegates electoral and legislative authority to the periphery; while fiscal decentralization delegates both resources and responsibility for government service financing to local entities (Kobusingye, 2014:5).

B. Types of Decentralization

Issa (2004:5), mentions that there are four types of decentralization chosen by governments depending on the scope, nature, and purpose of decentralization they

envisage. The author states that often these models are found together in various mixes. He points out that some governments have used all four types, simultaneously or at different times, while some began with one model and later shifted to another.

1. Deconcentration

Is the transfer of functions and resources from the center to local level units within the same administrative structure while the center retains control. The district education offices or district health offices in Malawi, which were responsible for carrying out Central Government educational or health policies at the district level before the 1998 decentralization policy, are examples of such a branch of the central government. Members of staff in the district offices are answerable to their respective ministries at the central headquarters in this case, and the parent ministry has the final say in all decisions.

2. Devolution

Is the transfer of functions, resources, and power to the community level through legal or constitutional provisions. It is the most comprehensive kind of decentralization, and it entails the transfer of responsibilities and authority to local autonomous government entities.

3. Delegation

Is the process by which the government assigns specified functions to an organization for a limited time. Examples in Malawi would be the University of Malawi, the Agricultural Development and Marketing Corporation (ADMARC), the Electricity Supply Commission of Malawi (ESCOM), the Malawi Housing Corporation (MHC), the Malawi Telecommunications Limited, and all entities with the registration number denoted by the letters SC (statutory corporations). Most of the time, the services that these organizations offer are beneficial public services that could neither be operated effectively by the Central Government itself nor affordably by the private sector.

4. Privatization

Is the process through which the government transfers or relinquishes control of state-owned enterprises to private companies.

C. Advocates for Decentralization

Decentralization has been called for by donors and development partners in developing countries as a key aspect of increasing community participation and enhancing local development, hence encouraging poverty reduction from the bottom up (Jütting et al., 2011). Romeo (n.d.), expresses that for over two decades the international community (EC Commission, 2001; UNDP, 1997; UNDP, 2002; World Bank and IMF, 2006) has pushed for democratic decentralization as a model for achieving "good governance." According to the author, these powerful organizations' guiding ideas include the concept of decentralization and reform as critical components of accomplishing development goals. Furthermore, it is often believed that decentralization will improve accountability by bringing service providers and recipients of public goods closer together. (Canare, 2021). When service providers are close to the grassroots, the author contends, it is simpler to monitor and hold them accountable for their decisions than when the responsibility for providing service and making decisions rests solely with the center. According to Bloch et al., (2012), the 'decentralization theorem', is of the view that it is more efficient when public goods are provided by the local government than when provided by the central government.

D. Critiques Against Decentralization

Even though the concept of Decentralization was embraced by many African Nations, some observations conclude that it has not always produced desirable results for participatory democracy and poverty reduction. For instance, Issa (2004:1), believes that decentralization is not a static concept as it changes according to the conditions existing in a particular country or according to the aim it purports to serve. Decentralization, he believes, was used throughout colonization to make people governable by convincing them that they were in charge of themselves. He states further that attaining independence within many African countries saw a transformation of the purpose of decentralization. The author argues that in some countries, decentralization aims at empowering the people at the grass-root level, while in others, the restructuring of local government to remove the racial basis of governance and turn it into a vehicle for societal integration and resource transfer from the wealthy to the poor. In addition, research findings of Ejobowah (2015:2),

who when answering the question; 'what have been the consequences of decentralization processes in Africa,?' revealed that decentralization may have helped in stabilizing and maintaining several African regimes where maintaining power may have been unpredictable in the absence of decentralization. He argues that "In other cases, decentralization could be helping to establish certain ruling parties in power, especially in dominant party systems." Based on these findings, the author contends that decentralization in many African nations exhibits a contradiction: it can either enhance or consolidate national-level actors while causing a minimal change in local government. Similarly, data from a study by Jütting et al., (2011) call into doubt the premise that decentralization can be used to combat poverty. According to the authors, an examination of the experiences of 19 developing nations shows that the influence of decentralization on poverty is not easy. The study revealed that decentralization and its usefulness as a tool for eradicating extreme poverty vary distinctly between poor nations on the one side and emerging economies on the other. The study further states that countries that fail to deliver expected goods and services are at risk as decentralization may increase poverty rather than reduce it. Only a country that fully commits to the devolution of authority from central to lower government entities, according to the author, will be successful in promoting participation and service delivery. According to an article by Hussein (2005:34), despite the widespread adoption of decentralization, critics argue that it can be parochial, inequitable, and unconcerned about the privileges and exploitation built into local power structures and that it ignores the possibility that local economic power holders can dominate local institutions and perpetuate oppression (Smith, 1985: 137).

E.   An Overview of Decentralization in Africa

According to the assertions of Ejobowah (2015:1), After the end of the cold war, Decentralization was adopted by African countries and became one of the leading political reforms in many parts of the continent. It is assumed that decentralization has been undertaken (at least in the name) in more African countries than anywhere else in the world. The current wave of decentralization processes in Sub-Saharan Africa has a variety of political and economic drivers (De Muro et al, 1998). For instance, there were internal demands for devolution of power in

countries such as Uganda and Burkina Faso. Decentralization was also required in South Africa due to the necessity to redress racial inequities that occurred during the apartheid era. The National Party and the Inkatha Freedom Party in South Africa were in favor of decentralization. There was a pressing need to bring about social reform that would empower previously marginalized individuals and communities in the country (Personal & Archive, 2009). The same applied to Zimbabwe, a country that was largely dictated by the racially-based land division system that favored whites (Issa, 2004).

Devas (2005:2) draws attention to the fact that decentralization was implemented differently in African nations compared to other continents such as Europe. As a response to the shortcomings of the centralized state over the preceding forty years, there was a genuine demand for local democratic control and autonomy across central and eastern Europe in the early 1990s. On the other hand, international organizations like the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) pushed for its introduction in various Asian and African nations. The economic justifications for decentralization, which frequently align with the neo-liberal aim of lowering the power of the central state, have the support of these organizations concerned with the inability of central governments to provide services effectively and combat poverty. In exchange for donor aid, the World Bank and other donor organizations like the International Monetary Fund (IMF), or the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), have promoted and even required decentralization in several countries in Asia and Africa. Malawi is included in the list of countries. Decentralization also resulted from political reform demands put forth by former colonial powers like France in all French-speaking nations. As a result, decentralization in Africa has experienced a range of outcomes, both positive and negative.

Decentralization has been seen and at times pushed by donors and developing country governments as a way to achieve several objectives in recent years as foreign investment flows, particularly from China, returned to Africa. These objectives prioritize democratization, social and economic advancement, and the stabilization of new or existing governing regimes (Connerley, Eaton, and Smoke 2010; USAID 2009). These objectives are ideals and are occasionally more rhetorical than they are faithfully achieved in fact by donors or governments. An exception can be made about the third objective—regime stability— which seems to be the most consistent

and observable effect of decentralization in Africa. Numerous academic theories connect these objectives to decentralization (Wunsch and Olowu 1990; Grindle 2007; Ndegwa 2002). Decentralization has been connected to urgent challenges including lowering central government expenses, gaining more support from the general public, and, in particular, resolving some of Africa's long-standing governance issues. These governance issues include; Chronic corruption, rent-seeking, the failure to provide basic services, inadequate upkeep of public infrastructure, inadequate execution of governmental programs, and a lack of initiative at the local level. Decentralization's potential to lessen these principal-agency issues is one of the main reasons it has been considered a solution to the existing problems.

However, according to Hiskey (2010), inadequate accountability systems and institutions are the main reasons behind the above-mentioned Principal-agent problems. In democracies, this relationship between citizens as principals and public servants as their representatives must remain intact to keep the latter acting in the former's best interests. When public servants/agents are not held accountable, they have the chance to obtain rent or abuse their offices for their benefit. As a result, there is poor policy formulation and execution. Problems of accountability, also make the political environment fertile for corruption. According to Englebert (2009), this is typical in African politics, where abuses occur at all levels of government, particularly at the grassroots, since checks and balances are very minimal.

F. Transformation of Local Government Institutions in Southern African countries

Figure 2 Map showing SADC countries

Source: (Focus: Volume 1 · Number 1 · June 2005)

The Southern African Development Community (SADC) is a regional organization founded by countries in Southern Africa to foster regional integration and promote socio-economic, political, and security cooperation among its member states to achieve peace, stability, and wealth. Angola, Botswana, the Union of Comoros, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Eswatini, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Seychelles, South Africa, Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe are among the 16 member states. (Africa, 2021).

The evolution of local government institutions in southern African countries can be divided into three distinct stages. The first is colonial rule, which began following the Berlin Conference of 1884, which partitioned Africa among western countries. The second stage begins when the countries gained independence from colonial powers in the 1960s. Finally, we have the period many African countries experienced major changes in the early to late 1990s. In this section, we will briefly look at the period during colonial rule to fully understand how the transformation of local government institutions transpired in the southern African countries, and the period just after countries attained their independence.

Analyzing the evolution of local government policy and institutional framework will aid us in comprehending the changes and factors that have shaped the environment in which councils have worked.

The Berlin conference of 1884 divided African countries among the western powers. In southern Africa, Angola and Mozambique were governed under a repressive system by the Portuguese. The system, known as 'regime do indigenato', largely affected the socio-economic and political life of the indigenous. The system was abolished in 1961 when a guerrilla war was initiated against the Portuguese. The Portuguese colonial administration put in place a system of indirect rule. In this system, chiefs were made to be assistants at the grass-root level of the district administration. They took several jobs and functions which awarded them privileges such as a share of the local taxes, housing, and transportation (Issa, 2004). Similarly, the British adopted the indirect rule system and used chiefs for governance. In this system, local people could participate in the management of their affairs to a small degree. For instance, the Tinkundla system of governance which is "an administrative subdivision smaller than a district but larger than Umphakatsi (or "chiefdom")", was still left to function in Eswatini. The traditional Chiefs became part of the official hierarchy and were assigned administrative functions. They executed duties as assistants to district commissioners and were responsible for maintaining law and order, administration of justice, as well as tax collection. The Chiefs, who were later called Traditional Authorities, were then given distinct rights and responsibilities over geographical divisions. The colonial authorities took this step on purpose to retain consolidated administrative authority. Issa (2004) contends that because the Chiefs' livelihoods were based on the tax income they helped collect rather than customary tribute, it meant that the colonial authorities had seized control of the local governance structure while professing to protect traditional institutions. The author further states that the traditional chiefs lost their autonomy by becoming subordinates to the colonial administration and were just mere agents of the administrations with no political or financial independence. He concludes that many countries failed to improve and expand the services that were already in existence at the time of independence because the Chiefs lacked expertise in the running of administrative affairs as they only had been acting as subordinates. Scholars have argued that decentralization pursued in the region during the colonial and post-

independence periods failed to achieve the goal of transferring responsibility for planning, management, and raising and allocating resources from the central government to the lower levels of government. They conclude that decentralization in most countries in southern Africa took the form of deconcentration rather than devolution.

In the post-independence period, most African countries have been practicing a system that demonstrates the over-centralization of power. According to Kiyaga-nsubuga, (2000), this has been influenced by the old tradition of the colonial authorities who preferred to maintain total control over their subjects. As a measure to control the diverse ethnic groups who were experiencing regional imbalances at the time, the newly independent states also kept all power at the center. This was to contain the population and prevent them from fragmenting as there were already pressures occasioned by rapid social change. According to the assertions of the author, most of these countries inherited deconcentrated local administration structures from the colonial era without modifying them. The new states did not consider devolution of power possible for several reasons. First, it was unrealistic for the states, which were characterized by extreme poverty, weak structures, and inexperienced manpower to effectively manage local governance. Second, due to long exposure to centralized control, the local authorities had developed a deep-rooted dependency mentality which they could not easily free themselves from. Third, the local population had not developed the necessary civic competence to demand transparency and accountability from public officials. Finally, it was feared that decentralization would strengthen the inequalities inherited from the colonial administrations.

G. The link between Decentralization and Development

Political and administrative decentralization is regarded as crucial for fostering citizen participation in governance and development. However, it's not always evident how the two are related. According to scholars, a lot relies on the particulars of each issue. Although the relationship between decentralization and development appears to be confusing, it is generally accepted that decentralized local governance promotes participatory development methods and the creation of policies that are tailored to local requirements (Sharma 2000:177; Crook 1994:340). Citizens'

participation in development planning and implementation enables the making of practical plans that correspond with the conditions and circumstances of the local area. Decentralization is therefore seen as a fundamental administrative method that addresses the issue of overloaded and overcentralized institutions (Boeninger 1992:268; Ikhide 1999:165). The center's task is divided up, which encourages cost-effectiveness, better coordination, and increased efficiency in the use of public resources, service delivery, and local development. For instance, delays are reduced and responsiveness in project management is increased when local institutions are given the authority to make some decisions without always consulting the top levels. This is because decisions are flexible and altered to respond to situations on the ground. Decentralization is also thought to be a way to facilitate the equitable allocation of resources and limit the growth of regional inequalities (Omiya 2000:197, Sharma 2000:178; Mukandala 2000:120; Mutizwa 1996:78). For instance, the decentralization process involves developing or decentralizing small-scale projects close to the people as an economic intervention.

In terms of development, decentralization and participative strategies are not without criticism. Decentralization and participatory methods are said to offer many political, administrative, and socioeconomic benefits, although some scholars have criticized them for having technical, theoretical, and philosophical flaws (Cooke and Kothari 2001:1-6; Kiggundu 2000:103; Smith 1985:5). 1985:5). For instance, Smith (1985:5) claims that because decentralization places a strong emphasis on local autonomy, it appears to be parochial and separatist because it threatens the cohesion of the general will, strengthens specific narrow sectional interests and promotes development inequalities, among other things. The effectiveness, reliability, morality, and practicality of participatory approaches have drawn considerable criticism. Methodologically, these development strategies are viewed as narrow-minded (Cooke and Kothari 2001:1-6). For example, it is asserted that participatory methods produce subpar standards and practices and result in the exploitation or abuse of the participants. According to Cleaver (2001:36), there is little evidence that participation is effective in ensuring sustainable development and material improvement among the poor and marginalized people, despite claims that it increases efficiency and effectiveness and promotes processes of democratization and empowerment.

H. The link between Decentralization and Poverty Reduction

According to OECD (2004), Decentralization provides political and economic benefits for the underprivileged in terms of reducing poverty. Politically, it is believed that decentralization would increase citizen participation in local decision-making processes, which they have typically been excluded from in the past due to a lack of proper representation or organization. Therefore, improved participation of formerly excluded groups in local governments may eventually lead to increased access to social security programs and local public services, decreasing the vulnerability and insecurity of the poor. Additionally, a stable political system can provide the necessary framework for the poor to improve their lot in life and begin making investments.

Moreover, acquiring a better economic standing can lessen their susceptibility to shocks. Through improved efficiency and more targeted service delivery, decentralization has a strong positive link with poverty from an economic perspective. As power and resources are devolved to the local level, it may also result in better targeting of the poor. Increased service delivery efficiency could directly improve poor people's access to facilities such as education, health, water, and sanitation, among other services. A more decentralized framework would make it easier to monitor projects and programs economically and would aid in allocating resources to those who need them the most. Additionally, it would make it possible to respond to local needs more quickly. Decentralization and poverty reduction, however, are not directly linked (Crook & Sverrisson, 2001; Hardingham, 2003). It is a mere assumption that decentralization would result in good local governance, which would enhance growth and eventually reduce poverty (e.g., see Blair 1997 & 1998; Manor 1999).

İ. Factors That Determine the Effect of Decentralization on Poverty

According to Jütting et al., (2011), Decentralization's effect on poverty is mostly determined by two sets of factors: first, the country's inherited background conditions, and second, the decentralization process conditions. The following are the results of the authors' analysis of four (4) background conditions' effects on poverty:

- **Country setting** - this covers factors including population density, infrastructural quality, income level, and degree of regional inequality. Decentralization is expected to result in scale-effect losses in nations with low population densities, diminishing local government resources for eradicating poverty and raising the cost-of-service delivery. Decentralization is likely to squander existing resources and capacities for the construction of local authorities in low-income nations, at least temporarily, leaving less for efforts to combat poverty.

- The **abilities** of local actors, as well as the attitude toward responsibility and adherence to the law. Participation of the poor is improbable in nations with low education levels and a history of lax government accountability, making it challenging to start a pro-poor decentralization process.

- **Social Institutions** - the participation of excluded groups may be facilitated or, conversely, hindered by inherited social institutions.

- **Political power structure** - A key element in the distribution of political power is the institutional system of checks and balances.

The authors also point out that, in terms of the decentralization process, four factors are crucial for illuminating how decentralization affects poverty. The four factors are;

- **The capacity and readiness to implement reforms** - this is dependent on elements like national political commitment, local financial resources, local human capacity, and donor involvement in policy creation.

- **Participation and openness -** the culture of openness and information exchange have a significant impact on outcomes for the poor.

- **Corruption and elite capture -** the localization of authority could result in elites seizing control of the decision-making process, which would have little or no effect on poverty. Similar to this, corruption may increase if resources and priorities are diverted from initiatives to reduce poverty.

- **Coherence of policy -** decentralization may only be successful if other policy reforms (such as land reform) are done concurrently and the process does not conflict with other initiatives taken by the country or the donor community.

24

The authors further state that besides the two sets of conditions mentioned above; which are the countries' background before adopting decentralization and the process conditions of which decentralization is conceived, there are overarching objectives that can determine the outcome of decentralization in developing countries. According to the authors, countries can adopt decentralization either by default or design. When decentralization is adopted by default, it means that the governments of developing countries are forced to decentralize for various reasons. This might be done in some circumstances to address other problems like ethnic diversity or to counteract declining budgetary resources. Concerning design, Governments have a limited amount of control over the decentralization process. The central government frequently imposes this policy or follows it to rid itself of tasks for which it lacks the necessary resources or authority. Governments have more control over the process when decentralization is intentionally implemented. Authorities firmly support decentralization and support its benefits, which encourage local empowerment. In this case, local governments now play a more proactive role in fostering socio-economic growth as opposed to merely providing services.
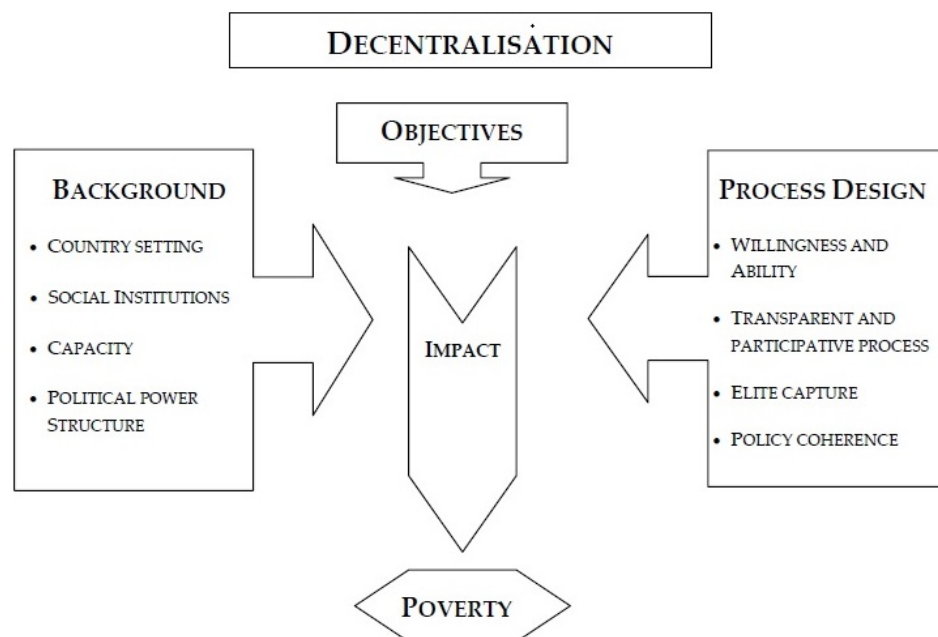

Figure 3 Showing the impact of decentralization on poverty reduction: Background and Process Conditions

Source: DEV/DOC (2004)

The evaluation based on evidence given in the evaluated research on how decentralization affects poverty results in various countries found that all of the low-income countries performed poorly, whereas the majority of the middle-income countries performed well. Decentralization is found to have reduced poverty in the cases of Bolivia, the Philippines, and India (West Bengal) in the studies analyzed. These are all lower-middle-income or less indebted low-income countries, without exception. Additionally, compared to the poor performers, whose literacy rates are below 50%, they have a literacy rate of over 80% (Jütting et al., 2011). According to Jütting et al., 2011 's study, decentralization has not produced any observable benefits for the poor in nations like Malawi, Guinea, or Mozambique. These countries fall under the category of "heavily indebted poor countries" (HIPC) and have illiteracy rates below 50%. The infrastructure in these countries is subpar and scores badly on the corruption perception index (below 2.9). The authors' analysis supports the essential role that the history or background of the country and the process's design play in determining whether pro-poor decentralization is successful or unsuccessful.

Given this conceptual analysis, we can see that democratic decentralization reforms were implemented in Malawi as a result of democratic reforms that resulted in the ousting of the Malawi Congress Party (MCP), a single-party regime that ruled the nation for thirty years, and the ascent of the United Democratic Front (UDF) Party to the position of power (Gordon 2008:73). Although decentralization was adopted in Malawi later in the 1990s, this was not Malawi's first attempt at it; rather, it was the conclusion of several efforts that started with colonial administrators at the turn of the twentieth century (Chinsinga 2007:92). Here we can see that Malawi inherited a local government system which was passed down to the new administration in 1964, the year of independence. As illustrated by Jütting et al., (2011), a country's background before adopting decentralization and the process conditions of which decentralization is conceived can determine the outcome of decentralization in developing countries. The problem with decentralization in Malawi can be traced from adoption and the process in which it was conceived. For instance, before independence, the control of local roads, public health, and other activities previously carried out by local authorities were gradually moved to line ministries, which set up regional and district offices alongside District Councils

(National Decentralization Program 2001:3-4). Gordon (2008:78) notes that the creation of District Development Committees (DDCs) to serve as the foundation for rural development efforts in 1967 significantly reduced and ultimately neutralized the statutory powers of local councils. However, local councils were left in place. As a result, Malawi continued to have parallel and inevitably competitive institutions for the implementation of local development after 1967.

In the following chapter, we will see how Malawi's decentralization background and design have affected the implementation of decentralization reforms in the country.

III.   THE POLITICAL AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT STRUCTURE OF MALAWI

This chapter provides an overview of the political and local government structure of Malawi. To be discussed here, more specifically, is a brief history of the evolution of local government policy and institutional framework in Malawi. The Chapter will also discuss the institutional set-up of the local government system in Malawi, and the role of stakeholders such as NGOs and other agencies in the promotion of local governance and development in the Blantyre district.

A.   Local Government Authorities

Authorities under local government may be established at one level or more. First, there is a single-tier local authority that oversees all local government operations in a particular area, such as a whole town or district, and has corporate status, which includes owning property, carrying out legal obligations, hiring workers, and having corporate status. According to Chiweza (n.d), the local government structure that Malawi adopted provides sub-structures or committees at the village or area level with specific responsibilities or consultative rights, however, these structures cannot be regarded as local authorities in themselves. On the other hand, several local authority levels can exist in a single area in a multi-tier system. This implies that multiple local authorities are active in one area. Using a district as an example, a multi-tier local authority would have a district-level local authority as well as area- and village-level sub-authorities. There would be corporate status at every level of authority. The local authorities are typically set up in a hierarchy, with the district-wide local authority having the overall mandate for the entire district while the other local authorities have specific roles and responsibilities that complement each other for the benefit of the particular geographic area within the district. We can observe such systems in South Africa, Ghana, and Uganda. Chiweza (n.d.), emphasizes that there have been several phases of local government throughout Malawi's history. The primary goal of local government has always been

to provide efficient and effective services, despite shifting emphasis over time. According to the Local Government Act of 1998, the main goal of local government in Malawi is currently to uphold the 1994 constitution, which is based on democratic ideals of accountability, transparency, and citizen participation in decision-making and development processes.

B. The Evolution of Local Government Policy and Institutional Framework in Malawi

Figure 4 Showing map of Malawi with districts and administrative zones[1]

Source: https://www.nationsonline.org/oneworld/map/malawi-administrative-map.htm

Understanding the evolution of local government in Malawi requires us to look back to the colonial period. The development of local governments in Malawi can be categorized into three distinct phases. First, there is the pre-colonial period.

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[1] The four administrative zones are marked by circles.

Second is the colonial era, and lastly, we have the post-colonial era. The current system of local government, how it functions, and the challenges it encounters have a lengthy history that may be linked to how similar systems developed and were used in pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial times. In Malawi, each new local government system has developed upon the one before it. Understanding this history, therefore, can help us better comprehend the current situation.

1. Pre-Colonial Era

Chiweza (n.d), describes that Local governance in Malawi was mostly carried out by traditional authorities before the colonial period of the 1890s. It was based on traditional clan and tribal affiliations that were connected by strong socio-cultural affinities. Because it was based on ancestry, the system of family inheritance used for choosing chieftains was never contested. Democracy by the delegation was practiced during this period, and the chief had councilors who served as representatives of various interest groups under his control. When choices needed to be taken, these councilors convened meetings with the constituents they acted as representatives for and provided the chief with these viewpoints. Respect for the opinions and interests of the populace provided the chief's rule authority, power, and respect. Communities typically worked without outside help to analyze issues, plan, and carry out their development initiatives.

2. Colonial Era

Several initiatives were taken during the colonial era toward the establishment of a single-tier local government system composed of urban and rural authorities. The British deliberately chose to suppress the supremacy of the chiefs' rule at the start of colonial rule to strengthen the British Empire. They used civil workers to administer the country's districts. The Governor, who represented the British Empire, was at the top of the hierarchy, followed by the Regional Commissioner and the District Commissioner (DC), also known as the "District Resident." The DC was in charge of all district-level government functions, including all facets of local administration, law enforcement, security, and justice, as well as financial management and tax collection. However, by 1903, the colonial government came to realize that this setup was rather difficult because, aside from tax collection, it was impossible to run the country without the assistance of the

chiefs due to the small number of DCs that had to take care of substantial areas divided into districts in a nation where communications were challenging. (There were fewer districts then than there are now.) The colonial government was unsure about how much authority to return to the chiefs, though. Following consideration of the challenges, the British government established the District Administration (Native) Authorities Ordinance[2] in 1912, which included the chiefs in the system of government. The DCs divided the districts into sections, each under the supervision of the principal headman, by this ordinance. These sections were further divided into groups of villages, with a village headman in charge of each group of villages. As executive representatives of the Government administration, the principal headmen were integrated into the administrative system. Their duties included collecting the hut tax, upholding the law, reporting village deaths, building roads, and doing any other duties as assigned by the colonial government. Although the colonial government passed this 1912 ordinance to create a subsidiary Local Government in the districts that would be selected and staffed by the people themselves under the supervision of the DC (or District Resident), Principal headmen were not usually hereditary chiefs who were selected by the populace per their tribes' customs. While some of them were hereditary tribal leaders, many of them were also members of the colonial government who enjoyed a high reputation and were favored by the DCs for having previously helped them with administrative tasks. In other districts, the DCs preferred appointing these "chosen" individuals over the tribal chief due to the chief's prior performance. The local administration system of 1912 was modified by several subsequent ordinances that the British approved between 1933 and 1960, which also gradually included features of local government. Due to the lack of significant African populations in the cities at the time, the ordinances placed a focus on rural areas. Nevertheless, some laws were specific to cities. The following is a list of these ordinances:

- **1933: the beginning of legislative and taxing authority**

An Indirect rule was established by the Native Authority Ordinance of 1933. This provision gave chiefs a lot of power, which made native authorities more important than principal headmen. A chief was defined as any native recognized as

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[2] An authoritative order or act of Parliament during the colonial period

such by the Governor. A native authority was described as "any chief or other native or group of natives declared to be established as a native authority." In addition to the two additional significant powers added by this ordinance, these native authorities held the same responsibilities as the senior headmen: They could pass fairly minor legislation to ensure the safety, security, and welfare of Africans. Additionally, they could set up treasuries for managing finances, levy rates, membership fees, and fees as taxes, while also being in charge of managing public funds for local development. They received funding from six different sources: a portion of the hut and poll tax, fines and fees levied by African courts (chief-presided courts that dealt with African issues), land rentals (25% on lease fees in native authority areas), proceeds from the sale of ivory (where native authorities could slaughter rogue elephants), local fees and dues, and small grants from the Central Government (Chiweza, n.d).

As a result, several departmental tasks—including maintaining village water sources, safeguarding crops, maintaining travelers' shelters, collecting livestock dipping fees, managing floods, and hiring midwives—were gradually moved to these authorities. However, the DC, who served as the native authorities' formal overseer, carefully limited their authority. As a result of the chiefs' lack of interaction with the populace, complaints increased. The chiefs maintained regular communication with the district office but less with their rural communities.

- **The formation of District councils of chiefs between 1938 and 1947**

The colonial government supported the development of councils to support both individual native authorities and to bring together native authorities from the entire district as they gradually came to the realization that the native authorities acting alone were not as efficient as they had planned. As a result, a council of chiefs with a single district treasury and the authority to enact legislation specific to each district was formed by combining all native authorities within that district. As a governing entity, these councils of chiefs were superior to individual native powers. The councils were composed of native leaders as well as their advisers to the chief locally known as (*nduna za mfumu*), notable community members, and those who had relevant skills or experience in the fields of education, social work, or business. The colonial government did not directly or actively participate in the choice of the council members, leaving it up to the chiefs' judgment. Therefore, these councils had no elected members and only consisted of hereditary and appointed members.

Because village headmen found the local government to be onerous and complex in the early 1950s, they were less able to handle the demands made of them. As a result, the colonial administration promoted the growth of section and village councils beneath the native authority councils. Hence, the section and village councils supported the village chiefs and played a significant role in local governance.

- **The establishment of statutory rural district councils in 1953**

The British passed the Local Government (District Council) Ordinance, which allowed for the creation of statutory formal district councils, in December 1953 after conducting a thorough investigation into Malawi's native authority councils. The investigation examined the economies, financial resources, conditions of staff, responsibilities, and methods of representation in each council's jurisdiction. Three criteria for creating the statutory councils came from earlier experiments and failures, according to the colonial government's Secretary for African Affairs: First and foremost, the primary bodies of local government needed to have access to sufficient funds, hire qualified personnel, and demand the best committees and councils. Second, the primary Local Government entities required localized subordinate authorities. Thirdly, to earn the trust and respect of all residents in their area, the main Local Government entities were required to be representative.

This ordinance had the following effects: Native authorities were replaced as local government institutions by rural district councils. They assumed most of the native authority' duties and powers related to local government. The ordinance did specify that although native authorities would continue to exist, they would report to the district councils. The funding and laws of the native authorities were under the supervision of these rural district councils, but they continued to serve as the Central Government's go-betweens for preserving law and order. Chiefs no longer served as the only representatives of local government, neither as native authorities nor as members of chiefs' councils. On average, Chiefs made up only one-third of the members of the new councils. The councils also included others who were regarded as important members of their communities. These "commoners" joined at the DC's invitation or on the recommendation of the chiefs. Eventually, DCs took up the role of the council chair.

The new ordinance's operation ran into a variety of issues. First, there was a lack of understanding regarding the functions of district councils and the responsibilities of native authorities, which confused the minds of some government officials and frustrated chiefs as well as to procrastination and, in some cases, responsibility evasion. Second, since chiefs were incorporated into the colonial Government's administrative structure, the native authorities and the Central Government enjoyed a special relationship that helped to maintain law and order. The colonial government was allegedly manipulating this relationship at the time, according to prominent nationalist figures like Dunduzu Chisiza. In other words, the nationalists interpreted the decision as a mandate from the Central Government to obstruct national leaders' efforts to engage with rural people to promote their cause.

- **The Separation of Rural Local Government District Councils and Native Authorities in 1960.**

Due to the resulting issues, additional legislation was passed in May 1960 to alter both the Native Authority Ordinance and the Local Government (District Councils) Ordinance. The Following modifications were made due to the emerging issues: District councils were no longer in charge of the native authority. District councils had less specified powers and lost the ability to create bylaws for good governance. Their function was constrained to merely providing services. District councils were reduced to becoming a direct charge of the Central Government account, losing control over finances for native authorities and African courts. District councils suffered a loss of revenue as a result, and the colonial government responded by instituting the equalization grant, a fixed annual grant. The native authorities had been put in charge of: serving as the Central Government's intermediary with the African people; working as the Central Government's agents to preserve local law and order; distributing the right to use title deeds; and delivering justice through African judicial systems (Chiweza, n.d).

- **Formation Of the Urban Local Government**

To ensure that Europeans and other settlers received priority over Africans in urban Local Government, the British passed separate ordinances. The Townships Ordinance of 1931 was the first piece of legislation. It addressed both the election of a township council and the structure of townships. From this backdrop, it is clear that

racial segregation played a major role in the formation of two distinct local government systems to serve urban and rural populations. As a result of all these ordinances, Malawi's local government structure was built on the English model and had the following characteristics by the time the country attained self-government in 1961: a single-tier system with local government councils in both urban and rural areas that varied greatly in terms of size, authority, funding, staffing quality, and turnover. It included local government in a variety of infrastructure functions, including municipal roadways, public health, and sanitation, as well as a clearly defined municipal tax structure that came as a result of the introduction of property taxes in significant urban centers.

3. Post-Colonial Era

According to Phillip Mawhood, local government in Malawi during the post-colonial period was best characterized as a "swing of the pendulum." The reform initiatives during this time were mostly influenced by political factors. Because of this, each level merits its analysis.

- **Moving toward locally elected government councils between 1961 and 1965**

The Local Government (District Councils) Amendment Ordinance of 1961, which Malawians had inherited, was altered when they took control of the central government. District councils with legal status were created in all rural districts. District council members were elected by the people. Chiefs were reduced to ex-officio members with no voting rights and were prohibited from joining the council as members by right. District councils no longer had DCs as their chairs; instead, locally elected councilors served in that capacity. However, the DCs were invited to assist in directing the council and its personnel due to their expertise and knowledge of local government sectors. Furthermore, the Local Government (Urban Areas) Act replaced the function of the Townships Ordinance. The district councils took on all of the duties that the pre-independence councils had in terms of service delivery; in particular, they were given charge of the DC's former responsibilities for public health and education. The councils were crucial in the provision of public health services, the construction of rural dispensaries, and the management of maternity clinics. They were also in charge of building and maintaining roads, bridges, and

ferries in rural areas, as well as overseeing marketplaces, water supply, and slaughterhouses. In addition to performing these major duties, Local government authorities also ran postal services and supplied community centers, libraries, sports fields, home craft workshops, and adult literacy classes. Furthermore, urban governments offered other services like sanitation, fire departments, and street lighting. Councils were regarded by the government and had a good reputation throughout this time. Through charges, taxes, dues, and poll tax, they were able to generate enough revenue. The government also provided them with enough grants. Councils offered a variety of services to the public. For instance, the councils were able to cover roughly 60% of self-help projects' construction costs and 95% of their recurring expenditures by using their resources. Councils were well-liked institutions that the public had confidence in and was respected by the community. Locals were therefore willing to contribute the necessary council fees, levies, and dues (Chiweza, n.d). The author states that this brief period is regarded as the "golden phase" of local government in Malawi's history because the councils: had a sufficient level of funding from the Central Government; Offered a variety of public services and were familiar with challenges that the community faced; were democratic as all council members, excluding chiefs, were chosen by the people; were also effective because the colonial DCs with experience and local government personnel continued to closely monitor the institutions of local government.

- **The Deterioration of the Local Government System from 1965–1993**

Chiweza, n.d, explains that after Malawi gained independence in 1961, local government performance started to decline in the early months of 1965. This drop was caused by two things. First, new DCs were hired to take the place of the experienced foreign commissioners. These new DCs lacked direction and did not provide the system with enough control. According to the government, the detachment of certain DCs and their easing of authority over district councils was a contributing factor to the inefficiency of several councils. The new council members' lack of experience was another contributing factor because the incumbents, who were more experienced, were not elected because they were largely viewed by the nationalist government as "colonial stooges." Thus, corruption in the local government system briefly became a threat. As a result, the local government councils came under greater control of the Central Government. They approved

several laws that directly impacted the councils' independence. For instance, the authority to fire the clerk of council, the treasurer of the council, or any other council employee without the council's consent was granted to the minister of local government in 1965. Reasons for firing an employee could be; incapacity, dereliction of duty, misbehavior, or poor attitude. Any elected council member from a Malawian political party was required to resign from their position in April 1965 if they joined another party. Political power over the elected members of the Local Government council was granted to the ruling party in 1966 after Malawi became a single-party state. To become ex-officio members of the party's area committees, all council members were required to join the party (MCP). Representative local government was reversed when members of local councils were chosen by the ruling party rather than the general public. 1967 saw the introduction of the Malawi Congress Party (MCP) local branch nomination process, which required approval from the MCP national headquarters and the Minister of Local Government. In 1967, civil servants were chosen to manage the local government councils' operations. The government had the authority to choose a civil servant supervisor of any council to assume the responsibilities of the council clerk. Civil servants took over all senior positions in the Local Government councils, including those of the finance officers.

Dulani (2004), states that the Malawi Congress Party (MCP), brought major changes to the local government system and structure in Malawi. Notable changes were made in 1967 when the MCP government established the District Development Committee (DDC) planning system. The DDC which was designed to act as a channel for presenting the development needs of people at the grassroots in form of district development plans (DDP), meant that councils were deprived of the function of playing a major role in local development planning. The councils could only provide social services such as postal services, household arts training for women, and entertainment and accommodation facilities. However, according to the author, in 1990, a change occurred when the Malawi government and the United Nations released a joint analysis of the state of poverty in Malawi. It was then observed that the DDC planning system had several weaknesses which made Malawi's development performance decline. The analysis suggested that a review of the processes and structures of local government be made. The government of Malawi responded through the statement of Development Policies (DEV POL 1987-96), by

adopting a policy of selective decentralization which would minimize government interference and make districts focal points of development, planning, and implementation. Malawi experienced another major political change which brought a new dawn of multiparty democracy in the early 1990s. This was before the recommendations for selective decentralization could be fully implemented. Following a referendum in 1993, Malawi held its first-ever free presidential election in 1994. Dr. Banda was voted out of power, and Bakili Muluzi of the newly formed party, the United Democratic Front (UDF), emerged as a winner in the country's first democratic presidential and parliamentary elections. With the introduction of new multiparty politics in 1994, the country adopted a new constitution, which among many issues, advocated for the devolution of political and administrative authority from central to local government units. The new democratic government began an inclusive review of the system of local government. Guided by the new constitution, a new local government act was enacted in 1998, and the national decentralization policy (NDP), was adopted (Dulani, 2004).

However, studies have shown that Malawi's adoption of the (NDP) did not improve the country's development performance. As illustrated in the first chapter, Chinsinga (2005, Ed & Ed, 2008), observes that Sub-district participatory structures that aim to serve as channels for representation, participation, and accountability have mostly existed only on paper. Similarly, Hussein (2012), notes that in the multiparty era, a total of fifteen (15) years went by with councils operating without ward councilors. This period is between (1994-2000) and (2005-2014) respectively. Local government elections were postponed during this period. Hartmann (2004:231), states that this was due to logistical and administrative obstacles. Hussein (2017), explains that during this period, civil servants and committees were handpicked by the central government and administered councils locally. He further points out that this raises questions on the level of commitment Malawi has towards consolidating participatory democracy at the local level. From this historical perspective, it is important to note, as expressed by Chiweza, that during the colonial and post-colonial periods of the one-party state, Local Government was primarily viewed as a tool for service provision, whereas following the transition to a multiparty system in 1994, Local Government was viewed as a tool for local governance, democratization, and the provision of local services. The author notes

that "while the new Local Government system is, in some ways, a continuation of previous approaches, it also represents a search for Local Government institutions that are truly participatory and accountable to local communities."

C. The Institutional Set-Up of The Local Government System in Malawi

In Malawi, The Local Government System (LGS) has a single-tier structure. This implies that all local authorities are independent of one another and no local authority has supervisory responsibility for another. However, the collaboration between and among councils is provided for by the Local Government Act. The institutional set-up of LGS comprises the local governments and their committees at the district level. The structure is lined up as follows:

Area Development Committees (ADC), Village Development Committees (VDC) for district councils, and Neighborhood Committees (NC) for town, municipal, and city councils are all examples of local government committees. Village Action Plans (VAPs) or Neighborhood Action Plans (NAPs) are developed at the VDC/NC level to start the planning process. VAPs/NAPs are a list of the village's/top neighborhood priorities. These are subsequently given to the council, which combines them into a local development plan (District Development Plans in District councils or urban development plans in town, municipal, or city councils). As a result, the district's priorities are reflected in the local development plan. The challenges are connected with the national priorities as defined in the Malawi Growth and Development Strategy (MGDS) in the construction of the local development plan (Malawi Government, 2013:2).
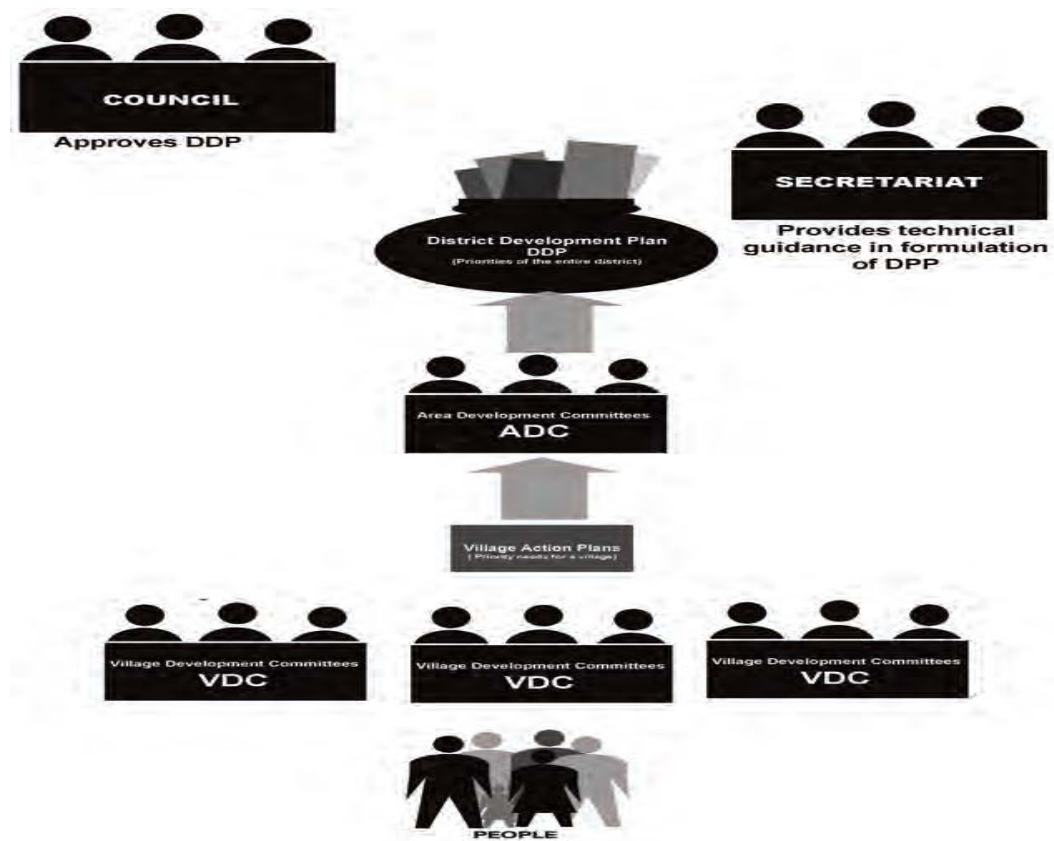
Figure 5 Illustrating the District Development Planning Process

Source: Guidebook on Local Government System in Malawi (2013)

D. The Duties of Councilors and Members of Parliament (MPs) in Local Government

Councilors, members of Parliament (MPs), and Traditional Authorities (Chiefs and Village headmen) are all members of a council and attend both council and committee meetings. Elected councilors and MPs have a voting right in the decision-making process of a council, while T/As are ex-officio[3] members and do not have a right to vote. Regardless, all members are required to collaborate on development works as they all have an oversight role over council policy and operations. According to Malawi Government (2013:25), "This means that before any VDC or ADC development program or project can be implemented, it must be approved by the community members, the councilor, the MP, and customary authorities (Chiefs or T/As)."

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[3] An ex-officio member is a member of a body (such as a board, committee, or council) who is a part of it by virtue of holding another office.

Duties of Local Government Councillors	Duties of MPs
To represent the people of their wards in the local district assemblies and bring to the local forum the local concerns that require Local Government solutions, e.g. community projects such as boreholes.	To represent the people of their constituency in Parliament and bring to the national forum the local concerns that require national solutions such as resources or legislation
To mobilise local support for local development and bring to the attention of the MPs those matters that require national solutions and Central Government where such matters cannot be contained within the DDPs.	To mobilise national support for local development on behalf of national leaders in pursuance of national development goals
To initiate and contribute to debate in the local district assemblies on local development matters and management of the district assemblies' resources.	To initiate and contribute to debate in Parliament on national issues such as the making of national laws and advocacy for human rights
To provide a systematic check on Local Government expenditure and service delivery in the district, ensuring accountability and transparency.	To provide a systematic check on Central Government expenditure and service delivery and demand accountability and transparency.
To receive at the district assemblies all proposals for the DDP and scrutinise the proposals and pass the budget.	To scrutinise proposed national budgets, and make sure resources are allocated in priority areas before passing bills.
To ensure an equitable system of distribution of resources amongst all wards and ensure an even spread of development amongst all ward	To ensure an equitable distribution of national resources amongst all the districts of Malawi

Figure 6 Showing duties of Councilors and MPs

Source: Boniface Dulani, 2007

E.   Citizens' Role in Local Governance

Malawi is a decentralized democratic country. The country's adoption of a new constitution that is based on participatory democracy meant that citizens would be allowed to participate at all levels of government. Chirwa (2014: 8), highlights that the constitution of Malawi (section 40[1][C]) provides that "every person shall have the right to participate in peaceful political activity intended to influence the composition and policies of the government." All citizens have a significant role to play in local governance. Their principal role is to take part in the formulation and implementation of development activities. The constitution of the Republic of Malawi provides for citizens to demand transparency, accountability, and services from their council. Malawi Government (2013:38) emphasizes that "this is one of the objectives of the decentralization process which the Malawian Government adopted 1998 as a way to empower communities and deliver high-quality services to people"

The Guidebook on the Local Government System in Malawi has listed ways in which citizens can participate in local governance as follows:

- **Political office and local elections -** the Local Government Elections provide a platform for citizens to either vote or contest for the office of a councilor. By participating in the electoral process, citizens ensure that elected ward councilors have the approval of the people in their wards.

- **Interaction between the council and the citizens -** all development issues that require councils' attention are presented by ward councilors. The councilors act as a bridge between the citizenry and the council. Councilors attend council meetings at least four times a year. It is therefore encouraged that open discussions be held between the citizenry and the councilors before the council meetings. This way, residents have an opportunity to inform the council of their development concerns. Once the concerns are presented to the council, it is the mandate of the councilor to provide feedback to the electorate on the resolutions taken by the council.

- **Service delivery -** the responsibility to deliver services to the people falls under the council. Services such as education, health, environment, and infrastructure are provided by the council through the Council Secretariat. Local citizens have the right to contact their councilors where they find services falling short. In this case, the council should consider discussing the matter to resolve it. Residents are also encouraged to take part in volunteer work as a service to the community. In rural areas of Malawi, volunteer work involves providing sand, water, labor, and molding bricks in the construction of community buildings.

- **Payment of taxes, rates, and fees -** citizens are obliged by law to pay taxes, licenses, and other charges. This is very important as councils can fulfill their mandate to deliver services when adequate financial resources are available.

- **Participation in the planning and implementation of development projects -** citizens are drivers of local development. They must participate in the identification, planning, and monitoring implementation of development projects in their area. In some cases, residents are compensated for their work in community projects. This is called paid labor. In cases where projects are

not fully funded, citizens can show their patriotism by doing volunteer work. This is called community contribution. In whatever case, citizens have a right to demand transparency and accountability in the way public funds are being used (MG, 2013:28-31).

F. The System of Government in Malawi

Malawi has a presidential system of government, with a President who serves as the Head of State and exercises executive authority. The President, who is both the Head of State and the Head of Government, is generally directly elected on a popular ballot. The Legislature and the Executive are formally separated, and the President as well as other executive officers are restricted from being part of members of the Legislature. Furthermore, the President serves a fixed term, and elections are held periodically. The elections cannot be triggered by a vote of confidence or other parliamentary procedures. Only by impeachment can the President be removed for a serious offense, such as a violation of the Constitution. Malawi's executive is hierarchical, with the President and Vice President at the helm, followed by the Cabinet and the civil service. Principal secretaries are the highest-ranking civil servants in ministries, ranking second only to Cabinet members in terms of importance. These civil servants serve as the ministries' and Government departments' overall controlling officers. Below them are teams of civil servants, ranked by seniority according to Government scales (Dulani, 2007).
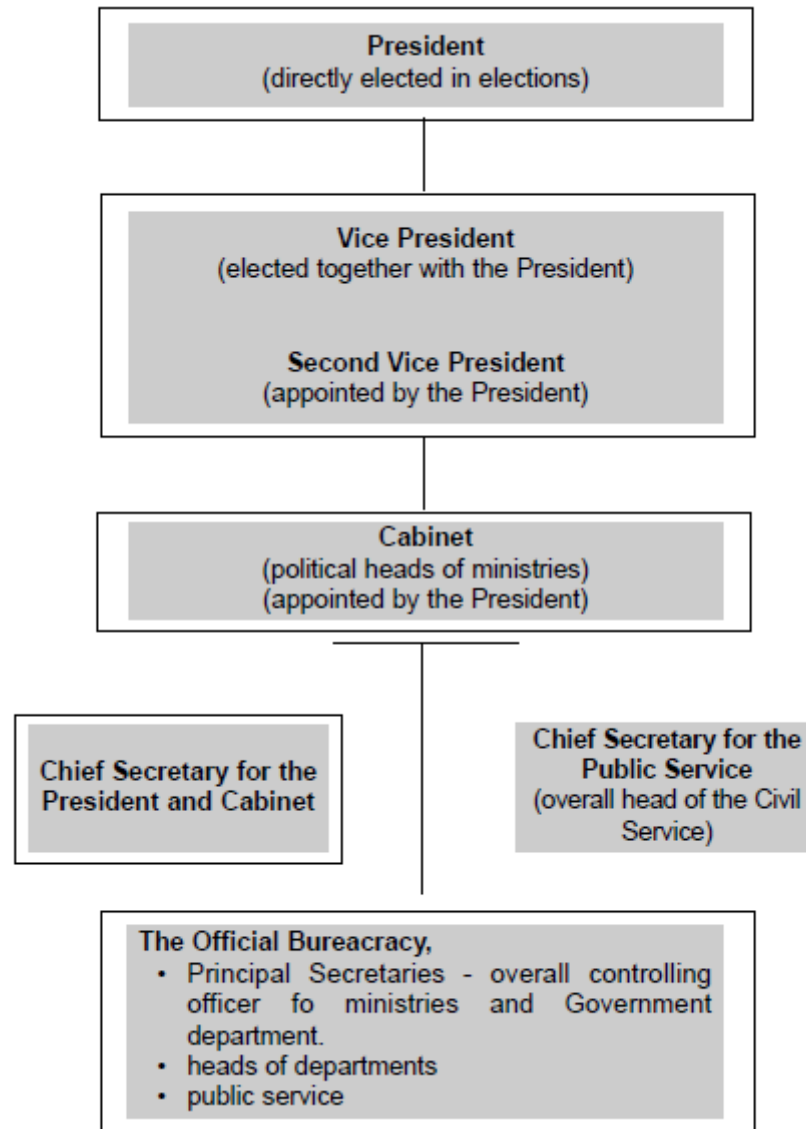
Figure 7 Showing the structure of the executive in Malawi

Source: Boniface Dulani, 2007

1. The System of Political Parties in Malawi

After 70 years of British colonial rule which ended in 1961, The Malawi Congress Party (MCP), under the leadership of Kamuzu Banda introduced a single-party system of government. Opposition and multiparty politics were not allowed in the country for 30 years during the authoritarian rule of the MCP. Following a referendum in 1993, Malawians voted for multiparty democracy, and a multiparty political system of government was introduced in 1994 under the leadership of Bakili Muluzi of the United Democratic Front (UDF). Malawi adopted a new constitution in 1995. The newly adopted constitution of Malawi (section 40 [1]) declares that:

every person shall have the right to form, join, participate in the activities of, and recruit members for, a political party; to campaign for a political cause, to participate in peaceful political activity intended to influence the composition and policies of the Government, and to freely make political choices (The Government of Malawi, 2006).

The multiparty political system in Malawi entails that the electorate votes political parties into power. There are a few requirements for establishing a political party in Malawi. The law dictates that for a political party to be registered, it should at least consist of members not less than one hundred (100). The party to be registered is required to have a manifesto and a constitution that guides it as well as an executive committee. However, Chirwa (2014) expresses that most parties do not have policy documents on issues of national importance. This according to the author is a result of the absence of a mandatory requirement for political parties to produce a policy document at registration. He further questions why the law does not demand that political parties disclose their sources of funding. According to the author, this undermines the process of transparency as party funding is not regulated. It is worth mentioning that the constitution of the Republic of Malawi section 40(2) sets that any party that has amassed one-tenth of the national vote shall be provided with funds to sustain its life in the National assembly. Given this background, it is therefore not surprising that there are many political parties registered in Malawi. Chunga (2014), asserts that political parties in Malawi have rapidly increased since the re-introduction of multiparty politics. He states that the office of the Registrar of Political parties in Malawi has registered not less than forty political parties in the country. Most of the parties, according to the author are 'brief case' parties. They only exist on paper but do not fully function as proper political parties. Chirwa (2014), adds that there is no stiff punishment such as deregistering a party if they violate their constitution or the code of conduct during elections.

In Malawi, newly formed parties are usually split from the country's three major parties – The United Democratic Front (UDF), The Malawi Congress Party (MCP), and Alliance for Democracy (AFORD). Members who have defected from these parties have gone on to form or join; The Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), The Peoples Party (PP), or the United Transformation Movement (UTM). Besides the political system structure and the ease with which one can register a new political

party in Malawi, Svåsand (2013), outlines two other factors that may have contributed to the rapid increase of political parties as follows:

The constitutional powers of the president – in most parties, the nominated party chairman represents the party as a presidential candidate in the general elections. If a politician with resources fails in the race to be nominated as a presidential candidate, they defect to form their party. Even if they don't succeed in the presidential elections, some still manage to field Members of Parliament across the country. As such the parties become potential coalition partners and still manage to get close to the leadership. Indeed, most ambitious politicians in the country have their eyes on the presidency as it is the highest office in the land. This has been demonstrated by intra-party conflicts in the scramble for the highest seat in almost all the parties. For instance, the United Transformation Movement (UTM) was established as a result of intra-party disagreements between the party founder Vice President Saulos Chilima, and former President Peter Mutharika of the Democratic Progressive Party. Similarly, former President Joyce Banda formed the Peoples Party after defecting from the ruling Democratic Progressive Party. Bingu Wa Mutharika, who was voted into power as President on the United Democratic Front ticket, left the party less than a year after taking over office and founded the DPP.

The first - past - the - post voting - Until the recent fresh presidential elections (2020), the Malawi electoral commission (MEC), applied the first-past-the-post electoral system. This, according to Svåsand, made the electoral threshold low and even lower as they were more competitive candidates in the elections. After the 2019 presidential elections were annulled due to electoral irregularities, the supreme court of Malawi announced a new 50% + 1 voting system. The introduction of the new system showed immediate results as all small parties joined coalitions and endorsed candidates of the four major parties. In the fresh polls, the DPP presidential candidate Peter Mutharika stood on a single ticket with UDF candidate Atupele Muluzi. The Peoples Party (PP), AFORD, UTM, and MCP, together with other small parties formed the 'Tonse Alliance' and endorsed Lazarus Chakwera of the MCP as Presidential candidate, with Saulos Chilima of the UTM as his running mate.

Scholars have revealed that since the introduction of multiparty politics in 1994, regional dimensions have underpinned the political party system in Malawi. Party systems are based on regional divisions. The division of parties has bearing

effects on the voters as they also vote along regional lines. The following table shows the regional division of key political parties in Malawi.

Table 1 Showing the major pollical parties in Malawi and their stronghold

Name of Political Party	Stronghold
United Democratic Front (UDF)	Southern Region
Malawi Congress Party (MCP)	Central Region
Alliance for Democracy (AFORD)	Northern region
Democratic Progressive Party (DPP)	Southern Region
Peoples Party (PP)	Southern Region
United Transformation Movement (UTM)	Traceable in all regions

2. Problems Affiliated with Political Parties in Malawi

In Malawi, there are many problems associated with political parties. Svåsand (2013:5-6), reveals that the constitutional rules, regulations, and legal acts issued by institutions mandated by law have affected the political parties. The parties have failed to develop a stable system due to organizational weaknesses combined with the selective application of the formal rules. Most of the parties are dependent on the leadership. Furthermore, it is difficult to distinguish one party from another as there are no clear ideological differences between them. Chirwa (2014), highlights more of the problems as follows;

- The Parliamentary and Presidential elections Act (Cap. 2:1) outlines methods and conditions by which political parties should adhere when participating in both local parliamentary and presidential elections. The act also outlines how candidates are nominated for elections. However, Chirwa notes that there is no mandatory requirement for candidates to hold primary elections and pre-election debates. He points out that this has resulted in disorganized primary elections by parties for leadership positions or parliamentary candidates. In some cases, the primary elections are not held at all. The consequences of such careless conduct reflect on the voters as they do not have a genuine

representative candidate from their constituencies. For political reasons, party leadership imposes a candidate on the voters against their will. In such cases, frustrated voters choose not to exercise their voting rights, compromising the process of democratic political participation.

- The legal framework for the regulation of political parties in Malawi does not make it mandatory for parties to hold conventions. With exception to situations where executive members of a party want to endorse or nominate a particular candidate for elections or a leadership position, it is rare for parties to conduct regular conventions and conferences. Chirwa exclaims that in some cases parties declare a presidential candidate before the convention takes place. The self-declared candidates who are usually party founders use all sorts of tactics in the book to intimidate and DE campaign their potential challengers way ahead of conventions. The case of UTM's Saulos Chilima who had no challenger, DPPs Chimunthu Banda who fell out with the Partys leader Peter Mutharika and left the party, and Friday Jumbe who boycotted a convention that was seemingly in favor of Atupele Muluzi – son to founder and former president of Malawi Bakili Muluzi confirm Chirwa's assertions.

- In Malawi, the law is not specific on the minimum number of candidates a party can field in a general election. This has led to the parties fielding candidates only in regions they consider to be their stronghold. Chirwa, further states that the absence of such a requirement has encouraged parties to field candidates based on regional bases. According to him, this explains why most parties in Malawi are based on regional support and are often identified with the founders as opposed to a particular ideology.

- Lastly, the author argues that leaders of political parties tower above accountability. They are not held responsible or accountable for their actions. He mentions cases where party leaders decide to form coalitions and alliances without consulting their party followers. As a result, party followers are left puzzled and frustrated. For instance, in the 2020 fresh presidential election, leaders of the major parties – UTM and MCP, that formed the 'Tonse Alliance' did not disclose the contents of their alliance agreement to their voters. Regardless, their followers blindly voted them into power without fully understanding the outcome of the alliance post-elections. Chirwa,

stresses that in this kind of scenario, it is almost impossible to hold individual winners of elections or their parties responsible for promises they make while on the campaign trail.

G. The Constituency Development Fund (CDF)

The government of Malawi adopted the CDF in 1996. The program, which objective is to strengthen the local government's capacity to meet the local needs of constituencies, involves the use of public funds at local levels outside the formal district planning system structures. The CDF was introduced after a private members' motion in parliament which was negotiated and initiated by an opposition MP. The fund is designed to assist each constituency in the maintenance of structures and undertaking minor community-based development activities such as repairing boreholes, fixing broken bridges, blown-off school roofs, etc. (Chiweza, 2016). The constituency development fund guideline outlines the objective of the CDF as a program established to respond to pressing issues related to community development. The guideline provides information on how the fund is given to members of parliament (MPs) and their constituent communities as an opportunity for them to implement projects that would enhance their welfare by meeting their demands (MLGRD, 2014:1).

However, the CDF has been criticized over reports of abuse by the MPs, and lack of accountability for both the funds and results of the projects funded. For instance, findings of a report by Chiweza (2016), revealed that the fund doesn't support rational planning processes since the projects the CDF is spent on are oftentimes not in line with the district development plans (DDPs), nor the needs of the constituencies expressed in the village action plans (VAPs). She argues that MPs use the fund as a tool for political gains. In a patron-client type of arrangement, the MPs allocate most of the funds towards the implementation of development projects in areas where they are guaranteed to get votes as a reward to loyalists. The remarks confirm Neil & Cammack's (2014), observations that although the CDF is formally managed by the District councils, MPs treat the funds as their monies and ignore oversight by local government. Chiweza (2010), asserts that the CDF in the manner in which it is currently being used creates a power center for one dominant actor (MPs) to consolidate and showcase their status and influence at the local level.

According to research that the author conducted, in most of the areas/ villages visited, the fund is doing the opposite in the sense that it is creating undesirable perceptions about the state and the actors. Furthermore, the fund is believed to hold the potential of escalating conflicts and hostility at the local level with ward councilors, MPs, and T/As. The quality of projects funded and delivered using the CDF has also been of a major concern. According to Neil & Cammack (2014:38), "Some CDF projects stand as a statement to an MP, while others can be seen as a waste of public funds." Meaning that, while other MPs are highly rated by their constituents for quality delivery of projects, others are disregarded for poor quality of projects delivered.

Figure 8 Showing ADMARC depot built with CDF funds by MP Makanagala, Blantyre Central

Source: Walika Mkandawire, Aug. 2013

Figure 9 showing CDF-built school block at Matope, Ndirande, Blantyre (2007)

Source: Cammack, Aug. 2013

As Chikoti (Malawi24, feb19, 2022) reports, regardless of the concerns and critiques in regards to the use and effectiveness of the fund, the government of Malawi, in the 2022-23 budget, increased the CDF from 40 million kwacha to 100 million kwacha for each of the 193 constituencies in the country.

H. Local Development Fund (LDF)

The Malawi Government established the LDF as a nationwide financing mechanism for local development in march 2009. The LDF aims at supporting decentralization and the achievement of sustainable development (Malawi Government, 2013). Through an indicative planning framework (IPF), all local authorities are provided with resources. The authorities access financing for LDF through four (4) windows listed as follows:

- **Community Window (CW)** - The community window finances demand-driven community investments and services directly managed by the community itself. The local communities participate in project planning, implementation, monitoring, and sustaining.

- **Local Authority Window (LAW)** - The local window finances projects that transcend more than one community or traditional authority. The council identifies such projects from within an Annual Investment Plan. This window benefits members of poor households who earn a wage for working on investment projects in their communities.

- **The Urban Window (UW)** - The urban window develops and improves economic services through the provision of infrastructure in urban centers. The projects are designed to improve the capacity of local authorities to generate revenue and provide services.

- **The Performance Window (PW)** - Through annual performance assessments, local authorities that demonstrate good performance are rewarded under the performance window. Any of the three (3) windows may manage the funds. The council that earns a bonus decides on which window to use.
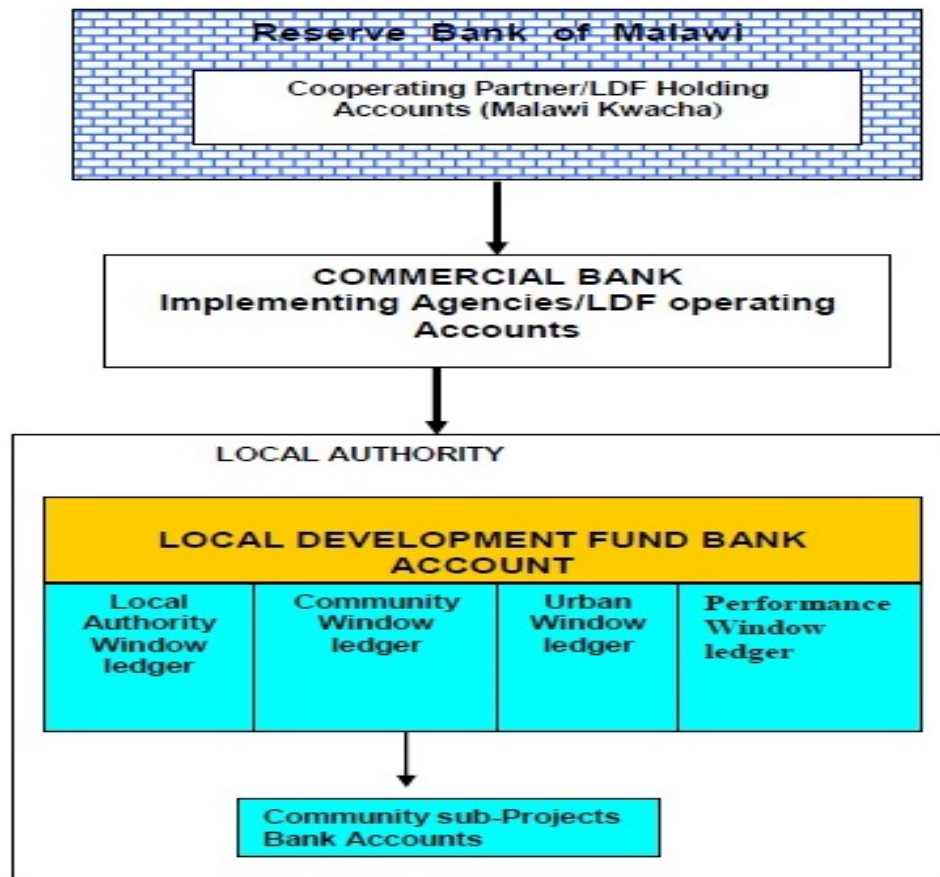
Figure 10 Showing LDF fund flow

Source: Malawi MLGRD 2009 Local Development Fund (LDF)

The LDF replaced Malawi Social Action Fund (MASAF), a program that was established in 1995 with seed funds from the World Bank and the Malawian government. Similar to the LDF, MASAF was designed to finance safety nets and community self-help projects. The LDF on the other hand was established as a basket fund where the government and all donors could contribute by pooling resources to finance development and governance projects at the local level (Chasukwa & Banik, 2019). The authors present data that indicates that the LDF is mostly funded by donors or development partners. For instance, the combined contributions of the World Bank, KFW, and AfDB were approximately 126 million dollars, constituting 62% of the funds received by the LDF for the 2009-2014 period. Data presented by Neil & Cammack (2014:38, Lockwood & Khan, 2012: 12), reveals that in the 2010-2011 period, almost 80% of the funds came from donors. Unlike the CDF, the LDF explicitly indicates that the district councils will access financing for the LDF based on the assembly's approved project submissions as contained in the district development plans. The DDP constitutes a significant local development framework

for effective implementation and monitoring of development activities, and usage of funds in councils (Chiweza, 2010). Based on her study, Chiweza observed that the LDF decision-making process has the potential to unify the various district actors such as MPs, ward councilors, chiefs, and communities to work together and cooperate in the identification of the needs of people at the local level. According to Neil & Cammack (2014), the LDF is very important in the promotion of participatory democracy in Malawi as it is the main source of discretionary funding for local development. The fund aims at empowering local communities to take part in the decision-making processes through improved local governance and development management, to reduce poverty and improve service delivery. However, just like the CDF, there have been reports surrounding abuse of the LDF by MPs. For instance, in his article (The Times Group Malawi 17,10, 2020), Malekezo reported that a member of parliament for Mzimba Hora Constituency was arrested by the Malawi Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB), and sentenced to four (4) years imprisonment over abuse of the LDF.

1. **Citizen Participation in Local Development Fund Projects**

Citizen participation is defined as the participation of members of a community in projects aimed at resolving their problems (Wilson, 2000:144). In the context of development, members of a community come together to take part in the process of identifying common problems and generating common solutions. In a local government setup, citizens participate in the planning, monitoring, and sustenance of development projects. Participation of local communities in Malawi may also involve mobilizing resources and providing manual labor for self-help projects. Studies suggest that citizens are more likely to be committed to a development project if they are involved in its planning and preparation; they identify with it and own it. As stated by Bahrami (2019), "Citizen participation is an essential component of democratic governance because it allows populations to stay informed and take collective action to address everyday problems." According to Malawi Government (2013:37), In Malawi, citizens may participate in the planning and implementation of the (LDF) funded activities through the Village Development Committees (VDCs), and the Area Development Committees (ADCs).

2. Structure and Functions of Village Development Committees (VDCs)

According to the Guidebook on Local Government System (2013), the VDC serves as a representative body from a village or a group of villages in an area. As the only structure closest to the people, the VDC is important in the planning system of a council. The committee is designed to carry out various functions such as:

- Identifying and prioritizing local needs of the community as well as preparing project proposals to be submitted to the ADCs

- Communicating issues relating to the community with the ADC and District Executive Committee (DEC)

- Inaugurating community self-help works

- Identifying, monitoring, and evaluating the implementation of a development project in the villages

- Encouraging and mobilizing community resources for citizens' participation in self-help works

- Reporting results of discussions and activities of the committee in the area to the Group Village Headman (GVH)[4]

According to the Guidebook, The Committee is composed of: one elected member from each village within the VDC, representatives of wards, four female representatives nominated by the VDC members, an extension agent nominated by the Area Executive Committee (AEC), and a GVH who can only supervise and not chair a VDC. The VDC can only serve for five years, a period that runs concurrently with election years.

3. Structure and Functions of Area Development Committee

ADCs are local structures below the District Executive Committee (DEC). According to the same guidebook, The ADCs are representative bodies of all VDCs in a Traditional Authority (T/A) area. Their functions are:

- Prioritizing, identifying, and preparing project proposals for submission to

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[4] Is an intermediary between traditional authorities and village headmen and their main role is to facilitate various forms of administrative transactions for the T/As over their respective areas of jurisdiction

DEC

- Addressing needs of the community that transcend a VDC

- Setting up a monthly meeting in conjunction with VDCs from their area.

- Mobilizing community resources and soliciting funds for self-help projects

i. Council Setup of The Blantyre District
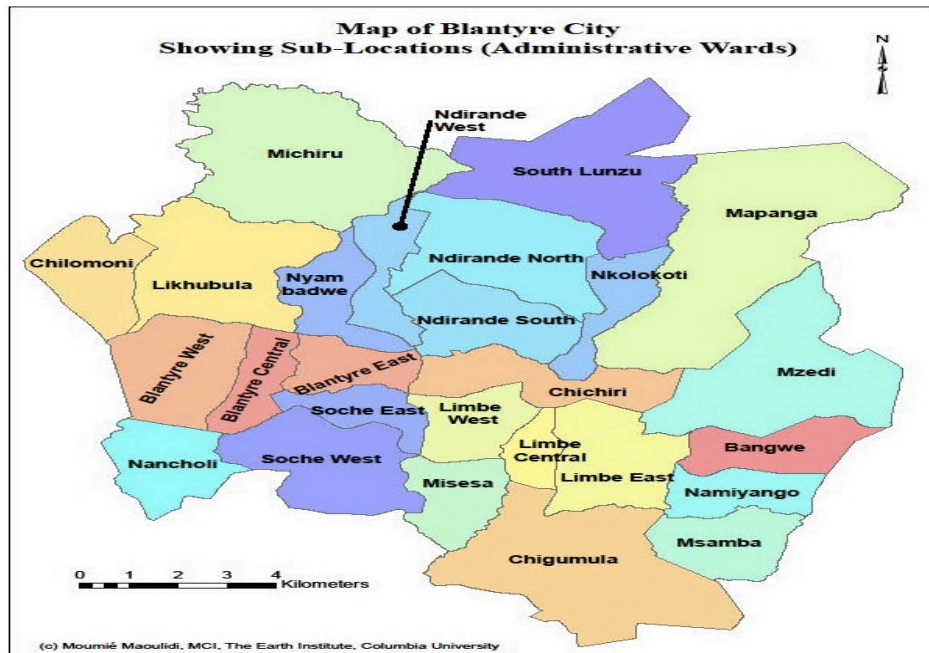
Figure 11 Map showing the Blantyre district/city of Malawi

Source:http://mci.ei.columbia.edu/millennium-cities/blantyre-malawi/blantyre-maps-and-population-data/

Malawi has twenty-eight district councils, which help the country's rural areas flourish through the local government system. The councils are responsible for making policy and decisions on local governance, as they have been assigned authority by the central government. They also make it easier for districts to provide local services and grow. Blantyre is one of Malawi's 32 districts, located in the southern part of the country. The district has the greatest population of 809,397 people, covering an area of 2,012km2 (2022). Blantyre's employment structure consists of both formal and informal sectors, which combined provide between 50,000 and 55,000 jobs and employ 62 percent of the labor force. Primary, secondary, and tertiary industry subsectors make up the formal sector's employment, while small-scale business operations make up the informal sector (Africon, 2022).

With 26,074 employees or 56.5 percent of all formal employment, the tertiary or services industry sub-sector is the most important to the city's economy and has created the newest jobs. About 41% of all employment is in the secondary industrial sub-sector, which employs 18,824 people primarily in manufacturing. There is little to no information available on activity in the informal sector. However, a recent Africon research and a field investigation for Blantyre City's Environmental City Profile point to the fact that the city has a sizable and thriving economy, providing jobs for about 4,500 people who would otherwise be out of work.

In total, the district has 137 VDCs and 11 ADCs (Blantyre District Council District Development Plan 2017 – 2022 May 2018, 2018). The Blantyre district has a council made up of ward councilors, ex officio members[5], MPs, TAs, and representatives from five (5) special interest groups[6], which is a statutory entity constituted under Malawi's Local Government Act (1998) section 5. The secretariat council, which is led by the district commissioner and made up of appointed officials and other council employees, is subordinate to the council. The secretariat is responsible for putting the council's decisions into action. The DC, as the controlling officer, is responsible for the day-to-day management of the council's operations and resources (Malawi Government, 2013).

1. Challenges Faced by Residents of The Blantyre District

According to a report by National Statistical Office (Office, 2019), Blantyre rural recorded a high poverty rate with 65.3% of the people living below the poverty line. Blantyre district council and the district development plan (BDC, DDP, 2018), revealed that the district faces thirteen major development challenges. These challenges, in descending order of priority, include:

high food insecurity, low household incomes, high population growth, poor standards of education, poor road network, high environmental degradation, high level of teenage pregnancies, high rate of youth unemployment, high morbidity, and mortality, low access to potable water, high levels of malnutrition, high crime rate,

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[5] A member of a body (such as a board, committee, or council) who is a part of it by virtue of holding another office.
[6] According to the council, interest groups are identified as women's groups, the youth, people with disabilities, people living with HIV and AIDS, the elderly etc

poor governance and accountability structures (BDC, DDP, 2018:6)

2. The role of Non-Governmental Organizations in the Blantyre District

As already mentioned in this chapter, residents of the Blantyre district face several challenges that affect their welfare. Concerted efforts from Non-governmental Organizations are therefore important to complement development works in the district. All development programs and activities implemented by the NGOs are supposed to emanate from the district development plan. The following are some of the prominent NGOs that are currently operating in the district.

Table 2 Some of the NGOs in Blantyre

Name of Organization	Issue Focus
Development Communications Trust (DCT)	Participatory development communication
ADRA Malawi	Health, Agriculture
Mai Aisha Trust (MAT)	Education, Health, Food Security, Micro-Finance, Relief
Foundation for community and livelihood development (FOCOLD)	Health, Advocacy, Agriculture
Family Life and Aids Education (FLAEM)	Health, Education, Advocacy
National Initiative for Civic Education (NICE)	Education, Community Empowerment
Save the Children	Education, Advocacy
World Vision International	Education, Health, Child Protection

In accordance with the decentralization policy, this Chapter has provided an overview of local governance and the local governance systems in the Blantyre district. It has offered a general view of the district's participatory development planning process in addition to explaining the power relations and roles of these entities. Additionally, it provided a brief overview of Malawi's political system and government structure. The details of the findings and outcomes on whether or not the decentralization process in the Blantyre District has aided local development and decreased poverty will be covered in the following chapter.

IV. AN EVALUATION OF THE EFFECTS OF DECENTRALIZATION REFORMS IN THE BLANTYRE DISTRICT

This chapter presents the findings of research that was conducted in the Blantyre district, T/A Kuntaja. The study examined the methods of participation and the awareness levels and attitudes of citizens in local governance. The research assessed the nature of citizen participation in the identification, implementation, and monitoring of the CDF and LDF-funded projects in the district. The study, therefore, reveals how the CDF and LDF are used and their effectiveness in the area of study. It also gives an insight into how sub-district structures namely; ADCs and VDCs operate in the district in light of decentralization.

A. Research Methodology

This research employed qualitative research methods to acquire data. Semi-Structured interviews and focus group discussions were used in this research. This method was deemed credible and effective for this study by the researcher since it allows for participatory learning and cross-checking of facts and impressions. Semi-structured interviews provide an opportunity for the interviewee to interpret and make sense of events and issues, while a focus group allows the researcher to gain a better understanding of why people have certain feelings (Bryman et al., 2022). To analyze data, I used a step-by-step process of analyzing Qualitative interview data as demonstrated by Löfgren (2013). In this study, Focus Group Discussions (FGDS) targeted Specialized persons with specific information regarding sub-district structures, namely; ADCs and VDCs. Semi-structured interviews with district stakeholders such as the District Commissioner, Member of Parliament, Ward Councilor, Chief, and Directors of Local NGOs were employed. This was done considering that the participants are familiar with the subject of discussion.

Through Development Communications Trusts interface meetings, I was able

to conduct initial interviews at the beginning of this study. This was done to understand how local communities view the causes of poor governance and service delivery. A review of relevant literature on decentralization and community development was also conducted as part of the study. It employed government documents, websites, books, journal articles, newspapers, and other sources to gather credible and relevant information on decentralization, local government institutions, and the nature of citizen participation in Malawi. The study, therefore, used a multimethod approach to collect primary and secondary data. Focus group discussions (FGDS) and semi-structured one-to-one interviews were utilized to gather primary data, while a document review was used to get secondary data.

1.   Focus Group Discussions

Saunders et al., (2016), define the research interview as a structured conversation between two or more persons in which the interviewer establishes rapport and asks succinct and unambiguous questions to which the interviewee is eager to respond and listen carefully. Essentially, it's about asking good questions and paying attention to the responses so that you may dig further into them. Interviews can aid in the collection of valid and trustworthy data relevant to your research question(s) and aims.

A focus group discussion is a type of interview in which the interviewer asks a group of people questions. Group interviews (including focus groups) typically have between 4 and 12 members, with the exact number depending on the character of the participants, the topic, and the interviewer's expertise. Inevitably, the more complicated the topic matter, the smaller the number of participants. Nonprobability sampling is commonly used to select participants, who are typically picked for a specific reason, such as being representative of the group being studied or representing individuals who are vital to a certain operation (Saunders et al., 2016).

According to Bryman et al., (2022), A focus group has many advantages. One of the most essential benefits is that it allows the researcher to learn why people feel the way they do. Subjects are frequently asked about their reasons for holding a specific viewpoint in individual interviews, but a focus group allows members to examine one another's reasoning. This can be more insightful and illuminating than traditional interviews, which use a question-and-answer approach.

In this study, two (2) Focus group discussions targeted the ADC and VDC in the area of study. Nine (9) people were invited to one place, where open-ended questions were asked in the first FGD (1FGD). The discussions took place at Khombwe primary school. In total there were 5 females and 4 males who participated in the first FGD.

In total, eight (8) people attended the second FGD (2FGD). There were 6 females and 3 males who attended the second focus group discussion at Machinjiri primary.

In both FGD attendees were members of ADC and VDC, Development Communications Trust (DCT) Khombwe and Mulira radio listening club members, the ward Councilor for the area, and the Group Village Headman (GVH), as well as the Director of DCT. In this study, the participants were aged between 28 to 40. All of the participants were subsistence farmers, however several of them also worked in small enterprises to make a living.

Issues discussed in the 1FGD and 2FGD included an assessment of the committee member's knowledge of the functions, their roles, significance, and performance of the ADC and VDC in their area. The session allowed the members present to engage in development talks, where they freely expressed their views as citizens. Discussions touched on the role of communities in tracking public funds and demanding transparency and accountability from duty bearers. This activity also created a platform for the community members to open up on issues that have been affecting them and hindering the advancement of public services infrastructure delivery such as schools, roads, and bridges in their area.

The discussions, allowed every participant to speak freely during the session. The issues discussed were emerging from the research questions and objectives. The researcher presented the questions one by one and conclusions were made at the end of the discussions.

2. Telephone and Internet - Mediated Interviews

Qualitative interviews can also be done over the phone utilizing a voice/listening-only mode. Videotelephony advancements are also bringing up new options for conducting interviews using a video calling service.

According to Saunders et al., (2016), conducting semi-structured or in-depth interviews over the phone has advantages in terms of accessibility, speed, and cost. The researcher may be able to interview persons who would otherwise be impossible to reach owing to distance, expensive prices, or time constraints. Even if 'long-distance' access is not an issue, conducting interviews over the phone may have advantages in terms of data collecting time and cost. To put it another way, this technique could be considered more practical.

In this study, I reached out to some of the interviewees through social media (WhatsApp and Facebook). Later on, zoom meetings were scheduled and conducted with the respondents - two (2) Members of Parliament for the Blantyre District, the District Commissioner for the Blantyre district, as well as the former District Commissioner, and two (2) NGO Managers for Mai Aisha Trust (MAT), and Family Life and Aids Ministry (FLAEM). Former elected officials were interviewed to gain a comprehensive understanding of how communities have participated in the recent past and to examine if the participation methods have improved over the years. I applied Semi-structured telephone and internet-mediated interviews with district stakeholders as the respondents were high-profile government officials and Managers who often have tight schedules. Agreeing to a face-to-face meeting proved to be difficult and impractical for the respondents. However, it was easy for me to establish personal contact with the respondents as I had previously attended the same schools with their close relations and also worked with two of the NGO managers – Development Communication Trust, and Mai Aisha Trust on development and charity projects.

Participants in this study were selected using a non-probability sampling method. The Focus Group Discussions (FGDS) were deliberately used to target specialized people who knew a lot about local government institutions and community development.

As demonstrated by Löfgren (2013), I used a step-by-step process of analyzing qualitative interview data. The first step involved reading the transcripts carefully. Secondly, all relevant pieces were labeled. In the third step, I decided which codes are the most important, and created categories (themes) by bringing several codes together. Lastly, I labeled the categories and decided which are the most relevant and how they are connected.

B.   Research Ethics

Every participant in the study has the right to be treated with respect. As such, Ethical considerations were made before and after data collection as. According to Creswell (2003), when researchers anticipate data gathering, they must respect the participants and the research sites. Ethical considerations that arise during this stage of the research are conscientiously addressed. The researcher will inform the respondents that the purpose of the study and its findings is solely to fulfill an academic requirement and will not be used for any other purpose.

All participants were told about the study and given the option to participate or not. Second, I ensured that each participant's anonymity and confidentiality were maintained by avoiding disclosing their identities without their consent.

Finally, I wrote up my results and avoided using terminology or words that are discriminatory towards people based on their gender, sexual orientation, race or ethnicity, physical impairments, or age.

C.   Decentralization in Practice in the Blantyre District

Advocates for decentralization such as donor and development partners (UNDP, World Bank, and IMF) share a viewpoint that recognized decentralization as an essential element in a quest to achieve good governance and poverty reduction. According to these institutions, the incorporation of grassroots participation in decision-making processes and allocation of resources creates a pathway for the existence of fair, transparent, and accountable democratic institutions that render public service to the local people effectively. Therefore, the amount to which decentralization has succeeded in establishing an excellent local government, which in turn supports poverty reduction, determines the success of decentralization in the eradication of extreme poverty. However, the following interviews that I conducted revealed to me that decentralization has not achieved its intended results in the Blantyre districts due to the following factors:

1.   The lack of capacity of VDC and ADC members

VDCs and ADCs are quite important structures. Any kind of Development belongs to the people as it is for the people and by the people themselves. For any

tangible development to take place, the grass-root community needs to be effectively involved in all stages of decision-making. The sub-district structures, therefore, are critical to effectively enhance sustainable development through the grass-root participation of the rural communities themselves. The VDCs and ADCs play a very important role in ensuring that development is conceived ideas from the local leadership so that in the end they take full ownership of the project. In so doing, the community feels fully empowered to enhance sustainable development. All say, "we did it". Communities need not be oppressed in development circles, they need liberation that would lead them to self-empowerment. However, it appears that the VDC and ADC members are not fully empowered by the district council and cannot demand transparency and accountability from duty bearers. In the 1FGD, The VDC and ADC members revealed that they had not received any training from the council. At Khombwe, ADC members disclosed that they rely solely on local knowledge and lack any additional technical skills. They argued that the only time that the council engages them is when there is a particular project that needs to be implemented. A female member of the VDC said:

"Kulibe yemwe amaganizako zozatiwunikira kuti machitidwe athu a ntchito azikhala motani. Ndizovuta kugwira ntchito asanatiphunzitse kagwiridwe kake". "No one aspires to guide our committee. I don't see how they believe we can function efficiently without training." (Interview 2FGD 26-05-2022)

Whilst on the issue of capacity, the findings, also, show that, contrary to how participation activities are interpreted by donors like the UNDP, citizens do not view it as a process. On the ground, citizens see participation as an event and a tool for developing policies and programs. They associate participation with the supply of manual labor to development works. In this case, participation is understood as molding bricks, assembling construction poles, collecting sand, as well as the willingness to provide free labor, which is also believed by many to be an act of patriotism.

A former member of parliament revealed in an interview that VDCs and ADCs are effective in enhancing participation and local development only in communities where illiteracy is relatively low. In some cases, the involvement of the MP in spreading civic education as to how ADCs and VDCs operate and their relevance, not forgetting to deliberately pick out only those who can deliver,

generally produces positive results. In the area of study, the committees were quick to acknowledge the good work that NGOs such as DCT are doing to train and educate people, even though it is not enough. The literacy level of VDC and ADC members is also a concern regarding their ability to discharge their duties effectively. According to the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2022), the literacy rate among the population aged 15-24 years in Malawi is 62.1 percent, while the literacy rate among the population aged 65 years and older is 35.1 percent. This was evident in this study as most of the Members of the VDC and ADC interviewed were primary school dropouts. This stands as a challenge for the members as they are unable to comprehend issues of development from an intellectual perspective. This study found that the communities are not aware of their rights to demand transparency and accountability from councils and service providers. Both the Committees and ordinary community members lack knowledge about the operations of the assembly. They fail to make informed decisions as they barely know about the decision-making processes and allocation of public resources. It was revealed in this study that community members in the area of T/A Kuntaja, including prominent figures such as the ADC Chairlady, VDC members, and the Group Village Headman, have little to no awareness of how public monies (LDF and CDF) are allocated in their area. This was evidenced by the fact that they were unable to determine the exact amount of funds granted by the council to their wards. The member of parliament for the area revealed that she encounters numerous problems that come as a result of citizens not being able to comprehend the roles and functions of their elected leaders. In a telephone interview, she expressed concern that constituents in the villages are unfamiliar with the duties and functions of a Member of Parliament. She said:

People in the village come to me with personal problems. For example, it is expected of me, as the MP to buy a coffin and cover other funeral expenses in my area. This is beyond the duties and responsibilities of an MP (Telephone Interview 20-04-2022)

Illiteracy is a big challenge, especially for VDCs and ADCs because they have a huge role to play in mobilizing and sensitizing other community members to comprehend how the local development process works. As illustrated by Jütting et al., (2011), in chapter two of this study, elements like local human capacity are crucial for illuminating how decentralization affects poverty. Given this background,

we can see that the lack of capacity of members of the VDC and ADC has affected the way decentralization, development, and citizen participation as a whole are conceived by the communities. The findings are in line with one of the factors that determine the effect of decentralization on poverty mentioned in the literature review of this study, which states that participation is unlikely or less effective in countries where the poor have low levels of education.

2. Political Patronage

As stated in the introduction, Malawi is one of the world's least developed countries, with a big population of extremely poor people. According to Chirwa (2014:35), political participation is therefore impacted negatively as people are vulnerable to political patronage. It was observed in this study that citizens subconsciously become vulnerable to Political patronage as they tend to depend on their elected officials for handouts and personal favors in return for votes. This sabotages the whole process of poverty reduction and achieving sustainable development in a decentralization setup. Those in positions of authority behave as patrons and frequently take advantage of their positions to win the support and devotion of their 'clients' or electorate. Because these 'providers' can't be held accountable to the people they are intended to serve, a high level of dependency between the subjects and their leaders is developed as a result, supporting the formation of anti-democratic practices. In extreme cases, people worship these "big men" (the leaders) as heroes. In most cases, the precedent is set during the campaign period. This is where the social contract between the electorate and elected representatives goes wrong. People often refer to politicians as "*Bwana*" which translates to Boss. After elections, this becomes a reality, citizens tend to view elected leaders as their Bosses. They fear them to an extent where they don't question them when things are going wrong. The politicians take advantage of this situation to do as they please, as there are no checks and balances.

During my interviews at Mtengowambalame, I observed that members of the community sat on the bare ground while the Chief and other elected officials sat on Chairs. I later understood that this is the arrangement for any other meeting that takes place in the area. Ordinary citizens are always given a secondary role.

3. The Financial Constraints of VDCs and ADCs

The VDCs and ADCs lack a unique source of income for their operations while being the most significant participation structures at the village and area levels. Members of the committees are frequently forced to labor without food, transportation, or remuneration because they lack financing. During the discussions, both structures stated that ADC and VDC meetings are held in remote locations, necessitating the expenditure of personal funds for transportation. There have been cases where members of the committees have had to sacrifice their only remaining savings for transportation just so they can attend development meetings. In the 1FGD, A female member of a VDC confessed that there have been instances where they had to use the only money they had to feed and clothe their families for transportation. She said:

Sometimes, we are called for emergency meetings, but we do not have transportation fees to enable us to go and attend such meetings. We've had instances where we've had to use the only money we have to feed and clothe our families for transportation. Regardless, we embrace our positions since the people chose us to be their representatives. They have put their faith in us (Interview 1FGD 02-05-2022)

Another member of an ADC questioned why they do not receive allowances to accommodate them when they go to various development meetings. The members think that the government is not keeping its end of the bargain with the committees. The government falls short in providing them with transportation and operational resources. This leads to the committees' failure to hold community awareness meetings. Both 1FGDS and 2FGDS found that this is primarily the cause of the VDC and ADC members' general lack of passionate effort after assuming office. Committee members lack the incentives to put in the necessary amount of effort. As a result, only a small number of members participate in such committees as they do not directly benefit their families. As a result, this has a highly negative impact on how well they deliver their services. It becomes challenging for the majority of the poor population to enjoy and actively participate in a democracy in a setting with significant levels of poverty, as is the situation here.

The committees, however, commended NGOs such as DCT for providing allowances to their parallel structures such as the Radio Listening Clubs (RLCs) whenever they engage them in development works. This answers the question of why

the community members prefer working in the parallel structures created by NGOs to those which are formally established by the government.

4. Lack of Adequate Project Funding

The councils are responsible for making policy and decisions on local governance, as they have been assigned authority by the central government. They also make it easier for districts to provide local services and enhance development. In the Blantyre district, the council is poorly funded. The study found that the Council is facing challenges because it receives insufficient funding for its operations and because its personnel is underqualified. In addition, the central government is hesitant to give the Council power and jurisdiction. As a result, the grassroots have also been impacted. The VDCs and the ADCs expressed that they are partially satisfied with the operations of the Blantyre district councils. The Committees acknowledged that they occasionally receive input and results of their development plans (DDPs) when they send their representatives to the council. A VDC member revealed in a focus group discussion that:

We recognize that the council works to the best of its abilities and that they do get some development projects when the council is properly funded, but when financing is insufficient, as it is in most cases, development projects come to a halt (Interview 2FGD 26-05-2022)

The lack of adequate project funding slows the progress of various projects in the district. As alluded to in the second chapter, the capacity and readiness to implement decentralization reforms by local institutions (District Councils) have determined the outcomes of decentralization, which in theory, are to combat poverty and enhance rural development.

5. Politicization of Development Projects

Despite the council making positive efforts to overcome underdevelopment and elevate the welfare of residents in the Blantyre district, it was discovered that the problem lies with the politicians, who, according to the revelations of this research, are always trying to manipulate the process of resource allocation. In most cases, politicians overlook the proper channels of development and as already shown in chapter three of this thesis, they abuse public funds by engaging in corrupt practices

and favoring their party followers. Again, this confirms what is mentioned in chapter two of this study corruption and elite capture are some of the reasons why there is no progress in the efforts to reduce poverty, making it difficult for actual development to take place, and for citizen participation to succeed. An example was given of a bridge construction project in the Machinjiri area. According to the members of ADC, which I interviewed, the council had allocated funds for the projects through the MP. However, according to the revelations, the MP diverted the funds for other projects that neither the ADC nor the ward councilor is aware of. In a 2FGD, A member of the ADC said:

We have the feeling that the council is prepared to give us the materials we require to achieve our development objectives. One project, for example, was to build a bridge. The council allocated to us (Area) all of the project's materials through our MP, but the MP used the materials without notifying us as ADC. MPs often overlook us (ADC) in favor of including members of their political parties as beneficiaries of development activities and projects (Interview 2FGD 26-05-2022)

Indeed, there have been numerous corrupt practices in district and city councils. Public funds are often diverted for other undisclosed projects, leaving out the rightful beneficiaries. A former ward councilor confirmed in a telephone interview that:

Members of parliament have their share in diverting such funds for personal benefits. As a result of these malpractices by the elected leaders, the Constituency Development Fund (CDF) and Local Development Fund (LDF) are not meeting the basic needs of the communities. In some instances, the allegedly LDF-funded projects, if ever done, are of sub-standards (Telephone Interview former ward councilor 02-05-2022)

Indeed, the study found that the needs of many constituents are rarely fulfilled because of the endless politicization of development projects. Due to high levels of corruption, many projects don't see their completion stages, and the quality of projects is mostly compromised.

6. Top-to-bottom approach to development

Since it is Malawi's primary source of discretionary money for local development, the LDF is critical to the advancement of participatory democracy. The

fund intends to eliminate poverty and enhance service delivery by allowing local communities to participate in decision-making processes through improved local governance and development management. The CDF, on the other hand, entails the use of public funds at local levels outside of the formal district planning system structures to increase the local government's capacity to address the local requirements of constituents.

Even though the CDF and LDF have to some extent helped local communities overcome obstacles to development, community members expressed worries that the money does not go far enough in their areas. The study found that the CDF and LDF protocols are scarcely followed. In a focus group discussion, the VDCs and ADCs mentioned that people at the grassroots do not get what they want in terms of development initiatives. They stated that they do not own the developments because politicians, particularly those from the ruling party, are the only ones involved. Typically, people receive something that is not what they had hoped for. According to the committees, public agents merely use them to provide manual labor in preparation for the implementation of development projects. In a 1FGD, the VDC members revealed that:

Here, at Mtengowambalame Primary School, we requested a school block and provided manual labor for the implementation of the project as advised by the council. However, the council did not honor its pledge as the members of the community never received the project's supplies and materials for the school block. Instead, we were only provided with iron sheets that could only be used to build a toilet (1FGD 02-05-2022)

In the Blantyre district, the choice of projects is mostly done by the top to bottom approach. This removes the ownership spirit of the beneficiaries of the proposed projects.

7. The Attitude of elected leaders

Members of a council include councilors, members of Parliament (MPs), and Traditional Authorities, who all attend both council and committee meetings. Because they all have authority over council policy and operations, all members are obligated to collaborate on development projects. This means that the community, the councilor, the MP, and the Chief must all agree before any development program

or project is carried out at the VDC/ADC level (Malawi Government, 21013:25).

However, In practice, the working relationship between ward councilors and members of parliament in Blantyre and Malawi, in general, is not good. The two are seemingly viewed as competitors either between themselves or the community sees them as such. Sometimes this is exacerbated by local citizens themselves as they consider ward councilors as potential candidates for the legislative position. As people start viewing the ward councilor as their potential candidate for the member of parliament, it goes without boundaries so much that the incumbent gets to realize and consider the ward councilor as a threat to his position. Sometimes the fears are true but sometimes they are just fears of smoke where there is no fire. In other words, fog is mistaken for smoke. Unlike members of parliament, who usually don't reside in their constituencies, councilors live with people in their communities hence, bridging communication gaps between them. The members of parliament have an upper hand in situations like these. Mostly it is the ward councilor who feels the pinch, as MPs apply their political muscle to squeeze and suppress the councilor's capacity. When this gets this way, it is the community that suffers because the flow of development, which practically is supposed to be facilitated by the councilor, is kind of being sabotaged by the member of parliament. Indeed as it says, "When two elephants fight, it is the grass that suffers." There is hardly a working relationship between MPs and Ward Councillors. They work as competitors as opposed to being development partners. There is a bad attitude between the two. Ward councilors are always victims simply because of their low financial capacity. Members of parliament always influence chiefs and faith leaders at the constituency level. Political parties always side with members of parliament as opposed to ward councilors. Unfortunately, MPs hardly reach out to communities except during the campaign period when seeking the next political mandate. In other words, ward councilors working with MPs is more like a political fight and not a development partnership.

In an interview I had with a former member of parliament he stated that "In Malawi, the ward councilors and MPs have been always working against each other and their relationship is not healthy as there is too much mistrust[7]." He was of the

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[7] Telephone interview with the former member of parliament (04/05/2022)

view that between the two there are no clear answers to what defines their roles and their job description. As noted by Hussein (2017), in some cases senior council officials and Councilors are not aware of their roles. Following the postponement of local government elections due to financial issues in 1999 and 2004, councilors who have been elected since lack a clear understanding of their roles, given that some duties had been delegated to TAs before the election of the ward councilors. The Local Government Act does not outline procedures for removing certain elected officials from office if they are shown to be ineffective. The local communities on the other hand do not see the importance of the councilors after years of their absence. As such, the communities don't see the need to get involved in local government elections.

8. Remuneration for MPs and Councilors

The working conditions of the elected representatives at the grassroots are made even more difficult by the fact that the government policy regarding remuneration and allowance sets a wider gap between the MPs and the ward Councilors. Unlike MPs, who have a fixed salary and other benefits, ward councilors do not receive a salary for representing their ward in the council. Instead, the ward councilors receive allowances to cover their transportation and upkeep during council and committee sessions, as described in Chapter three of this thesis (Malawi Government, 2013:24). Councilors must travel to interact and communicate with the electorate in their wards as representatives of those wards' constituents. Due to the low compensation, many councilors lose hope in their positions and find themselves unable to fulfill them because of a lack of resources.[8] Given the volunteer nature of their work, councilors who declined other governmental appointments struggle to provide a living for their families. As a result of their frustration, the ward councilors prioritize their private businesses and spend little to no time on local government and community issues. Consequently, there are no strong bonds between elected officials and the people they are tasked with representing. A 2FGDS with the VDC revealed that when meetings are arranged for development initiatives in their area, the ward councilor is normally expected to be present. However, it was discovered that the ward councilor is often not in attendance. One female member revealed, "We are

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[8] To attend the 1FGD, the ward councilor asked to be picked from his house to the meeting place

usually told that he is busy and would join us later but this never happens[9]." It is my understanding that the ward councilors are always busy with their private businesses to sustain a living, hence they don't prioritize attending development meetings.

9. NGO's Intervention In Community Development Works

NGOs' work and contribution toward improving the welfare of local communities in Malawi are prominent. The Philosophy of social mobilization is 'going to the people, staying with them, learning from them and adding on what they already know.' This may imply that people have the knowledge and capacity to improve their welfare and sustain their livelihood security. In reality, this is not the case. The NGOs' contribution towards improving the well-being of the local communities has generally brought positive as well as negative impacts on the living conditions of the poor people which will later be discussed in this section. Since the 1990s when the wind of political change emerged, NGOs across the country began addressing political and socio-economic challenges. Through awareness and sensitization meetings, people began to realize their potential to demand their rights and freedom through associations, participation in political and development agendas, and mindset change towards self-reliance in livelihood security interventions.

NGOs, both local and international, play a critical role in improving the living conditions of the local communities. Over time the NGOs have reached out to the majority of rural communities who are 80 percent of Malawi's population. I interviewed an NGO manager who stressed the significance of NGOs in empowering citizen participation in local development activities by saying that NGOs play a very important role in empowering communities to promote ownership and full participation in development management. According to him, NGOs bank on the knowledge communities already has, through community engagement and project implementation. The community is provided with opportunities to learn new methods and approaches toward sustainable development. He asserted that NGOs and local communities are intimate partners in the realization of genuine growth and development.

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[9] A second focus group discussion with the VDC in Machinjiri (26/05/2022)

The operational environment is generally good, especially since the 1990s when Malawi embraced the democratic system of government. Before that, the environment was not as good. The then single-party system did not open up and give chance to NGOs to mobilize communities in spearheading development programs. However, it was obvious that NGOs in Malawi still face significant problems in fostering citizen participation in development projects. As stated earlier, the emergence of NGOs did not only bring strength and opportunities but weaknesses and threats as well. The study discovered that the emergence of NGOs in the country came with the enticement of some privileges in a form of allowance each time local communities were mobilized for community programs. According to the NGO manager, following this approach of giving incentives, communities misunderstood development as belonging to the government or NGOs. It was difficult to reverse the trend as people already embraced allowance practices and conduct. They considered development as not belonging to them, but to the NGO or government. This attitude is still stuck in the minds of many local communities, including some partners in development work. Another challenge that the NGO faces is that the Malawi NGO Board charges prohibitive fees for NGOs to operate in Malawi. This has been a big challenge for them. It was also discovered that much as some issues to do with knowledge, attitude, and practices are improving in some instances, there is some resistance to some new ideologies that are introduced to the local communities by the NGOs. It was inevitable to notice, through interactions with the local communities, that there are controversies that surround the creation of NGO parallel structures in the area of study. The manager conceded that creating parallel structures against the already existing ones at the community level brings conflict and resistance to embracing development programs by the local communities. Nevertheless, not all structures created by local communities are useful. It would be more effective to adopt the already existing structures and strengthen them as this would be a way of community empowerment, thus promoting ownership of the structures

D. The Role Of Women In Development Works

Women play a major role in development works. The majority of the study's participants were women, as already demonstrated. This is because women are more devoted to development work than males are. In African communities, and

particularly in Malawi, women are often responsible for taking care of the home. Women, for instance, may go great distances to fetch water since rural areas lack access to potable water. During pregnancy, women must also suffer the stress of making long trips to and from health facilities. In this aspect, Malawi's underdevelopment disproportionately affects women. The government of Malawi, in partnership with OXFAM and Irish Aid, is running a 50:50 campaign aimed at profiling women's leadership in politics and development activities. To understand the importance of having women in leadership positions, I conducted a telephone interview with a female Member of Parliament, who is also the second deputy speaker of parliament in Malawi. In our discussion, she had this to say:

Every issue affects women. If we involve women in all aspects of development, they will deal with issues that the entire community faces. Corruption is the main barrier to growth in Malawi. It has made it impossible for our county to advance. If you pay close attention, you'll see that women are rarely involved in corrupt situations. For this reason, it's critical to incorporate women in development projects and leadership roles (Telephone Interview MP 20-04-2022)

One of the things I observed during my research, and internship period at DCT was the exclusivity of some roles to women. Some gender bias existed in these roles. At the very outset of the meetings, the moderator specified the roles that women were to play in the discussions. At the beginning and end of the meetings, women were assigned to sing.

Even though women predominate in the membership of the VDC and ADC committees, they were mainly given singing positions rather than actively contributing to the deliberations. The Malawian culture, where traditional or cultural customs play a significant part in assigning statutes to men and women, is the main cause of women's marginalization in the country (Mtelera, 2013). In Malawi, women often sing and write songs during public gatherings because of customs and historical repercussions of earlier political foundations. Women created songs and dances in support of President Banda at political rallies during the pre-democracy era (Chirambo et al., 20001). Such female tendencies later became profoundly ingrained in national traditions and the social fabric of Malawi, where the majority of women have internalized them. This can be observed as a recurring theme in Malawian women's daily lives today, who spend the majority of their time singing rather than

actively participating in decision-making during public meetings (Gilman, 2001).

V. CONCLUSION

This Chapter's primary objective is to summarize the research's major findings. The key themes of the research that were covered in the earlier chapters are highlighted. It also offers suggestions for enhancing local governance in the Blantyre District as well as potential areas for further study. In the end, the Chapter sets decentralization in a broader context to correctly assess the significance of the study's findings.

A. Conclusıon

The findings of the research concluded that although the government of Malawi, through decentralization, has put in place initiatives to enhance citizen participation in the decision-making processes at the grassroots, the relationship between citizen participation and the expected outcomes of participation as suggested by pro decentralization theorists and decentralization advocates such as international organizations, donors and development partners is rather complex and dynamic. The study found that effective participation is typically dependent on the citizens' ability to understand their role in local governance and demand transparency and accountability from public service providers. Community members of the Blantyre district in the area of Traditional Authority (T/A) Kuntaja and Machinjiri, lack the capacity, and awareness of the decentralization processes which would otherwise empower them to demand transparency and accountability from duty bearers.

Participation is understood in the framework of development planning and execution. It entails citizen participation in development initiatives through contributions of manual labor and resources to self-help development projects, as well as general project preparation. However, the study discovered that typical day-to-day decision-making processes in the Blantyre district are still less participatory. In certain circumstances, participation is sporadic, improvised, and not institutionalized. This reduces its usefulness for the empowerment of local

communities. At the local level, this is exacerbated by inadequate institutional structures and poor coordination of district stakeholders. Furthermore, citizens are unaware of the decentralization policy and its consequences on their welfare. As a result, they ignore the opportunities afforded to them by decentralization. The study, however, discovered that the issues impeding citizen participation are not permanent and can be readily resolved if discourse and communication are encouraged within and among the actors. As more resources move to the local level, community participation is likely to expand.

Parallel participatory structures created by NGOs are conceived to be more effective in the implementation of local development projects compared to the already existing sub-district structures such as ADCs and VDCs. This has been the case as the separate structures are deemed to be easy to mobilize and manage. As a result, NGOs prefer to create single-purpose structures to carry out development projects. However, the study found that parallel structures reduce the efficiency of formal multifunctional bodies like VDCs and ADCs. This influence may be seen in numerous ways: parallel structures have taken on the roles and functions of VDCs, depriving them of the takings that would otherwise benefit them if they were used by all development actors. Furthermore, they are unable to expand their competence to properly implement development projects in their areas. In addition, the creation of parallel structures has dispersed citizen participation, making it less coherent and effective. The parallel structures are single-purpose constructions with short-term benefits. As a result, members are more concerned with gaining immediate rewards, and in doing so, they tend to overlook the most vulnerable populations. In contrast, the development of parallel institutions has not been convenient for citizens participating in and negotiating for development projects because it requires them to attend numerous meetings, visit various offices, and travel. As a result, there are both financial and time constraints.

NGOs, despite being well respected by the public, are less incorporated into local governance systems, and their developmental operations are less linked to decentralization. Decentralization's goal in Malawi was to catalyze citizen participation by ensuring excellent local administration through District Assemblies and effective delivery of public goods and services by actors at the local level, however, the system and means for achieving such ambitious initiatives are

inadequate.

The government of Malawi envisioned a robust partnership between the public, civil society, and private sector entities, but the findings show that such collaboration is difficult in the Blantyre District. Instead, there is a slew of unconnected development initiatives that aren't well coordinated. The paucity of financial resources available to the council to fund the District Executive Committee, which organizes district development, and the lack of established policies controlling the operation of NGOs in rural regions exacerbate the problem. However, the study discovered that NGOs are keen to operate inside the District Assembly's official procedures if those institutions are adequately set up to handle all types of initiatives.

B. Recommendations

This section presents some recommendations based on the findings of research done in the Blantyre District's T/A Kuntaja and Machinjiri areas. The recommendations are in keeping with the study's main objective of examining the effectiveness of VDCs and ADCs in the context of decentralization. All development institutions, such as government ministries, NGOs, local participatory structures, such as ADCs and VDCs, and members of communities at large, can benefit from the proposals provided.

- The central government actors should not obstruct the council's operations by ensuring that there is a full devaluation of power to local units.

- To ensure that local communities are included in development planning processes, the CDF should be integrated with the formal district planning system and the district development plan.

- MPs and ward councilors should be given offices so that they can be conveniently available to their constituents.

- The government should clearly define the roles and responsibilities of ward councilors and MPs.

- The government's policy on compensation and allowances for MPs and ward councilors has to be reviewed.

- The government, through the ministry of civic education, should run large-

- scale public awareness campaigns to educate citizens about their roles and duties in local government.

- The district council should ensure that participatory entities like VDCs and ADCs receive sufficient training on how to carry out their responsibilities.

- The MPs should participate in spreading civic education as to how ADCs and VDCs operate and their relevance.

- To avoid confusion, civic organizations should join the government and public authorities in educating communities about the tasks and responsibilities of their elected representatives.

- Only those who can deliver to the membership posts of ADC and VDC should be prioritized by local communities.

- NGOs should adopt the already existing structures and strengthen them as this would be a way of empowering communities and promoting ownership of the structures.

- To reduce travel distance to development meetings, ADCs should divide themselves according to their geographical location.

- Malawi's Anti-Corruption Bureau should continue to scrutinize how MPs spend public funds.

- The fight against corruption should not be left to government agencies only. Citizens should stay cautious and report any corrupt practices by service providers to the Police or ACB.

- District Councils should make it a tendency to display on notice boards available funds and expenditures of the council to demonstrate transparency and accountability

- Politicians should quit politicizing development issues and instead plan and implement projects through recognized development channels (VDCs and ADCs).

- There is a need to break the cultural norms and allow women to take an active role in contributing to development deliberations.

- For councilors to perform their duties efficiently, the District Council should

take into account realigning development institutions with the wards. This will prevent the further formation of the parallel structures that the decentralization policy aimed to eliminate while also reducing the tensions between local actors. Additionally, because wards are smaller than Traditional Authority Areas and are therefore more easily able to promote local development, it would increase participation.

- To prevent ward councilors, members of parliament, and traditional authorities from interfering with one another's duties, the District council should pass regulations or bylaws defining their respective obligations. Additionally, political and development issues should be clearly distinguished from administrative ones; doing so will help to clearly define the duties of the various players.

- To hold NGOs accountable to the public, the government ought to think about enacting a policy to control their local operations. A code of conduct for NGOs will force them to function inside the district councils' decentralized structures, which will lead to a controlled growth in structures such as VDC and ADC.

- The District Council ought to think about starting capacity-building initiatives. Building capacity is crucial since it is useless to transfer authority, resources, and duties to organizations that are ill-equipped to handle them. Building capacity should focus on creating partnerships and communication in development planning at the district level.

- To educate the public on the effects of the decentralization policy on their daily lives, the District Council should continue its civic education programs. In turn, this will empower the citizens and enable them to hold elected officials accountable. The government should work to develop critical citizens through civic education who are bold enough to advocate for their rights and powerful enough to oppose elite dominance. Civil society can be involved in numerous decentralization projects to achieve this.

- Ward Councilors should get encouraging incentives from the government to help them stay committed to the position for which they were chosen.

- The central government must provide the District Council with enough

resources and equipment, especially for development projects, to promote efficient service delivery to the citizens.

- The government ought to keep up its policy of integrating gender perspectives into development initiatives. At the district level, there is a lot of talk about empowering women, but in the villages, women are still not included in the decision-making processes. Therefore, the District Council should support grassroots efforts to empower women through civic education and a deliberate strategy of including women in all development committees, including the top positions.

C. Recommendations for Future Research

This study suggests that more research be done on the major developments and factors that have a bearing on the performance of District Councils in the multiparty dispensation.

The study has briefly touched on the issues of gender in leadership and development initiatives. A study on equity, inclusiveness, and gender sensitivity in local governance can also be of great significance to close the knowledge gap in this field of research.

Another study can be carried out to address the question of whether the bodies to whom the tasks are to be devolved should only do so once they have developed the capacity to handle or manage the functions and duties, or vice versa, or do both at once. Decentralization is a hot topic in Malawi right now, and it has to be looked into. Some line ministries that are unwilling to delegate some functions to the District Assemblies frequently use the capacity issue, as do NGOs that are wary of cooperating with the district council structures.

As councilors have been reintroduced to take over the development responsibilities that the traditional authorities had previously undertaken, it is also vital to study what the new roles of traditional authorities should be. This is important because the study observed that there is a struggle for political space between the Traditional authorities, ward councilors, and Members of Parliament. Therefore, a study on traditional leadership, democracy, and decentralization is very significant.

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APPENDIX

APPENDIX A Questionnaire

APPENDIX B Ethical Approval Form

QUESTIONNAIRE

My name is **Ibrahim Yassin**, and I am currently in my final year at Istanbul Aydin University-Turkey, where I am studying Political Science and International Relations. I am doing academic research as partial fulfillment for the attainment of a Master of Political Science and International Relations under the topic: **Citizen Participation in Local Governance - A Case Study of The Blantyre District, Malawi.** Your corporation in responding to this questionnaire will be greatly appreciated. You are requested to willfully respond and the data collected out of this will remain confidential and for academic purposes only.

This questionnaire has been divided into five parts: Part A is for District Commissioners, Part B is for Members of Parliament, Part C is for Ward Councilors, Part D is for NGO Managers, and Part E is for Village Development Committees (VDCs) and Area Development Committees (ADCs).

The questionnaire has been designed as one of the tools for data collection.

PART A (For District Commissioners)

1. How satisfied are you with the way your council responds to development issues in your district?

2. How satisfied are you with the way local citizens participate in the local development decision-making process in your district?

3. What would you say are the major challenges that the District Council faces when rendering public service to citizens in your district?

PART B (For Members of Parliament)

1. How effective are sub-district structures such as VDCs and ADCs in enhancing participation and local development?

2. What are the major challenges that MPs face when rendering public service to their constituents?

3. In your view, do development projects funded by the CDF and LDF meet the needs of local citizens?

4. How do you view the working relationship between ward councilors and MPs in Malawi?

PART C (For Ward Councilors)

1. How effective are sub-district structures such as VDCs and ADCs in enhancing participation and local development?

2. What challenges do ward councilors face when engaging citizens in local development work?

3. In your opinion, do development projects funded by the CDF and LDF meet the needs of local citizens?

4. How do you view the working relationship between ward councilors and MPs in Malawi?

PART D (For NGO Managers)

1. How can you rate the NGO's work and contribution toward improving the welfare of local citizens in Malawi??

2. How important are NGOs in empowering citizen participation in local development projects?

3. What can you say about the operational environment of the NGOs in Malawi?

4. What challenges do NGOs face when promoting citizen participation in development initiatives?

5. What can you say about the parallel structures that NGOs create separate from the already existing local development structures?

PART E (For VDCs and ADCs)

1. How do you understand your role as a Member of VDC or ADC?

2. Are you satisfied with the CDF and LDF-funded projects in your community?

3. Are you satisfied with how your MP addresses your development needs?

4. Are you satisfied with how your ward councilor represents your development needs?

5. Are you satisfied with how your district council addresses development issues in your area?

6. What challenges do you face as VDCs or ADCs?

7. How different are committees established by NGOs from VDCs and ADCs?

APPENDIX B Ethical Approval Form

T.C.
İSTANBUL AYDIN ÜNİVERSİTESİ REKTÖRLÜĞÜ
Lisansüstü Eğitim Enstitüsü Müdürlüğü

Sayı   : E-88083623-020-48759   25.04.2022
Konu   : Etik Onayı Hk.

Sayın IBRAHIM YASSIN

Tez çalışmanızda kullanmak üzere yapmayı talep ettiğiniz anketiniz İstanbul Aydın Üniversitesi Etik Komisyonu'nun 21.04.2022 tarihli ve 2022/07 sayılı kararıyla uygun bulunmuştur.
Bilgilerinize rica ederim.

Dr.Öğr.Üyesi Alper FİDAN
Müdür Yardımcısı

<p style="text-align:center">**RESUME**</p>

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- 2010-2014: High school certificate, Kayseri Mustafa Germirli Anatolian High School, Turkey

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Languages:

- English: Advanced

- Turkish: Advanced

Skills:

- Trustworthy, Integrity, Hardworking, and result-oriented

- Self-motivated, self-starter and team player, adaptive and initiative

- Excellent interpersonal and communication skills – both oral and writing

- Excellent organizational, time management skills and ability to multi-task and prioritize work

- Strong analytical skills and problem solving using a methodical and organized

approach

- The ability to develop innovative solutions encourages and contributes creative solutions to address challenging situations

- Ability to work under pressure and with minimum supervision

- Ability to work in a multicultural environment

- Leadership skills and resourcefulness

- Proficiency in the use of computer; Word Processing, Excel, Presentation, Publisher, Outlook and also knowledge in Internet/Email, Statistical Package for Social Scientists (SPSS) and STATA

Publication:

- Community Participation In Local Governance In Malawi: A Case Of The Blantyre District, in International Research Journal of Modernization in Engineering Technology and Science. Issue:05/May-2022. Ibrahim Yassin.