



**POLICY BRIEF**

*Implementation of Devolution and the Gendered Impact of COVID-19 on  
Devolution*

**JULY 2020**

## **INTRODUCTION**

This policy brief is developed by the Institute for Young Women's Development (IYWD) based on findings from an analysis of the implementation of devolution using a case study of Mashonaland Central province.

## **POLICY OPTIONS ON ENHANCING DEVOLUTION**

### ***i. Enacting subsidiary laws and institutional frameworks***

The government should urgently enact subsidiary laws and institutional frameworks that facilitate operationalisation of devolution. The process of crafting devolution legislation must be participatory, inclusive and time-bound. There is need to ensure there is clarification of roles and responsibilities within a devolved framework. Subsidiary laws and institutional frameworks should articulate and clarify different roles and responsibilities for different tiers of government. Guidelines on devolution should include clear aspirations and approaches for addressing gender disparities.

### ***ii. Depoliticise devolution agenda, process and outcome***

The development dividends from successful devolution can be easily articulated and discourse needs to shift from politics to development. Local authorities and administrators need to leverage and strengthen existing platforms to enhance citizen engagements. There should be deliberate efforts to have legislative safeguards that promote participation of young women in the devolution process while guaranteeing their full enjoyment of devolution outcomes. Depoliticization and integration of gender transformative safeguards should focus on formal and informal structures such as residents and rate payers association; faith based and community-based organisations along with local authorities associations. There should be structures for providing feedback on progress with the devolution process and these must include all stakeholders that represented the diversity of communities.

### ***iii. Quota system to prioritise transformative participation***

The devolution process should promote gender transformation anchored on effective participation of young women in structures that determine development priorities. A quota system on resource allocation for devolution should be explored as a way of ensuring that specific benefits from the devolution process are enjoyed equally by women. The quota system should also translate to participation and representation of women in key devolution structures. Besides affirmative action of ensuring women get elected offices, there is need for devolved structures to ensure women are represented in structures responsible for coordinating the devolution process.

### ***iv. Devolution and democratisation of development***

There is need to ensure that devolution expands and democratises spaces to facilitate effective participation of formerly marginalised groups such as young people, women and people with disabilities. Citizens should be educated on by-laws as well as how they can be involved within a democratised development process. Investments should be made towards creation and strengthening of platforms for citizens engagement to enable them to participate in planning and implementation processes.

### ***v. Information access for improved citizen participation, transparency and accountability***

Devolved structures should aim to addressing the lack of information on devolution. Devolution information sharing should prioritise addressing negative perceptions surrounding the process. This entails the need to develop reference documents (including in local languages) that clearly articulate the devolution model being implemented in Zimbabwe, the devolved mandates; relationships, roles and responsibilities of the different tiers of government and the place of citizens in the devolution agenda. There should be independent task forces that include full and effective participation of communities especially marginalised groups. Lower tiers of government should be deliberate in engaging communities as well as providing information to ensure their operations are transparent. Civil society and community groups should advocate for improved access to information as a basis

for accountability. This should move beyond accounting for how resources were utilised towards facilitating an understanding of the prioritisation and procurement process.

**vi. *Improved Local Resource Mobilisation***

Devolution should be designed and implemented in a way that ensures creation of new business opportunities and lower transaction costs resulting from decentralisation of business licensing and operations to ensure ease of doing business. Devolved structures should explore possibilities of expanding the fiscal space for local authorities to reduce reliance on disbursements from central government. Local authorities should build their capacity, willingness and strategic approach to engage in Public Private Partnerships as part of efforts to grow local economies. Deliberate efforts should be directed towards strengthening local economic zones built on key economic activities of specific areas/communities so as to take advantage of the competitive and comparative advantages of local enterprises.

***POLICY OPTIONS ON EMERGENCIES***

**i. *Local Level Emergency Response System***

Ensure devolved structures have clear local level emergency response structures that facilitate provision of context specific support. Such a system should include targeted awareness and education on COVID-19. There should be focus on prevention information, emerging trends and young women-specific risks. There is need to utilise mediums frequently used by young women including art, music, comedy, social media, popular radio programs, interpersonal communication as well as other mediums that can contribute towards bridging information and trust gaps.

**ii. *Increase Access to Comprehensive Youth-friendly SRH Information and Services***

Young women must continue to benefit from access to Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) information and services including STI/HIV prevention, treatment and support and timely maternity care. Existing commitments such as the Maputo Plan of Action which guides the African Union States on SRHR policy framework should be implemented to ensure universal access to comprehensive sexual reproductive health services even in the context of emergencies. More political and financial support should be directed towards guaranteeing availability and accessibility of SRH services and commodities.

**iii. *Local level Safety Nets***

There is need for devolved structures to develop their own localised social safety nets through interventions such as disaster funds that provide a cushion to the most vulnerable in emergency contexts. Social protection is a vital policy tool that the structures should adopt to reduce inequality and social exclusion. In the short term, Government and stakeholders must consider relief interventions such as food distribution and or cash transfers to meet food security, housing and medical needs while mitigating against loss of income. Recovery plans should focus on strengthening resilience of community members to further shocks that usually accompany emergencies.