



# **IMPLEMENTATION OF DEVOLUTION AND THE GENDERED IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON DEVOLUTION**

*A Case Study Report on Four Districts in Mashonaland Central Province*

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## **LIST OF ACRONYMS**

CEADZ	Civic Engagement for Accountability Democracy in Zimbabwe
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
COVID-19	Corona Virus Disease 2019
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DDC	District Development Committee
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GAM	Global Acute Malnutrition
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GRSSD	Gender Responsive Social Services Delivery
HRP	Zimbabwe Humanitarian Response Plan
IYWD	Institute for Young Women's Development
KII	Key Informant Interview
MP	Member of Parliament
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OPC	Office of the President and Cabinet
PC	Provincial Council
PDC	Provincial Development Coordinator
PHEIC	Public Health Emergency of International Concern
RDC	Rural District Council
RDC	Rural Development Coordinator
SARS-CoV-2	Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2
STEM	Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
VIDCO	Village Development Committee
WHO	World Health Organisation
ZEPARU	Zimbabwe Economic Policy Analysis and Research Unit
ZIMSTAT	Zimbabwe National Statistical Agency
ZimVAC	Zimbabwe Vulnerability Assessment Committee
ZWL	Zimbabwe Dollar

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides findings, conclusions and recommendations from a study commissioned to provide an analysis of the implementation of devolution with the case study of Mashonaland Central Province. The study further assessed the extent to which the government's response strategy to COVID-19 has integrated devolution. The study was conducted in July 2020 with data collection conducted in four districts<sup>1</sup>

## METHODS

The study utilised an exploratory, qualitative design and data collection was conducted through a combination of a desk review, key informant interviews and virtual focus group discussions. A total of 10 key informant interviews were conducted with stakeholders together with 21 in-depth interviews with young women. Further, 32 young women were engaged through focus group discussions (FGDs).

## KEY FINDINGS

### *Understanding of Devolution*

There is limited understanding of devolution amongst most community members. Knowledge of devolution is predominantly found among those working on devolution within government as well as those who would have been engaged in outreach work facilitated by IYWD and RAU. There is minimal diffusion of devolution information with a few respondents reporting getting information on devolution from their friends. The veracity of diffused information could not be ascertained. Young women and key informants who reported some knowledge cited IYWD's project on devolution as the source of information on devolution. This was reportedly complimented by information from the media which was characterised as being generalised and lacking specificity necessary for people to grasp the concept of devolution and locate themselves in both discourse and practice. Some community members understood the process specifically ceding power by central government to local government. Those who understood devolution in the context of outcomes focused on the benefits which included transitioning decision-making power to spaces close to communities and further notions equating devolution to people power as some young women highlighted that to them it meant "*Kudzikiswa kwemasimba kuvanhu*".

### *The Status of implementing Devolution*

Section 301(3) of the Constitution of Zimbabwe states that not less than 5% of national revenues raised in any financial year must be allocated to provinces and local authorities as their share in that year. The 2019 National Budget Statement provided US\$310 million in the budget to execute devolution which will be shared among 92 local authorities and 10 provincial councils. Key informants outlined that despite disbursements, there was scope for improving especially by bringing more clarity on the status of devolution both at policy and programmatic levels. Central government was reported to be working on a legal framework that will give effect to the Provincial and Metropolitan Councils; the membership, and their duties to effectively implement devolution. With regards to devolution disbursements, Bindura Municipality received 5 million Zimbabwean dollars and prioritised investments in water and sanitation. The Guruve Rural District Council (RDC) reported receiving ZWL\$320, 000 as devolution funds and invested in improving education in the district. In Shamva, Chaminuka RDC reported receiving 3 million Zimbabwean Dollars and funds were earmarked for investments that include drilling 13 boreholes in villages, clinics and schools, upgrading the sewer system and develop infrastructure in schools and clinics.

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<sup>1</sup> Bindura, Guruve, Mazowe and Shamva

### ***Programmes and Institution frameworks of implementing devolution***

Young women and key informants converged on the reality of limited awareness of programmes and institutional frameworks responsible for coordinating the devolution process at provincial and district level. Milestones recorded thus far are overshadowed by limited knowledge and minimal role clarity amongst the different tiers of government on devolution. There are existing development actors and structures whose roles within the devolved architecture are yet to be defined. Respondents identified village heads, councillors and chiefs as key players in raising awareness on devolution with a few noting that the DDC and local authorities have the mandate of coordinating devolution at the district level. The same stakeholders were also noted as key in providing updates and information on the devolution process. Even those that expressed ignorance on the institutional framework for implementing devolution expressed certainty that the Member of Parliament (MP), mayor and councillor are key stakeholders and should be involved in the way that devolution is implemented in their area.

### ***Support rendered towards devolution***

Financial disbursements from central government constitute the main form of devolution support received. Minimal investments have also been made towards meetings to discuss devolution modalities within the province. However, key informants opined that discussions did not provide sufficient content and expertise on operational approaches for devolution. Current devolution processes need to build on existing ones but the study revealed that systemic adjustments are yet to be made hence current processes simply took over existing structures of local governance. There have been a few instances where NGOs have sought to provide technical support in form of trainings on devolution but these have focused more on the demand side specifically strengthening the capacity of communities to understand and demand accountability on the devolution process. The approaches have reportedly not paid sufficient attention towards the supply side where institutional structures need to have capacities to align their knowledge, skills and competencies with requirements for executing within a devolved framework.

### ***Public participation in Devolution***

There is still limited participation of communities in devolution processes. This has further rescinded due to restrictions resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. Key informants from local authority structures argued that there is adequate space for participation of citizens in the devolution processes. Current approaches seem to be premised on assumptions that because spaces already exist, they will simply roll out the devolution process without any re-orientation. The limited knowledge on devolution and its attendant processes was also cited as a reason behind limited participation of communities in devolution processes. Structural and patriarchal barriers persist in local government decision-making processes including strategic planning, budgeting along with policy formulation and implementation. These are barriers towards promoting space for young women's meaningful engagement with solution holders.

### ***Opportunities in implementing devolution***

- *Strengthened citizen participation*
- *Improved culture of transparency and accountability*
- *Creation of sustainable local economies*

### ***Challenges in implementing devolution***

- *Politicisation of Devolution*
- *Inadequate Financial Resources*
- *Corruption and Nepotism*

### ***Impact of COVID-19 in Mashonaland Central Province***

The COVID-19 pandemic has had an impact on development. It has threatened social safety nets especially for informal traders who are unable to carry out their trade within the context of the lockdown. The inability of informal sector actors to earn incomes has resulted in reducing revenues to local authorities that rely heavily on rentals. Council Budgets are prepared on an annual basis and they include projected income from informal traders. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic this income stream has been completely wiped off and even if the country reopens; the number of traders is likely to have reduced due to loss of capital especially as they were predominantly involved in survivalist ventures without access to capital even before the lockdown. Imposition of a lockdown to minimise the spread of the COVID-19 virus has had socio-economic and political implications that should have been concretely considered in Mashonaland Central province. A huge population in rural, farming, mining and peri-urban communities including young women members of IYWD had limited access to information on the pandemic, precautionary measures to take and the significance of the lockdown.

### ***Gendered impacts of COVID-19***

Apart from the challenges that everyone else was facing due to COVID-19, IYWD also noted with concern a continued lack of other health services to young female sex workers, pregnant women and those living with HIV as clinics hesitated admitting patients due to fears of COVID-19. Restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic have resulted in limited access to services with young women reporting constrained access to services such as health as well as water. COVID-19 induced constraints in service delivery only further worsened access levels for women whose levels of access have always been constrained by historical gender imbalances. Insights from IYWD literature outlined that health service providers “were ill-prepared and had inadequate Covid-19 response equipment. The lockdown period was also characterized by the heavy presence of security forces including police and soldiers who were responsible for enforcing lockdown restrictions. In Guruve District, there were concerns of sexual violence against young women by soldiers deployed. This was reportedly raised at a District Covid-19 taskforce meeting”. In Bindura urban, high presence of police details without adequate information to citizens left a lot of people concerned about possible violations of their rights including access to information<sup>2</sup>.

### ***Utilisation of devolved structure for COVID-19***

Engagements with key informants indicated that the COVID-19 response did not effectively utilise the established devolved structures. The pandemic response was chiefly driven from central government and did not utilise the devolved structures from the onset. Comments from key informants suggests that if devolution had been adequately done in the province, those devolved structures could have simply taken responsibility of coordinating the provincial response to COVID-19 in a much contextual way based on the provincial realities. The key informants suggested that a more contextual response will ensure better community awareness raising and mobilisation.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- i. Put in place laws and the overall institutional framework that facilitates operationalisation of devolution.
- ii. Depoliticise devolution specifically the agenda, process and outcome. The development dividends from successful devolution can be easily articulated and discourse needs to shift from politics to development.
- iii. Include a quota system to prioritise transformative participation of and benefit from the devolution process by women.
- iv. Utilise devolution to expand democratise spaces to facilitate effective participation of formerly marginalised groups such as young people, women and people with disabilities.

- v. 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. Explore possibilities of expanding the fiscal space for local authorities to reduce reliance on disbursements from local government.
- vii. Engage in Public Private Partnerships (PPP) as part of efforts to grow local economies.
- viii. Prioritise creation/strengthening of local economic zones built on key economic activities of specific areas/communities.
- ix. Ensure devolved structures have clear local level emergency response structures that facilitate provision of context specific support.
- x. Develop localised social safety nets through interventions such as disaster funds that provide a cushion to the most vulnerable in emergency contexts.



## INTRODUCTION

This research report provides findings, conclusions and recommendations from an assessment of the implementation of Devolution as part of the work of Institute for Young Women's Development (IYWD) under the Civic Engagement for Accountability Democracy in Zimbabwe (CEADZ) project. IYWD has been leading the project entitled *Implementation of Devolution and Public Accountability through budget and policy monitoring for inclusive and improved Gender Responsive Social Services Delivery* (GRSSD) in Mashonaland Central (Bindura, Shamva, Guruve and Mazowe districts). This project by IYWD was designed to:

- Strengthen young women's capacity to inform and influence the formulation and implementation of Chapter 14 of the constitution on devolution for accountable governance in Mazowe, Shamva, Bindura and Guruve districts of Mashonaland Central province by June 2021;
- Raise awareness on the importance and meaning of devolution as outlined in the constitution amongst young women and girls from farming mining and rural communities of Mashonaland Central Province.
- Facilitate dialogue and engagement on Chapter 14 of the constitution on devolution, among young women, policy makers, traditional leaders and local leadership on the formulation and implementation of an effective and inclusive framework for accountable governance; and
- Track and document progress of the project for knowledge management and use as a tool for future accountability on the implementation of devolution.

As part of this project, IYWD commissioned this research to provide an analysis of the implementation of devolution. The study further assessed the extent to which the government's response strategy to COVID-19 has integrated devolution. In addition, the study sought to provide clear policy recommendations for local and national governments. Findings are expected to influence IYWD's broad interventions in seeking public accountability from local authorities as well as inform its national advocacy on devolution in line with Chapter 14 of the Constitution.

### *Objectives of the Study*

The specific objectives for this study were to:

- Analyse the implementation of devolution and assess utilisation of devolved systems in responding to COVID-19 using a case study of Mashonaland Central Province; and
- Develop a research report that will inform a policy paper on a gendered approach to devolution in crises including COVID-19. The paper will be submitted to local and national policy makers.

### *Methodology*

An exploratory, highly qualitative study design was used for the research. Triangulation was central, hence qualitative and quantitative methods were employed. Secondary data from a desk review was used together with primary data from engagements with key informants and young women. The desk review provided an understanding of the devolution legal and governance framework. It further provided an appreciation of the COVID-19 response at national and provincial level. In-depth interviews and WhatsApp-based Focus Group Discussions were conducted with young women from the four districts of Bindura, Guruve, Mazowe and Shamva. Key informant interviews were conducted with respondents purposefully selected from provincial and district stakeholder responsible for implementing devolution. These include Provincial Development Coordinator (PDC), District Development Coordinator (DDC), Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Councillors and Government Ministries such as Ministry of Women's Affairs and Youth. The table below shows an overall profile of respondents.

District	Method	Number of participants	Profile
Bindura	Key Informant Interviews	2	- Provincial Development Coordinator - Local Authority
	In-depth Interviews	4	Young Women
	Focus Group Discussions	9	Young Women
Guruve	Key Informant Interview	1	Ministry of Women Affairs
	In-depth Interview	5	Young Women
	Focus Group Discussions	8	Young Women
Mazowe	Key Informant Interview	1	DDC
	In-depth Interview	7	Young Women
	Focus Group Discussions	8	Young Women
Shamva	Key Informant Interview	3	- DDC - Councillor - Ministry of Youth
	In-depth Interview	5	Young Women
	Focus Group Discussions	8	Young Women
IYWD	Key Informant Interview	4	- Team Leader - Program Lead - Knowledge management, Documentation and Advocacy officer - Finance and Administration Manager/Alliance of Community Based Organisations (ACBOs) Coordinator

## LIMITATIONS

The COVID-19 pandemic and related travel restrictions meant the team could not collect data physically. To mitigate, in-depth interviews were conducted together with virtual FGDs.

## BACKGROUND

This research was conducted in a context that Zimbabwe had set out the devolution process. Key actions include disbursement of financial resources to support devolution processes at the provincial level. Government funding towards devolution raised the need for citizen monitoring on prioritisation and utilisation. IYWD's work on devolution was a continuation of earlier work focusing on promoting social accountability driven by participation of young women in local authority governance processes.

### Defining Devolution

Devolution is defined as “the transfer of authority to autonomous lower level units, such as Provincial and District that are legally constituted as separate governance entities”<sup>3</sup>. The definition is expanded further to transcend only geography through “the transfer of political, administrative and fiscal management powers from central government to subnational authorities, such as state, regional and local”<sup>4</sup>. Another thread is provided to include the democratising potential of devolution by outlining that it is “a mechanism intended to boost participation of recipients of public services in matters

<sup>3</sup> UNDP (1999) Decentralization: A Sampling of Definitions. Working paper prepared in connection with the Joint UNDP-Government of Germany evaluation of the UNDP role in decentralization and local governance.

<sup>4</sup> Mwikali, P. and Wafula, M.K. (2015). Effects of devolved governance on organizational performance: A case of Mombasa County Government. International Journal of Scientific and Research Publications, Vol.5, No.6, pp.1-10.

affecting their well-being”<sup>5</sup>. The hypothesis is that well executed devolution should result in elimination or reduction of bureaucracy thereby improving efficiency in service delivery. A final strand argues that devolution, if executed well, should “strengthen democracy, promote state-building and accommodate diverse cultures through fostering equitable distribution of resources”<sup>6</sup>. There are various threads that characterise devolution. Key among them and for this study includes the transfer of political, fiscal and administrative authority. However, this study is framed within the understanding that “devolution is not an end in itself but a means to an end which is sustainable and equitable development of Zimbabwe”<sup>7</sup>. This research is focusing on both the process and the expected outcomes of devolution specifically steps taken thus far along with emerging results.

### **Devolution in Zimbabwe**

There is both an economic and political imperative to devolution in Zimbabwe. One study<sup>8</sup> outlined that “Economic devolution is where provinces and districts will work to attract investment and transform themselves into economic zones with own gross domestic product (GDP) to ensure sustainable and equitable development of the country”. The study further contends that, “the political dimension to devolution on the other hand is designed to strengthen democracy by ensuring that decision making is done at the lowest level of government that has more reach by citizens”. Devolution therefore is envisioned as a strategy for empowering citizens to make locally based development choices to improve the delivery of social services. With continued inefficiencies with central government, decentralised structures are considered to provide easier and faster ways of decision making and people-centric solutions. Another key attribute to governance that devolution can bring, is to enhance accountability by ensuring that communities can directly engage with decision makers to get answers to some of their concerns.

The Office of the President and Cabinet (OPC) will be involved in building capacity of the devolved areas in packaging their resources for investment attraction. Political will to implementing devolution has been demonstrated by the designation of the President of Zimbabwe as chair of the Cabinet Committee on Devolution<sup>9</sup>. Although devolution was made a constitutional provision in the Zimbabwe Constitution Amendment (No. 20) Act 2013, Zimbabwe has always had a well-structured administrative decentralisation such as the provincial administration structures and local authorities.

### **Feminism**

The research is steeped within a feminist theory<sup>10</sup> that encompasses “a range of ideas, reflecting the diversity of women worldwide. Feminism counters traditional philosophy with new ways of addressing issues affecting humanity, calling for the replacement of the presiding patriarchal order with a system that emphasizes equal rights, justice, and fairness”. Feminist theory facilitates interrogation of devolution as well as its effectiveness/ineffectiveness in the context of broader historical frameworks. Further, it attempts to avoid homogenous analysis that assumes devolution will deliver equally for women and men despite historical structural and institutionalised inequalities. The research will primarily use liberal feminism. Liberal feminism argues that women’s subordinate position as compared to that of men emanates from customary and legal constraints.

By extension, translating to feminist legal theory, the solution for equalizing the rights of women *vis à vis* men lies predominantly in equalizing the playing field by removing whatever customary and legal constraints stand in the path of equality. There is an explicit understanding in this research that the

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<sup>5</sup> Forje, J.W. (2006). Rethinking Decentralization and Devolution of Power within the African Context: Challenges and Opportunities. Presented at the 28th African Association for Public Administration and Management Annual Roundtable Conference, Arusha, Tanzania, 4th – 8th December 2006.

<sup>6</sup> Abbiate, T. and Federeco, V. (2018). African Federalism and Decentralization in Action: Evidences of a Blurred Story from Kenya and South Africa. *Federalismi.It* - ISSN 1826-3534 [Numero Speciale 2/2018].

<sup>7</sup> Zinyama, T. and Chimnikire, P. (2019). The Nuts and Bolts of Devolution in Zimbabwe Designing the Provincial and Metropolitan Councils. *African Journal of Public Affairs*. Volume 11 number 2.

<sup>8</sup> ZEPARU (2019) Exploring the Key Success Factors in Implementing Devolution in Zimbabwe

<sup>9</sup> ZEPARU (2019) Exploring the Key Success Factors in Implementing Devolution in Zimbabwe

<sup>10</sup> R. Tong, in *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences*, 2001

notion of equality is not in the abstract sense but in terms of the lived experiences of men and women<sup>11</sup>. Gender justice is a core objective, as is freeing women from oppressive gender roles that have been used as excuses or justifications for giving women a lesser place or no place at all. Analysis from the research will hone in on the ways in which devolution in providing opportunity for equalising the playing field and expanding opportunities for women to fully participate in political, economic and civic spaces.

### ***Case Study Geographical Scope: Mashonaland Central Profile***

Mashonaland Central is one of the 10 provinces of Zimbabwe. It has an area of 28,347 km<sup>2</sup> and a population of 1,152,520 (2012 census), representing about 8.5 percent of the total Zimbabwe population. Bindura district is the provincial capital with the province hosting seven other districts which are Mbire, Guruve, Mount Darwin, Rushinga, Shamva, Mazowe and Muzarabani.

According to ZIMSTAT 2012<sup>12</sup>, Mashonaland Province has a total population of 1,152,520 with 567,140 being males and 585,380 females. The population in Mashonaland Central Province is relatively young with 43 percent aged below 15 years and about four percent aged 65 years and above. The population in this province is mostly rural with only five percent of the total found in urban areas.

In terms of education, census information revealed that about 14 percent of the population aged 3-24 years had never been to school. However, 80 percent of these were below six years of age and many of them likely to start school at a later stage. 56 percent of the population was currently attending school. In 2012, an estimated 53 percent of the total population for the province was in the economically active category. The economically active population constituted 71 percent of persons aged 15 years and above. Of the economically active population, six percent were unemployed and 94 percent employed. Out of those who were employed, the highest proportion (69 percent) was engaged in agriculture related occupations, followed by services, mining and construction (five percent each). The province is generally anchored on agriculture and mining. The province's average household size is four persons.

### ***The COVID-19 Crises in Zimbabwe and Mashonaland Central***

Corona Virus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) caused by Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) has become one of the worst pandemics that the world has had to grapple with. The World Health Organisation (WHO) declared COVID-19 a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC) on 30 January 2020 and, subsequently, a pandemic on 11 March 2020. Within the context of this research, Zimbabwe was responding to the COVID-19 pandemic which was severely disrupting livelihoods, access to education, employment and participation in governance processes (including participation in the devolved structures of government), decision-making and public life.

Nearly seven out of 10 (69 percent) of households in Mashonaland Central had access to safe water, i.e. either piped or from boreholes/protected wells<sup>10</sup>. The remaining 31 percent relied on relatively unsafe water from unprotected wells, rivers, streams and dams. A further 16 percent of the households had water on their premises, while 36 percent had water within a distance of less than 500 metres. 15 percent had to travel more than one kilometre to access water. It was further noted that within Mashonaland Central, households in Urban Districts district were better off than those in the rural districts in terms of quality of water and distance to the source. Access to water is critical given the importance of regular hand washing in preventing further spread of the COVID-19 virus. The risks of the COVID-19 virus spreading is heightened by intra and inter-province movement as well as the province's proximity to Harare which is the epicentre of the virus in Zimbabwe.

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<sup>11</sup> Amy S. Tsanga and Julie E. Stewart. (2011). Women & law Innovative approaches to teaching, research and analysis. Southern and Eastern African Regional Centre for Women's Law

<sup>12</sup> ZIMSTAT (2012) Provincial Report Mashonaland Central; Zimbabwe Population Census 2012

## *Legal and Institutional Frameworks Guiding Devolution*

The Zimbabwe Constitution Amendment (No. 20) Act 2013 provides the framework for devolution of governmental powers and responsibilities in Section 264 with the tiers of government outlined in Section 5 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe. Sub-section 1 provides for devolution of governmental powers and responsibilities to provincial and metropolitan councils and local authorities. Specifically, Section 264 Sub-section 1 states that, “whenever appropriate, governmental powers and responsibilities must be devolved to provincial and metropolitan councils and local authorities to carry out these responsibilities efficiently and effectively”.

Apart from the constitutional provision of devolution some of the crucial legal provisions that support devolution include the Urban Councils Act (Chapter 29:15), Rural Councils Act (Chapter 29:13), Regional and Town and Country Planning Act (Chapter 29:12) and the Provincial Councils and Administration Act (Chapter 29:11). The Provincial Councils and Administration Act (Chap 29:11) is being amended through the Provincial Council and Administration Amendment Bill as part of the subsidiary legislation to support implementation of devolution.

The Government’s Legislative Agenda for 2018-2019<sup>13</sup> outlined in the President’s State of the Nation address include some bills that have a direct bearing on implementation of Devolution which are the Provincial Councils Administration Bill, The Public Finance Management Bill and Rural District Councils Bill. Some of the critical discussion points on the legal framework that should be of focus for civil society and communities include<sup>14</sup>:

- The Provincial Council and Administration Amendment Bill should clearly provide for the definition of devolution and spell out the roles and responsibilities for each of the three tiers of government;
- Legal provisions in the Rural District and Urban Councils Acts that need to be aligned with the Constitution to eliminate any envisaged contradictions that can militate against the implementation of devolution;
- Potential conflicts of interest in the composition of the Provincial and Metropolitan Councils as outlined in the Constitution;
- Institutional structures and platforms to promote inclusivity, transparency and accountability in the implementation of devolution;
- Prospects of providing for sharing royalties between central government and lower tiers of government;
- Possible amendments to the Public Entities Corporate Governance Act [Chapter 10:31] local authorities to fall under its purview; and
- Legal provisions on corporate social responsibility so as to meet the needs of the marginalized local communities.

A key expectation from effective devolution is the potential for strengthened accountability and transparency. Zimbabwe has tried to promote transparency and accountability and an example related to the demand for availability of audited financial records. The Office of the Auditor General (2019) reported that only three (Bindura Municipality, Tongogara Rural District Council and Marondera Rural District Council) out of 92 had up to date financial statements audited and reported. Within this context, there are possibilities of drawing on the example of Bindura to learn lessons and identify opportunities for strengthening transparency and accountability.

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<sup>13</sup> Bill Watch 26 - 2018 The Government’s Legislative Agenda for 2018-2019

<sup>14</sup> ZEPARU (2019) Exploring the Key Success Factors in Implementing Devolution in Zimbabwe

## FINDINGS: DEVOLUTION

### *Understanding of Devolution*

In its conception, IYWD understands devolution to mean that people have the power to own their communities. The definition and conceptualisation extends towards owning problems as well as solutions. The understanding is premised on the assumption that a proper devolution process will ensure that development and decisions are responsive to the needs of different groups within societies and communities. IYWD programming is further informed by an understanding that devolution requires strategic engagements and capacity building that ensures key stakeholders have a shared understanding. While devolution has potential for strengthening cohesion and promoting gender transformation, in the absence of shared understanding there is potential for the concept of devolution as well as its practical application to be perpetually contested.

Stakeholders pointed to limited understanding of devolution amongst most community members. Those who reported having some knowledge and understanding of devolution would have been engaged in outreach work facilitated by IYWD and RAU. A few highlighted knowing and understanding devolution through their peers as well as from reading the constitution. Young women and key informants who reported some knowledge cited IYWD's project on devolution as the source of information on devolution. This was reportedly complimented by information from the media which was characterised as being generalised and lacking specificity necessary for people to grasp the concept of devolution and locate themselves in both discourse and practice.

“if...you don't belong to an NGO, you will never get to understand clearly how government programs that happen in your area are formulated and implemented. That way you are not in a position to point out when things are not being done right”.

Amongst respondents who reported being aware of devolution, they understood it as a process of decentralisation of power from the central to the local government level. For some this process of devolving power meant power moves closer to the community. Transitioning decision making power to spaces close to communities would facilitate access to localised governance spaces by ordinary community members. There were further notions equating devolution to people power as some young women highlighted that to them it meant “*Kudzikiswa kwemasimba kuvanhu*”.

There were further insights equating devolution of decision-making power to the people. In some instances, young women defined devolution as women's empowerment. This was linked to the primacy of IYWD as the source of information on devolution along with its utilisation of feminist approaches whose foundational ethos include empowerment of young women. Heterogeneity expressed in literature around the definition of devolution was articulated by respondents with some highlighting that they understood it as decentralisation of corporates to set up offices and operations at the lower levels. While this was a corporatized understanding of devolution, young women outlined that decentralisation would be important in providing goods and services closer to communities.

Key informants outlined that there was a tendency to limit devolution to bringing power to local levels while neglecting the dimension that focuses on devolution of responsibility. This was discussed mostly in the context of communities participating in civic processes as a responsibility that they need to take up and consider seriously in the process of devolution. In the same line, devolution was suggested as a process that should make development possible through engagement of local stakeholders rather than through an overreliance on the central government and national authorities.

“There seems to be this misconception that devolution should only focus on bringing power to the local level without talking about responsibility. If power is devolved it means responsibility is devolved hence communities need to be capacitated to accept and deal with power and responsibility” Key Informant

Overall, the understanding of both the key stakeholders and the communities of devolution is mainly linked to decentralisation which has been in existence in Zimbabwe since introduction of provincial and local authority structures. Decentralisation as was the case in Zimbabwe was decided with minimal consultations and was a strategy for increasing the head-offices' capacity to achieve proposed objectives. On the other hand, devolution is usually a response to demands for more local or regional autonomy to which government officials in the central government reluctantly accede<sup>15</sup>. In the case of Zimbabwe's devolution which took a similar top-down strategy to that of decentralisation, the conception of devolution has not been explicit on the need for a balanced model that supports both power-sharing and fiscal devolution. Communities seem to know the need for both these aspects of power and fiscal devolution because of their work with civil society organisations but they exist in a context where this is contested by local authorities and provincial structures who work under the guidance of the central government which seems reluctant to accede the political and fiscal power through the process of devolution.

### ***The Status of implementing Devolution***

Section 301(3) of the Constitution of Zimbabwe states that not less than 5% of national revenues raised in any financial year must be allocated to provinces and local authorities as their share in that year. The 2019 National Budget Statement provided US\$310 million in the budget to execute devolution which will be shared among 92 local authorities and 10 provincial councils. The total budget was initially projected to increase by 12% and 15.2% to US\$ 347.2 million and US\$400 million in 2020 and 2021 respectively. However, the budget was revised to ZWL\$703 million in the 2019 Mid-Year Budget Review and Supplementary Budget against disbursements of ZWL\$120 million, following the adoption of the Zimbabwe dollar as the mono currency<sup>16</sup>.

Key informants addressed the lack of clarity on the status of devolution both at policy and programmatic levels in Mashonaland Central Province, and gave insights on progress made thus far. They highlighted that central government is working on a legal framework that will give effect to Provincial and Metropolitan Councils; the membership, and their duties to effectively implement devolution. In addition, Key informants outlined that Provincial Council (PCs) members were elected in 2018 but are yet to be sworn in and function. The PCs are key actors in devolution and are responsible for coordinating developmental processes and programmes in the province.

The PDC also highlighted that while a governing framework for the PCs is yet to be put in place, inter-governmental fiscal transfers are already being disbursed by the central government through Ministry of Finance to local authorities. The PDC revealed that Local Authorities in Mashonaland Central have received a cumulative total of ZWL\$36 million to implement projects that have high socio-economic impact. The projects implemented are those that have hailed from the Village Development Committees and adopted at the Rural District Development Committee (RDCC) meeting<sup>17</sup>.

Bindura Municipality presented that they received 5 million Zimbabwean dollars on 30 December 2019 as devolution funds for 2020. They revealed that they will prioritise water and sanitation highlighting their aspiration to expand water works. A critical target was that the by the end of the 1st quarter of the year they should have purchased 2 refuse trucks and dumpers while completing construction of Garikai bridge<sup>18</sup>.

The Guruve rural district council reported receiving ZWL\$320 000 as devolution funds in 2019. Funds were allocated towards investments to improve education in the district. An important example

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<sup>15</sup> See ZEPARU citing Luiz Carlos Bresser-Pereira 2004

<sup>16</sup> ZEPARU (2019) Exploring the Key Success Factors in Implementing Devolution in Zimbabwe

<sup>17</sup> IYWD CEADZ Progress Report Feb 2020

<sup>18</sup> IYWD CEADZ Progress Report Jan 2020

outlined relates to the district reportedly prioritising support towards students (mostly female) who are good in Science in order to prepare for the district's drive towards STEM. The district reportedly allocated ZWL\$200 000 to establish a science laboratory at Chifamba High School<sup>19</sup>. The prioritisation outlines possibilities availed by devolution where local level authorities can determine their priorities and invest where they feel the district will derive the most dividends.

In Shamva, Chaminuka RDC reported receiving 3 million Zimbabwean Dollars in December 2019. Funds have been earmarked for investments that include drilling 13 boreholes in villages, clinics and schools, upgrading the sewer system and develop infrastructure in schools and clinics.

The key informants outlined that although the devolution process had started slowly it had gained momentum. Progress has since been disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic which has resulted in some projects being halted. The halting of project and processes of devolution coupled with inflation has further eroded the value of resources allocated to the devolution process whilst the immediate need to respond to the pandemic has also meant that some of the resources earmarked for other development process had to be reallocated to support the response to COVID-19.

While bureaucrats could articulate progress made towards devolution, most young women were not aware of progress. Limited awareness was attributed this to the absence of clear structures that provide information on devolution within communities. A key informant outlined that lack of information among young women could be attributed to structural factors specifically their non-participation in structures at ward, district and provincial level. This outlines a reality that there could be fiscal devolution but administrative and political devolution may not be there.

Those that highlighted knowledge of some of the current devolution initiatives cited some of the infrastructural projects that were underway in their communities such as the installation of new water pipes in Bindura, drilling of boreholes in Shamva and the construction of a science lab in Gurube. However, respondents indicated that these projects were since stalled due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Some of the young women who participated in meetings on devolution indicated that they were aware that resources for devolution have been disbursed from central government. However, they were not convinced that enough is being done to ensure that resources are utilised. Some respondents also raised concerns on how committed resources have not been disbursed and how this may potentially result in the erosion of value of those resources in the highly inflationary environment.

The study established that there is still some significant work that needs to be done to ensure that there is wider community engagement and public awareness on devolution and the current work that is being done. Available evidence showed that young women who were engaged as part of the work of IYWD were following the devolution processes. There has not been sufficient diffusion of information to other communities raising the reality that the need for information within communities is far outweighing the resources and capacities of institutions trying to provide information. Young women further emphasised the need for transparency and accountability mechanisms to ensure resources allocated for devolution are used in a transparent manner. There was a general concern that if more resources are to be availed without mechanisms for accountability being properly set up and functional, the devolution process might transfer corruption from the central government.

*“Tinoziva kuti devolution inofanira kuunza simba kuvanhu asi tomboti kana kwaunzwa mari hapana nzira yekuziva kuti kwauya marii uye mari yacho yashandiswa chii” “We know that devolution is supposed to transfer power to the local level but if devolution funds are disbursed there are no mechanisms for finding out how much would have been disbursed as well as what it would have been used for” Key Informant.*

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid



Young women in Mazowe were more positive on the state of devolution in their district with some stating that industries are opening as a result of the devolution. An example provided was that there was a ground breaking ceremony for industrial development that was done in Ward 15. The research could not ascertain the nature of the industry as well as the link to devolution. They further noted that the devolved structures have offered more space for women and youth to participate in governance processes including spaces that were previously dominated by man such as being members of the traditional leader's council of advisors. Although representation and participation of women and youth has not reached optimum levels in the district, devolution is considered a strategic entry point towards ensuring that more women and youth take an active role in local affairs. This ties in with the liberal feminist approach which prioritises acknowledging historical imbalances as well as deliberately levelling the playing field. The overarching point expressed by respondents centred on the importance of ensuring that more people are aware and knowledgeable about the initiatives that are being implemented as part of devolution.

Overall, the devolution process has been rolled out in the province and some resources have since been disbursed. However, in its current form, devolution has been limited to provision of financial support for infrastructural development in the province. Although the developments done so far are important in addressing the social service delivery in these communities, other elements of devolution such as participation in decision making and the development of sustainable decentralized economies and the execution of political decisions by the lower tiers of government seems to be still lagging behind. At provincial and local levels, there is limited institutional capacity to fully implement the devolution agenda; account for the funds disbursed; formulate development programmes with adequate consultation of the communities as well as the ability to mobilise resources outside those that are allocated as 5% from the central government.

### ***Programmes and Institution frameworks of implementing devolution***

Young women and key informants concurred that there is limited awareness of programmes and institutional frameworks responsible for coordinating the devolution process at provincial and district level. Whereas progress has been made, there is limited knowledge and minimal role clarity amongst the different tiers of government on devolution. Respondents identified village heads, councillors and chiefs as key players in raising awareness on devolution with a few noting that the DDC and local authorities have the mandate of coordinating devolution at the district level. The same stakeholders were also noted as key in providing updates and information on the devolution process. Even those that expressed ignorance on the institutional framework for implementing devolution expressed certainty that the MP, mayor, councillor are key stakeholders and should be involved in the way that devolution is implemented in their area.

Respondents outlined that despite challenges, allocation of devolution funds by central government provides a critical starting point. Respondents indicated that this is an essential component of the devolution process because it provides a base upon which devolution can be built.

### ***Support rendered towards devolution***

To date, the devolution process has mostly been supported through the financial disbursements that were allocated to the provinces. Although some meetings have been held to discuss the modalities of devolution in the province, these did not provide enough technical training on how the devolution should go ahead. Key informants indicated that the current devolution process has simply taken over the existing structures of local governance such as changing the Provincial/District Administrator to elevate it from political administrative status to economic development-oriented ones. These are expected to coordinate private players, state owned enterprises; spearhead development planning, promote investment and tourism development. The challenge is that there has not been accompanying technical capacity strengthening to ensure that these offices execute the expanded responsibilities.

There have been a few instances where NGOs have sought to provide technical support in form of trainings on devolution but these have focused more on the demand side specifically strengthening the capacity of communities to understand and demand accountability on the devolution process. The approaches have reportedly not paid sufficient attention towards the supply side where institutional structures need to have capacity to align their knowledge, skills and competencies with requirements for executing within a devolved framework. Some young women indicated that they tried to engage with some local authorities on devolution but they failed to articulate the key issues and update on the status of devolution.

### ***Public participation in Devolution***

In its current configuration where discussions and decisions are mostly made by the PDC and the DDC structure, there is still limited participation of communities in devolution processes. In recent times this participation has further rescinded due to restrictions resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. Key informants from local authority structures argued that there is adequate space for participation of citizens in the devolution processes. These include traditional spaces such as the budget making process and the Village Development Committees amongst others. Communities however argued that there is need to expand these existing structures. Current approaches seem to be premised on assumptions that because spaces already exist, they will simply roll out the devolution process without any re-orientation. Key informants outlined that devolution is a political process hence its implementation is highly politicised. This was further corroborated by young women who highlighted that the process of devolution is predominantly led by people aligned to a specific political party hence it is inevitably a politicised process. Insights from Key informants and FGD participants pointed to the fact that devolution has been politicised and this has affected participation of other community members especially given how partisan politics play out in the communities. The limited knowledge on devolution and its attendant processes was also cited as a reason behind limited participation of communities in devolution processes.

The study noted structural and patriarchal barriers that persist in local government decision-making processes including strategic planning, budgeting along with policy formulation and implementation. These are barriers towards promoting space for young women's meaningful engagement with duty bearers. This is despite the fact that young women are primary consumers of social services which include water, health, sanitation and roads. The devolution process however seems to have expanded the space for young women to participate as reported by some respondents. Respondents outlined that prior to conversations around devolution; women were scared to occupy positions of power. They noted that devolution has allowed them as women to participate and make decisions on ways they can demand accountability and transparency. There were reported instances of marginalisation with specific reference being made to minimal involvement of young people with disabilities.

In terms of public participation in transparency and accountability initiatives on devolution, the study noted that the structures have accountability mechanisms. Respondents outlined that when communities approach structures or participate in processes such as full council meetings, they are able to make an account of the development processes as well as determine how the devolution process is being implemented. Transparency on the other hand was reported to not be fully embraced. This was because there is no timeous provision of critical information and knowledge to citizens and oversight bodies like Parliament and civil society organisations (CSOs). These oversight bodies play a critical role in monitoring and evaluation of progress in implementation of devolution projects.

For some respondents, limited participation and apathy is a reflection of dependency where community members are used to externals providing support. Overreliance on external support has curtailed people's agency resulting in them losing their sense of responsibility. Inflated expectations of external support reportedly results in communities continually expecting those in positions of authority to find solutions even for localised challenges. Respondents who expressed this view

challenged the community to take devolution as an opportunity to take responsibility and fully participate in processes that are of concern for their own local community development.

### *Opportunities and Challenges in implementing devolution*

The following are some of the opportunities that can be drawn from the ongoing devolution process that stakeholders in the province and elsewhere could consider in further expanding the impact of devolution.

#### *Strengthened citizen participation*

- Devolution processes offer the greatest opportunity for citizen participation and engagement in determining the type and quality of services delivered within their localities as well as ensure decision making in the way that development planning is shaped. This citizen participation should also consider often marginalised groups such as young women and people living with disabilities. Gender representation and participation is critical to ensure that the needs of every citizen are taken on board in the developmental process. For gender parity some suggestions have been proffered around the need for a quota for women's participation, children and other marginalised groups such as those who live with a disability to ensure that their voices are heard.
- Respondents noted that the devolution process has amplified voices of local communities on issues that concern them especially around development autonomy. Amplifying voices has resulted in a development prioritisation process that is reflective of actual needs of communities.
- A critical element to ensure there is strengthened participation of citizens that emerged from this study is the need for devolution to be defined and framed in language understood by all citizens. This process would include co-creation of meaning and processes which was identified as a pre-condition for successful implementation of devolution.

#### *Improved culture of transparency and accountability*

- Given the proximity of decision making, devolution is viewed by respondents as a catalyst for improved transparency and accountability.

#### *Creation of sustainable local economies*

- Respondents considered devolution as an opportunity for localised employment creation as a devolved economy is likely to grow much better through more focused development planning and improved utilisation of resources.

Although there are significant opportunities that can be offered through devolution, there are attendant challenges that also need to be addressed to ensure that this process is rolled out successfully and some of these challenges are outlined below:

#### *Politicisation of Devolution*

- Devolution processes are political because of how they focus on issues of power and its distribution. However, based on this study the discourse of devolution was conceptualised and is steeped in partisan politics and often viewed as a threat to power as well as a challenge to the status quo. The study noted that there is a common perception that devolution means loss of political and economic power of political and economic elites because they benefit from a centralised structure. Some of the respondents indicated that leading any discussion of devolution is often misconstrued as challenging the power of central government and because provincial and local authorities still derive their power from central government, they also tend to be overprotective of their own allegiances and become gatekeepers in discussions on devolution.

- The politicisation of devolution is attributed in the failure to ensure a common and shared definition of devolution and its expected benefits to all stakeholders. There is generally a misunderstanding of the roles that political parties can and should play, no clarity on roles within the three tiers of government and the opportunities that exists for the inclusion of each and every stakeholder. Furthermore, the role and functions of the provincial councillors and the RDCs, financing for devolution, capacities of those involved in the structure around transparency and accountability are all issues that have made the devolution process political.

#### *Inadequate Financial Resources*

- The research established that the province has got huge intrastromal and social service delivery deficits that need significant financial resources to support. The 5% allocation will remain inadequate to finance development needs for the province. The broader macro-economic environment has resulted in local authorities failing to raise financial resources to support their operations. With the advent of COVID-19 the situation has become worse with some of the sources for financial resources such as rentals from informal traders at some of the market places being eroded due to the lockdown and restrictions. Furthermore, households have been incapacitated to pay as efficiently because they have also been affected by disruptions to their businesses. The study also noted sub-optimal private-public partnerships which can provide alternative ways of gathering resources to finance the devolution agenda.
- The extensive list of priorities against limited fiscal capacity of local authorities to support the projects will mean some levels of disappointment from legitimate expectations that communities have that devolution will solve most of their development challenges. This disappointment then can further entrench apathy by communities which in turn will affect one of the important expectations of devolution which is to promote effective citizen participation in development and decision-making processes.
- The overreliance on the 5% disbursement from the central government will also mean that the autonomy of decision making and the efficiency that comes from independent planning and implementation of development plans in a fully devolved structure is unattainable. Resources from central government were reportedly not disbursed timeously. Further, the resources are reportedly utilised through systems and structures that makes the process of procurement long thereby risking the loss of value especially in the context of hyperinflation.

#### *Corruption and Nepotism*

- Respondents indicated that they are concerned that the process of devolution and availability of resources to finance different initiatives might translate into corruption and nepotism especially at the local governance level. They are sceptical that councillors might have been given an opportunity to loot resources, employ their relatives for some projects and simply be involved in some corrupt activities that could compromise the integrity of the devolution process.

#### *Benefits from devolution*

The study revealed that there have been some benefits that have been witnessed from the devolution process so far. From the perspective of IYWD, the work on devolution has been effective because there is an emerging culture of transparency and accountability. Civil society and community members are now able to ask stakeholders openly given the renewed sense for engagement that has been offered by devolution. More importantly, young women have also been at the centre of participation in the devolution processes which included increased participation in VIDCOs and WADCOs. Through engagement processes and platforms authorities and stakeholders have been encouraging communities to be more pro-active on devolution.

Devolution has also been used as a pedestal to discuss other issues of community rights which are often restricted in the province. Through devolution, discussions on economic, social and political rights have been more permissible because of how devolution has received political will at the highest level including the support of the Office of the President and Cabinet (OPC).

Besides the infrastructural development they have witnessed as a result of devolution, communities are now more confident that through their contributions on economic governance, there will be improved local enterprise development, access to decent jobs as well as improved allocation and utilisation of local resources. “Through this devolution, we hope we shall at least be able to buy maize from our own GMB without people from other places getting such maize and only to resale to us at a premium,” said one of the young women in an FGD<sup>20</sup>. Further, communities reported optimism from the prospect of selling their own produce in their locality as this reduces added-on costs while reducing the risk of theft. Some women argued that earning an income from selling their produce in the local area will have an indirect benefit of reducing domestic violence as there is no risk of their husbands “...travelling to Harare and coming back empty handed after spending all the hard earned cash with other women [sex workers]”<sup>21</sup>

Another key benefit attributed to devolution is the development of collaborative relationships amongst various stakeholders. Relationships among different stakeholders in the province have been characterised by mistrust while being affected by partisan politics. However, emerging evidence suggests that through devolution there has been some sense of ownership and improvements in the way different stakeholders engage and discuss matters of local development. Insights from interviews point to a growing sense of shared interests brought through conversations of devolution. One young woman expressed her appreciation on how her involvement in discussions on devolution has made her gain confidence and how now she is able to engage the Councillor as part of demanding accountability.

At the very basic level, the devolution process has ignited a sense of ownership and renewed prospects for a more engaged youth. One of the young women who responded to the study remarked that “it just feels good to be involved in the development processes of our community because [our community] is all we have”<sup>22</sup>. Some extended the same idea to note that devolution gives the responsibility of employment creation to the local stakeholders without waiting for the intervention of outsiders.

It is important to note however that there are some who have a completely negative perception of devolution and they completely disregard everything noting that nothing has changed since the process of devolution has started. Although this opinion is shared by a minority it is important to understand their lack of trust in the current system and their sentiment around how community participation should be intensified before the devolution process is celebrated. For those that hold this view, part of their concern stems from the mistrust of proposed amendments for removing MPs for the provincial councils citing that these are community representatives that are key in processes of providing oversight.

### ***Priority areas devolution should support***

In defining the priority areas that devolution should support, there was a general consensus amongst both local authorities and community members that urgency should be placed on social services with priorities being Health, Education, Water and Sanitation. Prioritising these elements was based on the realisation that community members in the province have precarious livelihoods with most failing to

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<sup>20</sup> FGD WhatsApp Discussion with young women in Guruve

<sup>21</sup> In-depth interview with young woman from Shamva

<sup>22</sup> In-depth interview with young woman from Bindura

afford basic needs. In addition, the majority lack access to adequate social protection. Some of the alternative priorities per district are captured in the table below:

District	Priorities
Bindura	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Road rehabilitation (add transport costs to farmers and affects availability of doctors in some areas)</li> <li>▪ Refuse collection</li> <li>▪ 24 hr clinic</li> <li>▪ Support for income generating projects</li> <li>▪ Welfare support for the elderly</li> <li>▪ More schools</li> <li>▪ Water reticulation services and boreholes (especially in the context of COVID-19)</li> <li>▪ Removal of quarantine centre from a residential area</li> </ul>
Guruve	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Boreholes</li> <li>▪ More schools</li> <li>▪ Clinics and family planning services and commodities</li> <li>▪ Waiting Mother's Shelter</li> <li>▪ Road rehabilitation</li> </ul>
Shamva	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Access to water at Madziva hospital as well as construction of a waiting mother's shelter</li> <li>▪ Boreholes in communities as well as serving existing ones</li> <li>▪ Medication in clinics including family planning services and commodities</li> <li>▪ Electricity for communities</li> <li>▪ Hand sanitisers and Protective clothing</li> </ul>
Mazowe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Boreholes</li> <li>▪ Rehabilitation of industries</li> <li>▪ Road rehabilitation</li> <li>▪ Schools</li> <li>▪ Rehabilitation of sewer system</li> <li>▪ Family Planning services and commodities</li> <li>▪ Teaching more people about devolution</li> <li>▪ Waiting mother's shelter</li> <li>▪ Public toilet at market place</li> </ul>

#### *Analysis of the list of priorities*

- There was not much of prioritisation of issues related to responses to COVID-19, community members seemed more concerned about their general community development;
- Their primary priorities is on social services and infrastructural development and not other elements of devolution;
- There is a general lack of family planning services and commodities and against the COVID-19 situation that has meant people are staying at home there might be need to urgently address the Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights.

## **FINDINGS: COVID-19**

### ***Impact of COVID-19 in the province***

Although the first COVID-19 cases were recorded in Shamva in June 2020, the province had witnessed the impacts of the pandemic much earlier due to lockdown regulations imposed much earlier in the country. As of 22 July, 2,034 COVID-19 cases and 26 deaths were confirmed, indicating an exponential rise in cases within the last three weeks.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had an impact on development. It has threatened social safety nets especially for informal traders who are unable to carry out their trade within the context of the lockdown. The inability of informal sector actors to earn incomes has resulted in reducing revenues to local authorities that rely heavily on rentals. Council Budgets are prepared on an annual basis and they include projected income from informal traders. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic this income stream has been completely wiped off and even if country reopens the number of traders is likely to have reduced due to the precarity of their operations even before the lockdown.

Key informants also shared that the setting up of isolation centres and the provision of PPEs has also diverted funds initially earmarked for other development priorities. Budgets for local authorities do not have contingency and provisions for emergency funding and as such any support rendered to the COVID-19 response will mean reallocation of resources from other budget priorities. The situation has been further precipitated by the continued inflation affecting the Zimbabwean Dollar in which the budget is denominated.

The imposition of a lockdown to minimise the spread of the COVID-19 virus has had socio-economic and political implications that should have been concretely considered in Mashonaland Central province. A huge population in rural, farming, mining and peri-urban communities including young women members of IYWD had limited access to information on the pandemic, precautionary measures to take and the significance of the lockdown. As a result, in some areas people have continued to do business as usual including handshaking, playing soccer and other social gatherings risking contracting/spreading the virus. Economically, the announcement of the lockdown triggered high inflation, price increases and shortages of basic commodities. There were shortages of mealie meal in Bindura, Shamva and surrounding areas following announcement of the lockdown. There was also a general hike in prices of basic commodities demonstrating how businesses were taking advantage of the crisis<sup>23</sup>.

The lockdown period exposed wide socio-economic insecurity and vulnerability of Mashonaland Central province and the country at large. During the early days of the lockdown, IYWD members in different parts of Mashonaland Central reported general compliance by businesses and some individuals to restricted operating times and safety precautions. However, as the lockdown period progressed, there were heightened shortages of basic commodities including mealie meal. This reportedly resulted in non-compliance to Covid-19 safety precautions as people scrambled for scarce goods.

Further on in the lockdown, reluctance on the need for safety precautions dwindled as a considerable number of informal businesses and general citizenry including some personnel from Local district and Provincial offices continued operating with no Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). This was indicative of low adaptive capacity for both government representatives and citizens.

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<sup>23</sup> IYWD CEADZ March 2020 Progress Report

## ***Gendered impacts of COVID-19***

Apart from the challenges that everyone else was facing due to COVID-19, IYWD also noted with concern a continued lack of other health services to young female sex workers, pregnant women and those living with HIV as clinics hesitated admitting patients due to fears of COVID-19. This was primarily because they were ill-prepared and had inadequate Covid-19 response equipment. The lockdown period was also characterized by the heavy presence of security forces including police and soldiers who were responsible for enforcing lockdown restrictions. In Guruve District, there were concerns of sexual violence against young by soldiers deployed. This was reportedly raised at a District Covid-19 taskforce meeting. In Bindura urban, high presence of police details without adequate information to citizens left a lot of people concerned about possible violations of their rights including access to information<sup>24</sup>.

The 2020 Zimbabwe Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP), launched on 2 April 2020<sup>25</sup>, indicates that 7 million people in urban and rural areas are in urgent need of humanitarian assistance across Zimbabwe, compared to 5.5 million in August 2019. Since the launch of the Revised Humanitarian Appeal in August 2019, circumstances for millions of Zimbabweans have worsened. Drought and crop failure, exacerbated by macro-economic challenges and austerity measures, have directly affected vulnerable households in both rural and urban communities. Inflation continues to erode purchasing power and affordability of food and other essential goods is a daily challenge. In this situation, women often bear the brunt and they further become vulnerable to abuse as they fight to contain the household pressures.

With an increased demand for clean water for hand hygiene under the preventative measures of COVID-19 women have faced an increased burden in the province. In all the four districts engaged as part of this study water is one of the most cited challenges. This therefore means that more time for women is spent sourcing water for the family. With restrictions to movement on one hand and access to water from sources outside the household, the ability to access water has become a more demanding challenge for women.

## ***Utilisation of devolved structures for COVID***

Engagements with key informants indicated that the COVID-19 response did not effectively utilise the established devolved structures. The pandemic response was chiefly driven from central government and did not utilise the devolved structures from the onset. Following the declaration of COVID-19 as a national disaster by HE President E.D Mnangagwa on the 19th of March 2020; the following coordination activities have been conducted:

- Formation of the COVID-19 Inter-ministerial task force initially chaired by the then Minister of Health and Child Care, Dr Obadiah Moyo
- High level political commitment to the National COVID-19 response with appointment of Honourable VP KCB Mohadi as the Chairperson of the National COVID- 19 Inter-ministerial Response Task Force.
- Declaration of a 21-day nation-wide lockdown except for essential services started on the 30th March 2020, and was subsequently extended on 19 April for a further 14 days.
- Partial lifting of lockdown conditions with essential services allowed to resume;
- Imposition of a curfew from 1800hrs to 0600hrs.

To localise responses, a provincial task force was established and it has since assumed the responsibility of monitoring the pandemic including compliance to safety regulations amongst the citizens. Comments from key informants suggests that if devolution had been adequately done in the

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<sup>25</sup> <https://reliefweb.int/report/zimbabwe/zimbabwe-situation-report-11-jun-2020>



province, those devolved structures could have simply taken responsibility of coordinating the provincial response to COVID-19 in a much contextual way based on the provincial realities. The key informants suggested that a more contextual response will ensure better community awareness raising and mobilisation. With an increase in local transmission of COVID-19, the need for more localised responses has become imperative but concern over how the delayed involvement of devolved structures is considered as a major undoing in effective community-based responses to the pandemic. The study indicated that there are some community members who actually feel that COVID-19 does not concern them and they commonly refer COVID-19 as “for those in Harare.”

### ***Support received on COVID-19 response***

The study explored how community members perceive the support that has been received to respond to COVID-19. The general perception of community members is that there has not been adequate support from central government to respond to the pandemic. Those that indicated that there was some support stated that such came through in the form of awareness and PPEs for medical personnel.

The respondents from Bindura expressed concern that there has not been adequate support even for PPE as meetings are being held without people having masks and sanitisers. Some indicated that hand and respiratory hygiene is not being adhered to in public places including some local authority offices. Civil Society Organisations and international donors were noted for their support in the provision of information and PPEs for communities.

Community members felt that given the nature of how the government closed out operations and how this disrupted people’s livelihoods, there was need for social safety nets and support that could go towards food subsidies or some social protection grants that can support people to at least meet their basic needs especially vulnerable populations such the elderly and people with disability.

Price hikes of basic commodities have further left communities unable to meet their usual food basket and malnutrition has become a significant threat that the respondents indicated. Approximately 95,000 children under age 5 are suffering from acute malnutrition, with the national global acute malnutrition (GAM) prevalence at 3.6 per cent (ZimVAC Rural, 2019). Eight districts recorded GAM prevalence of over 5 per cent. Since early April and the beginning of the harvesting season, the country overall has not experienced a nationwide increase in malnutrition. A major concern is the potential impact of disruption of services due to COVID-19 on malnutrition which would translate into a 10 to 50 per cent increase of acute malnutrition in the worst-case scenario (equivalent to 9,500 to 47,500 children)<sup>26</sup>.

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<sup>26</sup> <https://reports.unocha.org/en/country/zimbabwe/>

## **CONCLUSION**

The study documented key perspective around devolution within Mashonaland Central. Additional perspectives documented related to the gendered impact of COVID-19 on devolution in the four districts. Key conclusions were drawn for different study domains and these are outlined below.

### ***Understanding of Devolution***

There is limited awareness on and knowledge of devolution beyond people involved with government structures and those working with IYWD. While those working within government structures have an appreciation of likely processes that will accompany devolution, they are not clear on how the devolved structures will be organised. Limited information on devolution among citizens will potentially curtail the extent to which they can be meaningfully involved in monitoring devolution. The study further concluded that minimal information on devolution may result in inflated citizen expectations on the potential of devolution to address all their development challenges. Overall, there is understanding of what devolution entails but there is minimal appreciation of how devolution will be operationalised.

### ***The Status of implementing Devolution***

There has been minimal investment towards implementation of devolution. There has only been fiscal devolution with minimal administrative and political devolution. Investments into social services prioritised by local authorities point to strong potential for organic, local driven development if a proper devolution implementation framework is put in place. Local authorities received devolution funds but the operational framework has not been transformed to reflect devolution aspirations. The study concluded that disbursing devolution funds in the absence of legal and structural reforms may be welcome but contributes little towards effective devolution. Disbursement of devolution funds in the absence of necessary systemic transformations limits the extent to which this will be successful.

### ***Programmes and Institution frameworks of implementing devolution***

There is limited awareness of programmes and institutional frameworks responsible for coordinating the devolution process at provincial and district level. Progress made with financial disbursements will potentially be derailed by minimal knowledge and limited role clarity amongst the different tiers of government on devolution. There are different community-based actors and structures that already play roles in community development. In the absence of role clarity there is potential for confusion, duplication and conflict among different actors. Providing funds from central government without institutional frameworks further constrain the extent to which any structural defects will be rectified.

### ***Support rendered towards devolution***

Devolution has primarily been supported through financial disbursements allocated to provinces. There has not been support towards prioritising, spending and managing resources within a devolved system. The study concluded that the absence of training and capacity building towards operational aspects of devolution implies that devolution funds are being disbursed in the absence of structure-readiness. The complexity of devolution means its supply side components will need to be handled by Government. Civil society organisations have potential to provide demand side support towards strengthening community understanding of and involvement in devolution.

There have been a few instances where NGOs have sought to provide technical support in form of trainings on devolution but these have focused more on the demand side specifically strengthening the capacity of communities to understand and demand accountability on the devolution process. The approaches have reportedly not paid sufficient attention towards the supply side where institutional structures need to have capacities to align their knowledge, skills and competencies with requirements for executing within a devolved framework. Some young women indicated that they tried to engage with some local authorities on devolution but they failed to articulate the key issues and update on the status of devolution.

### ***Public participation in Devolution: A gendered analysis***

There is near universal acknowledgement of the importance of devolution in democratising development and broadening civic space. Further, there is acknowledgement of the multi-dimensional exclusion of women from participating effectively in governance and development processes. Public participation in devolution has been limited and historical disadvantages mean women in general and young women in particular are likely to be on the fringes of devolution processes and outcomes. Devolution entails supplanting the existing structures and by extension redefining how citizens engage with the state at local level. This presents opportunities and threats for transforming gender relations by expanding the scope for young women's participation. Opportunities are that as the governance architecture is being transformed, there can be deliberate efforts to improve the qualitative and quantitative participation of young women beyond devolution. Threats are that in the absence of strong advocacy, systems and structures that have disadvantaged young women can potentially be reproduced and reinforced.

### ***Benefits from devolution***

The study concluded that although there are still minimal benefits from devolution, there is high potential if pre-conditions are met. Devolution discourse and practice has contributed towards sustaining efforts towards inculcating a culture of transparency and accountability. The study concluded that devolution is about equitable distribution of resources and that dovetails with imperatives of Gender Equality and Women Empowerment that characterise the work of IYWD. Devolution provides a platform for furthering rights related dialogue which was not possible without the neutrality brought by devolution.

### ***Impact of COVID-19 in the province***

The study concluded that the COVID-19 pandemic has had more profound economic as opposed to epidemiological impacts on the province. Precarious livelihoods have been further eroded, weak social protection systems have been pushed to the edge and historically marginalised groups such as women have been pushed further to the margin. The economic impacts of COVID-19 are severe and need to be analysed in the context of a potential peak in the epidemic which is likely to have far reaching consequences for a population whose potential for resilience has structurally been weakened.

### ***Gendered impacts of COVID-19***

There has been homogenous analysis of the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. The broader conclusion is that the pandemic has, is and will continue to affect women the most. Impacts on women are linked to historical disadvantages, biological realities along with gender norms that sustain and reproduce disempowerment. Analysis that ignores historical nuances threaten to affect planning and prioritisation thereby undoing much of the progress towards transformation and gender justice.




### ***Utilisation of devolved structure for COVID***

The study concluded that the COVID-19 response did not effectively utilise the established devolved structures. The pandemic response was chiefly driven from central government and did not utilise the devolved structures from the onset. Weaknesses in localising the response resulted in missed opportunities to localise information communication and knowledge sharing on the COVID-19 pandemic and response.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

KEY CONCLUSION	RECOMMENDATIONS
There have been discussions about devolutions and disbursements have been made towards it. However, the laws have not been adjusted and institutional frameworks for smooth operationalisation are not in place.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Put in place laws and the overall institutional framework that facilitates operationalisation of devolution.</li> </ul>
The discourse of devolution is steeped in politics and power contestation. This has sometimes affected the extent to which those with power to drive devolution are willing to drive the agenda.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Depoliticise devolution specifically the agenda, process and outcome. The development dividends from successful devolution can be easily articulated and discourse needs to shift from politics to development.</li> </ul>
Devolution is primarily focused on facilitating localised decision making and rearranging power relations between the centre and the periphery. However, there are possibilities of missing opportunities to address promote gender equality and women empowerment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Include a quota system to prioritise transformative participation of and benefit from the devolution process by women.</li> </ul>
A key impediment to effective devolution has been utilisation of traditional engagement and participation structures which have been predominantly exclusionary and restrictive.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Utilise devolution to expand democratise spaces to facilitate effective participation of formerly marginalised groups such as young people, women and people with disabilities.</li> </ul>
There is evidence showing some accountability specifically willingness to account for resources provided. However, there are gaps in promoting transparency specifically access to information.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>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.</li> </ul>
There is potential for local authorities to transition and self-sustain within a devolved framework. However, limited local level fiscal space necessitate reliance on central government and this means ceding some autonomy.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Explore possibilities of expanding the fiscal space for local authorities to reduce reliance on disbursements from local government.</li> </ul>
There are multiple opportunities for expanding local economies and public private partnerships provide potential for growing local economies, invest in capital projects and transition towards self-sustainability.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Explore possibilities of engaging in Public Private partnerships as part of efforts to grow local economies.</li> <li>Prioritise creation/ strengthening local economic zones built on key economic activities of specific areas/communities.</li> </ul>
There were missed opportunities for instituting localised responses to the COVID-19 pandemic.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Explore possibilities of ensuring devolved structures have clear local level emergency response structures that facilitate provision of context specific support.</li> </ul>
The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed already known weaknesses within social protection systems in the province.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop localised social safety nets through a interventions such as disaster funds that provide a cushion to the most vulnerable in emergency contexts.</li> </ul>

## ANNEXES

Data Collection Tools	 IWD_FGD Guide .doc
	 IWD_Key Informant Interview
	 Informed_Consent_ Form.docx