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MAKING INCLUSIVE LOCAL DEVELOPMENT A REALITY THROUGH CONSTITUENCY DEVELOPMENT FUND

The Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection participated at the 66th LGAZ Annual Conference and 19th AMICAALL General Assembly on the panel discussion organized by Local Government Association of Zambia (LGAZ) at the Assembly. The thematic area for discussion was “*Actualising decentralization for Sustainable Development: Harnessing Opportunities and Mitigating Challenges*”.

JCTR’s thematic area was “*Making Inclusive Local Development a Reality through Constituency Development Fund*”. The objective of this session was:

- To explore the opportunities which Constituency Development Fund (CDF) has created for inclusive development at the local level,
- To share strategies aimed at ensuring CDF adequately addresses the needs of vulnerable groups.

Constituency Development Fund (CDF) is not a new reality. CDF has been in existence since 1995. Probably, we should now commence deliberations on how the increase of CDF has accelerated impactful and meaningful contribution to national development. Development is a difficult concept to define and it is important to take note of who is defining development. This is because it has implication on the objectives and desired change of that development.

Has CDF been Inclusive?

The 2022 guidelines have shown commitment and deliberate interventions to promote the holistic development of women and youths. However, the inclusivity of children and people with disability leaves much to be desired. Government must create deliberate provisions in the CDF implementation that the inclusivity of children and people with disabilities become a reality. The non-inclusivity of people living with disabilities must be considered in the composition of the Constituency Development Fund Committee.

What Challenges has the implementation of CDF faced?

The implementation of the 2022 CDF has faced numerous challenges. And JCTR has noted the following challenges:

1. **Capacities:** there is limited capacity in terms of human resource at many of the municipalities. For instance, the accounts officer needs to manage two accounts (one for the municipality and the other for the CDF). This is seriously causing delays.
2. **Capacities of Community members:** community members are still struggling with skillful capacities in developing project proposals and business plans.
3. **Financial Capacities of Local Authority:** the Local authorities have been limited financially to sensitize communities in their districts on the CDF guidelines, Decentralization policy, Local Government Act.
4. **Centralization in Decentralization:** in as much as the Government has advanced decentralization, CDF has been facing serious centralization effects. For instance, the approval of projects is being done by the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development. This is a serious bureaucracy that must be addressed.
5. **Politicization of the CDFC:** the Member of Parliament has too many people to the Constituency Development Fund Committee (CDFC). Members of Parliament, especially those aligned to political parties have political aspirations and this influences the operation of the CDFC.

6. **Process and timeliness:** the delay in finalization of guidelines and approvals of projects remains a challenge. And this keeps affecting the absorption rate by the communities.
7. **Vulnerability of CDF to the elite capture:** the Government must ensure that the community members benefit from the CDF. It must not be seen as money to be dished, but money to improve livelihoods.

Priority Areas to improve the utilization and Evaluation

Even though there are all these challenges, some of them can be addressed. And to address these challenges, the following are the recommendations:

1. **Revise the CDF guideline:** the Government must revise the CDF guidelines to include the financial support of WDCs/VDCs, reduce the nominating powers of the Member of Parliament to nominate members to the CDFC.
2. **Decentralize the deciding and approving powers:** as the Government has decentralized funds, it must also devolve the deciding powers so that the approvals are concluded at province or district level.

Enhancing Community Participation

The CDF is vulnerable to the elite capture. There is need to ensure that the participation of community members is enhanced. Currently, there has been fatigue on the processes and this may have led to some community members giving up on participating. The following are some of the recommendations to enhance community members' participation:

1. **Sensitization and awareness raising:** the Government and the Private sector must provide intervention on sensitization and awareness raising. It is only when people are aware, that they can fully participate.
2. **Defining Role playing between MPs and Councillors:** there should be some intervention so that the roles of MPs and those of Councillors do not collide, especially on the implementation of CDF.
3. **Make Integrated Plans available:** Councillors must ensure that Integrated Development plans are made available to community members. These must also be shared with schools, cooperatives, health facilities so that they inform their decisions, especially with projects and budget submissions.
4. **Feedback and accountability mechanisms:** the Government must enact the Access to Information. This will enable community members to participate in the processes as well as hold leaders accountable at all stages. Additionally, there must be robust feedback mechanism on the implementation of CDF (approved projects, rejected projects, plans, selection criteria etc).
5. **Simplification of Processes:** the Government must ensure that processes are simplified. However, as the Government would simplify the processes, accountability, transparency and effectivity must not be compromised.
6. **Formulation of CDFC:** The Member of Parliament's authority to nominate five (5) members of a committee of about twelve (12) to fourteen (14) members, where the MP is also a member among the committee. This risks politicizing the committee and leaving out members of the community based on their political affiliation. These powers must be withdrawn.
7. **Inclusivity:** The CDF must be deliberate about including vulnerable groups like children. Also, there must be substantial consideration on inclusivity of people living with disabilities.

Conclusion

As a nation, we must enforce the value for money. CDF amount is huge and the projects we implement must show the value for the money. Even though there is so much belaboring on composition of committees, legal and policy frameworks, the focus on CDF must not merely be about processes and composition of committees. But key focus must be on making change a reality.

Development must improve the lives of people. And this gives us the impetus to look at structures and processes that can bring about the desired change. Therefore, our view on structures and process like composition of committee, legal framework, guidelines, deciding power etc..., are being discussed in the context of making change a reality. The CDF amount (ZMW 25.7m) may seem like more than enough amount, the needs in communities remain greater.

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