

# Elected Ward Councilors as Advocates of Community Participation in Development under the Decentralization Reforms in Malawi: A Literature Review

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## Abstract

This paper assesses the effects of ward councilors in Malawi in as far as promotion of participation of local people in development decision making in the communities is concerned. The paper argues that participation of the local people in local government machinery is very critical if development initiatives are to be sustainable. It has been established that participation of local people negatively get affected when the Councils are dissolved and no follow up elections are held. In the absence of Ward Councilors, it has been highlighted that the Councils do not function accordingly and people do not exercise their political right to participation as enshrined in the Malawi's Constitution. This resulted into paralysis of many areas of operation. However, things turn round when Ward Councilors were brought back into the local government system. The paper established that the presence of Ward Councilors promotes political participation of people in decision making and at the same time improves the delivery of services in the communities. In order to make community participation meaningful and successful, the paper emphasizes on the importance of having Ward Councilors in place and making sure that there is well designed, constructive, legally and systematic binding program to follow. Community participation bears fruits if the availability of clear goals and rules that govern the interactions and processes in the exercise of participation are put in place.

**Keywords:** Ward Councilors, community participation, decentralization, Malawi

## 1. Setting the Scene

The bottom up approaches have gained momentum because they encourage the participation of the local communities and beneficiaries in the design, implementation and monitoring of the project investments that have been requested by the communities themselves. Bottom-up or participatory approaches are advocated because they help to deliver benefits to the intended beneficiaries and also improves the chances of sustaining such chances (Yoshimura, 2006) and, makes development to be more inclusive, strengthens governance and improves efficiency and effectiveness (Dongier et al (2001). Similarly, Davids (2005) asserts that the people-centered-development is basically based on public participation, social learning, empowerment and sustainability as the building blocks of development.

The multiparty dispensation of the early 1990s opened up political spaces and other participatory opportunities to debate the scale and depth of poverty in Malawi. In that regard Malawi with advice from the World Bank considered to decentralize some of its political administrative power and authority to the local Councils. Decentralization was adopted as means for community empowerment and government to reduce poverty by bringing government close to the people. This was emphasized by the launching of the 1998 Malawi Decentralization Policy and passing the Local Government Act in the same year which provides the legal framework for sub-national development. Among other objectives the Act aimed at furthering the constitutional order based on democratic principles, accountability, transparency and participation of people in decision-making and development process by putting Ward Councilors into the representation position and facilitators of community participation (GOM, 1998a:5), while the Malawi Decentralization Policy provides the institutional and policy framework for the decentralization process.

## 2. Theoretical Concept

This section introduces a selection of pertinent theoretical and analytical perspectives that are relevant to examine the roles of elected ward councilors as agents of community participation in development process. The term 'participation' is prominent in literature around local governance. Participation is fluid in terms of both coverage and purpose. With respect to coverage, participation is a broad term centering on economic, political, social and cultural spheres. As for a purpose, participation translates into a means to an end or an end in itself. The understanding of participation influences the framework of the activities being pursued, strategies and outcomes; hence it is necessary for one to be clear on the coverage, nature and purpose of participation being adopted. This paper is much aligned towards political participation considered to be a means to an end and not necessarily political participation as an end in itself.

Political participation has been defined in both general and narrow terms. In broad terms, Parry et al. (1992) define political participation as 'taking part in the process of formulation, passage and implementation of public

policies'. In specific terms, political participation has been defined by Nie and Verba (1972) as 'those legal activities by private citizens that are more or less directly aimed at influencing the selection of governmental personnel and/or the actions they take'. The consensus that one can see in the aforementioned definitions is that political participation centers on the involvement of different players in matters of public interest for the purpose of influencing the decision making process. Political participation entails actors from both public and private spheres seeking decisions being made in their favor by those who are entrusted with the responsibility of making decisions. Political participation is an appreciation of the fact that the rulers make decisions with limited discretion as they are still subjected to the influence by those not mandated to make decisions but who hold the 'original' power. Political participation ensures some degree of autonomy by the local people in managing their resources and affairs for the pursuance of the societal objectives. Whilst appreciating the definitions and issues raised by Parry et al. (1992) and Nie and Verba (1972), this paper engages the understanding of political participation as construed by Verba (1967). Verba (1967) refers to political participation as 'acts by those not formally empowered to make decisions aiming at influencing the behavior of those who have such decisional power'. In his exposition, Verba (1967) contends that political participation:

*stresses the intention to influence decision-makers...does not include what can be called 'ceremonial' or 'support' participation, where citizens 'take part' by expressing support for the government, marching in parades, working hard in community projects, or voting in ceremonial elections. Participation is not confined to the electoral process nor is it limited to any particular type of political act such as voting, letter-writing, picketing, or political-party activities...Participatory acts refer to interactions between citizens and decision-makers.*

Political participation can be realized through several channels. Local people can influence the decision-making process by voting in elections, contacting and lobbying, campaigning, protests, action group protests, letter-writing or petitioning and picketing (Verba, 1967; Gaventa and Valderrama, 1999; Cornwall, 2002; Grant, 2002). The channels of participation point towards having a two-way communication between the constituents and the representatives. According to Parry and Moyser (cited in Grant, 2002), 'contacting and lobbying involve efforts by individuals or groups to influence officials and policy makers; campaigning is about effort to rouse support and resources; group action and protest focus on collective goals and are significant to mobilizing people to make direct demands on government'. Political participation manifests itself in the forms of direct or indirect (representative) involvement in the public decision-making process. Through democratic lenses, an individual can see political participation breeding two distinct forms of democracies, namely, participatory democracy and representative democracy. Both these democracies are necessary for good governance (Chasukwa et al. 2014). In the case of Malawi Decentralization, participation is supposed to be realized through the influence of the Ward Councilors. They mobilize and consult communities on issues of interest, present them in the Council for consideration and then provide feedback to the communities.

### **3. The Decentralization Process in Malawi**

Democratic decentralization reforms in Malawi were introduced in the wake of the democratic changes that took place in 1994<sup>1</sup>. Malawi's new constitution of 1994 introduced multi-party democracy after 30 years of centralized, one-party rule. These changes saw the collapse of the autocratic one-party state machinery and adoption of a liberally democratic constitution in 1995 which among other things guarantees a full range of civil, cultural, political, social and economic rights, democracy, good governance and rule of law. It opened the way for decentralization by setting down powers and functions of democratically elected local governments.

The overall objective of decentralization is to create a democratic environment and institutions in Malawi for good governance and development at the local level which would facilitate the participation of the grassroots in decision-making as a strategy to contribute towards poverty reduction (GoM 1998). In essence, the decentralization reforms bring the government closer to the people so that they actively get involved in development cycle. Malawi's decentralization took a form of devolution of administrative and political authority to the districts. This entails that Malawi chose to adopt the democratic decentralization with elected political leaders called Ward Councilors. Ward Councilors are democratically elected to represent and serve the interest of their Wards hence agents or advocates of development.

#### **3.1 Roles of Councilors**

According to Albert (1989) the local government council is the body which receives political demands (policy agenda) that are generated in the locality by individuals and groups including councilors. Councilors are local politicians elected to represent interest of their wards in the council. There are two main categories of the responsibilities of councilors: Individual and collective.

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<sup>1</sup> Malawi, formally Nyasaland was a British Protectorate from 1809 to 1964 when it got independence.

### *3.1.1 Individual Responsibilities*

According to Fowler (1995) the individual responsibilities of the councilor relate to representing his/her constituency or ward in the council. Thus the councilor is expected to: Present and defend interests of his /her ward in the council; provide feedback to the ward on the decisions reached by the council, clarify council decisions and actions including the finances of the council, expenditures and implementation of development projects and service delivery, Collect and present concerns and priorities of the voters to the council, and, advance policies of his/her political/party in the council (Nchimbi, 2004).

### *3.1.2 Collective Responsibilities*

All councilors irrespective of their different political ideologies are responsible for the overall development of the districts within which their councils operate and have responsibility (Max, 1991). Collectively they perform many duties including but not limited to: Determining development policy and strategy, Reviewing development policy and strategy and decide on the relevant changes, Deliberating and deciding on council's development and recurrent budget and by-laws, Supervising the conduct of the council's administration with regard to the implementation of development projects and service delivery, Fostering community leadership and engagement, and they are the appointing and disciplinary authority for all cadres of staff in local government.

### *3.1.3 Roles of Councilors in Malawi Context*

The roles and responsibilities of Councilors in Malawi as prescribed in the Guidebook on the Local Government System in Malawi (2013) include Representing their Wards in the Council sessions; Informing themselves on the views and needs of the people in their wards; Bringing to the Council local concerns that require Council solutions; Making plans for development and service delivery covering all Wards in the district and ensure fair distribution of resources and development to all Wards; Giving feedback to the people in their Wards about what has been decided in the Council; Bringing to the attention of the Members of Parliament matters that cannot be addressed through the inclusion in the District Development Plan but require national response strategy; Initiate and contribute to debates in Council on Local Government matters and management of Council resources; Ensuring transparency and accountability in the operations of the administrative arm of the Council; Lobbied the MPs so that people in their Wards receive adequate and quality national service such as security, electricity and relief in times of disasters; Providing systematic check on the Council Secretariat expenditure and service delivery within their respective Wards and the district as a whole; Receiving, at the Council level, all proposals for local development plans, examine them closely and pass a budget for the plans; Help or facilitate implementation of local development initiative (MoG, 2013). These are assisted by a secretariat that carries out the operational day-to-day business of the local government Councils. However, the administrative personnel are 'subordinate to councilors hence they execute and administer the lawful resolutions and policies made by the councilors' (Malawi Government, 1998a).

## **3.2 Significance of Ward Councilors**

As indicated above, Local Councilors play a very vital role in the running of development in as far as decentralization reforms in Malawi are concerned. However, Malawi had been implementing democratic decentralization without Councilors for Nine years from 2005 to 2014. Absence of Councilors in the Local Government system caused a great paralysis many areas of functionality as follows:

### *3.2.1 Promotion of Transparency and accountability*

Transparency and accountability are vital ideals needed to 'steer decisions and actions as well as legitimize local governance institutions' (Olowu and Wunsch, 2004). The local governance system in Malawi is aimed at enhancing principles of accountability and transparency (MoG, 1998b). However, without the councilors this outcome can hardly be obtained. Without the councilors, Council administrators are not accountable and transparent (Chinsinga 2006). In particular, councilors sit on several committees that are crucial for providing checks and balances on how public funds are being utilized (Chiweza 2010). The absence of councilors in the Council brought loopholes for corrupt acts to take place since there was nobody to monitor how funds were being used by the Councils (ibid). The paralysis in this realm can be witnessed by the fact that the lack of councilors 'hampers efforts for the grassroots to demand accountability, transparency in the provision of basic services for many people who fall within the Council (Tambulasi 2009).

### *3.2.2 Facilitation of Participation and representation*

Another area that is also affected by the absence of Councilors is Participation and representation. Participation and representation are critical outcomes of local governance as they 'increase accountability and reduce the length of the chain of agency that accompanies political parties and their bureaucratic apparatus' (Fung and Wright, 2001). For Malawi, local governments are 'responsible for the representation of the people' (MoG, 1998a) and 'facilitate the participation for the grassroots' (MoG, 1998b). These governance policy ideals are to be realized with the institutionalization of the councilors as they would function as representatives of the people and focal points of grassroots participation (Tambulasi 2009). However, the absence of councilors prevents the attainment of participation and representation objectives. By not having elected councilors in place, the government of Malawi

‘denied the citizens at the grassroots level the opportunity to participation or representation in the running of the affairs’ (Malawi News, 3–9 March 2007). Lack of councilors at the local level disables the envisaged leadership and representative functions (Tambulasi 2009). Absence of councilors in the wards created a big gap between the people and the Council. It becomes so easy for communities to talk to councilors when they need them and they would in turn represent them at the Council (Chasukwa 2014).

### *3.2.3 Local Level Policy Making Paralysis*

Policy making is one of the important functions of the local governance system as councilors make policies and decisions that affect the welfare of the local populace (Olowu and Wunsch, 2004; Goss, 2001). Councilors in Malawi are mandated to ‘make policy and decisions [and] by-laws for the good governance of the local government’ (MoG, 1998a). The administrative wing of the Council is ‘subject to the general or special direction of the Council (councilors)’ and is responsible for ‘implementing the resolution of the Council (councilors)’ (ibid). This means that councilors are the only legitimate policy makers and policies made in their absence are illegal. In this regard, the absence of councilors means a paralysis of the policy-making machinery at the local government level (Chasukwa 2014). The absence of councilors paralyzed formulation and promulgation of some policies. The role was shifted to the secretariat but with some limitations. These sentiments do not only entail policy-making paralysis but also disregard the rule of law, as the policy making function is not supposed to be ‘shifted to the secretariat’ even though with ‘some limitations’. As per the Local Government Act the secretariat is only supposed to implement policies formulated by councilors (MoG 1998).

### *3.2.4 Paralysis of the Rule of Law: The Constitutionalism Question*

The rule of law is not only critical for the sustenance of governance outcomes but is also one of the pivotal good governance ideals. It means that ‘those who hold official positions should perform their duties according to the law; that which the law requires of them to do they must do. This is to say that whichever is unlawful, officials must not do’ (Khembo, 2004). Observance of the rule of law preserves the spirit of constitutionalism which is about the ‘supremacy of the constitution’ (Li, 2000). The existence of a functional local governance system in Malawi is a constitutional requirement. In fact the whole local governance arrangement is to ‘further the constitutional order’ (MoG, 1995). The absence of councilors therefore sparks cries of the question of adherence to the rule of law and constitutionalism, as it is contrary to the dictates of the constitution.

It is a requirement for democratic governance to have a functioning local government system for grass-roots participation, accountability and transparency (Tambulasi 2009). Councilors are very important in a democratic society like Malawi and having them all the time is what democracy means’ (Malawi News Agency, 2007). The absence of councilors in Malawi, therefore, means that ‘democracy is suffering’ (The Daily Times, 16 October 2007) and represents a ‘big democratic deficit’ (Daily Times, 27 September 2007). Tambulasi 2009 concludes that if democracy is to be successful and consolidated, councilors have to be available all the time

## **3.3 Challenges faced by Ward Councilors in Malawi**

The first group of Councilors was elected in 2000 and ended their term of office in 2005. Whilst in service, this group faced a number of challenges and this limited them from discharging their duties as per the expectation. Most of these challenges were institutional conflicts in nature due to ill construed decentralized structures.

### *3.3.1 Central Government and Local Government Relations*

Resistance of the decentralized line ministries to operate within the framework of District Councils as this would, in their view, mean a significant loss of power, status and authority. Elected councilors complain about the central government’s continued grip on the district councils and attempts to force its will on matters supposed to be decided at the local level (Musukwa 2001). This follows the fact that decentralization “vests powers in line ministries of central government such that sometimes it does not recognize devolution of authority to districts” (Ferguson and Mulwafu, 2004). Accordingly, Hussein (2004) emphasizes that the “undermining of local authorities is confirmed by a number of provisions in the Local Government Act of 1998 that ensures central government’s unlimited authority over district councils”. In this case although the aim of the new local governance system in Malawi is to ensure a bottom up approach and to decentralize control and decision making powers over development activities, in practice the ultimate control remains with the centre (Hussein, 2004). In most of the cases the centre has virtually been “unwilling to share power” (Chiweza, 1998). As a result, the local government officials feel powerless and conflicts follow in an attempt to reclaim their power and control from the central government.

### *3.3.2 Councilor and Members of Parliament relations*

The other structural problem was on the roles and responsibilities of councilors and Members of Parliament resulting in power struggles and conflicts. Tambulasi (2006) observed that it appeared there is no clear and real division of labor between councilors and members of parliament. In addition no meaningful civic education was conducted for both councilors and members of parliament so as to adequately distinguish their roles. This was exacerbated by the fact that the position of councilor is not very much rewarding in any way as it does not go with any salary but just allowances unlike that of members of parliament. As a result, it was assumed that councilors

worked towards becoming Members of Parliament so as to gain some increased monetary rewards. Chinsinga and Dzimadzi (2001) describe the relationship between elected members of the Council and MPs as “generally conflictual”. According to Chinsinga and Dzimadzi (2001), the main reason for the apparent constrained working relationships between MPs and Councilors is that the former sees the latter as a potential threat to their candidacy during the next general elections.

### *3.3.3 Traditional Leaders and Councilors relations*

Before decentralized structures were set up, all the powers in terms of local activities were vested in traditional leaders (Chirambo 2003). The traditional leaders were a symbol of local representation and participation. When Councilors were democratically elected in 2000, they became local representatives of their wards and they took their rightful place as beacons of local participation (Tambulasi 2006). In addition, according to the Local government Act, traditional leaders who were formally at the centre of local government before democratic decentralization reforms are now only *ex-officio* non-voting members. This transfer of power and responsibilities from traditional leaders to Councilors made the former consider themselves as losers in the decentralization reforms (ibid). As a result there was mutual mistrust between Councilors of local government councils on the one hand and traditional leaders on the other. According to Chinsinga and Dzimadzi (2001) this was because traditional leaders considered Councilors as “outsiders” since traditional leaders had been the ones running local administration before the local government reforms.

### *3.3.4 Council Secretariat and Councilors Relations*

The other conflicting relationship in the decentralized governance in Malawi was between the Council secretariat and Councilors. The conflicts mostly arose due to the struggle for power between the Council Secretariat and the Councilors. The legislative framework for decentralization policy reforms was insufficiently clear regarding the division of labor and functions between the council (political organ) and the Secretariat (executive organ) which had in turn undermined the capacity of these institutions to collaborate efficiently and effectively in carrying out of their respective mandates as key integral parts of the evolving decentralized bodies (Chinsinga (2008) in Crawford and Hartmann); The problem was that the majority of the Councilors as well as some Council Secretariat officials did not understand the decentralization reforms. As Chinsinga and Dzimadzi (2001) put it, “Councilors did not really know where to start and stop in overseeing what is happening at the district level as a result there was conflict of ideas between the Council Secretariat and the elected members of Council when they tried to do their work”. The Councilors thought that in the decentralized governance they would take the position of prominence to the extent that the Council secretariat would only be relegated to the position of mere servants.

### *3.3.5 Councilors Relations*

In some instances, the relationship between and among Councilors themselves was not cordial. This was especially the case when Councilors resigned from the political party that sponsored them into power (Chasukwa and Chinsinga, 2014). The other Councilors looked at party ditching as an act of betrayal and this could not go well with the rest of the members hence conflicts arose. The problem was that Councilors built ‘camps’ that were very adversarial so that switching camps was seen with much suspicion (Tambulasi 2009).

### *3.3.6 Councilors versus Community relationship*

The major problem was that the participatory structures which were established to facilitate the participatory approach purposes had been dormant in most areas since they were constituted. In most areas the participatory structures existed only on paper as they had virtually collapsed. The main reason for their collapse was that they were constituted without being trained and briefed on their roles (terms of reference). As explained by Chinsinga and Dzimadzi (2001), the vertical framework of participatory structures constituting the District Council, the Area Development Committee (ADC) and the Village Development Committee (VDC) was intended to give opportunities to the grassroots to articulate and define their problems and to take part in the decisions to find sustainable ways to meet their needs and improve the quality of their livelihoods. The participatory structures were meant to create room for different opinions where previously there were limited opportunities for public involvement, enabling people to occupy spaces that were previously denied to them. Many people therefore had little knowledge about these structures as well as the roles of Councilors. In this regard, they (structures) rarely functioned as vehicles for sensitizing, educating and informing the grassroots about the decentralization reforms. Inadequate knowledge about the participatory structures and roles of Councilors created a wide gap between the Councilor and the communities. It was difficult for the communities to appreciate the presence of the Councilor in development as compared to the MPs and Chiefs (Hussein, 2003; Chiweza, 2005).

Following the above challenges encountered by the first group of Ward Councilors in Malawi, most of them resigned from their post before the end of term of office (Tambulasi 2009). In 2014, however, the Government through the Tripartite Elections brought back the Ward Councilors into the Local Government System with the same purpose of advocating and facilitating community participation in development.

### **3.4 Benefits of Councilors in Development**

#### *3.4.1 Improved Public political participation*

Participation of people in council affairs is ordinarily supposed to be done through the council structures, namely Council Full Meeting and Council Service Committee, and structures below the council, namely Area Development Committee (ADC) and Village Development Committee (VDC) (Chiweza et al. 2014). The construction of the council is crafted in such a way that the participation structures are within the reach of the community members. The VDC is the closest structure to people at the grassroots (MoG., 1998). Participation of the people in the service committees is to be through Councilors as representatives of the local people. This is in line with the theory of participation which indicates that people sign an agreement that the elected individuals will have to represent the community in matters of local interest. As per the Constitution of the Republic of Malawi, Section 147(1), the legal position on the legitimate representative of the people in local public life is that a Councilor is the one who has the mandate to represent people in matters bordering on local public life (MoG., 1995). As the mode of operation, the councilors consult the people on the issues they are to present in the meetings for a detailed discussion. Following the return of Ward Councilors, Malawi is now seen to be on track trying to honor what is stipulated in the Constitution and other legal provisions. There is an indication that processes and procedures in executing development initiatives are being followed. Consultation steps before the implementation of any initiative are being observed. Community members therefore are getting satisfied with the way Councilors are handling development initiatives. They are being involved in the development cycle despite some challenges which will be highlighted later. The presence of Councilors is bringing back the lost political right to participation which community members had been crying for over Nine years (2005-2014). This has resulted in the improvement in service delivery in the communities. Now local people can ably present their grievances through the Councilors through which they feel being part of the development process as opposed to the time when Councilors were absent. Councilors in Malawi are in a better position to be regarded as agents of participation in development because they are community based and share the development issues with the people they represent.

#### *3.4.2 Improved Service Delivery*

The bouncing back of Councilors also means improvement in service delivery in the communities. It has been established that some services such as roads maintenance, refuge collection and other infrastructural development which were at some point on stand still when Councilors were absent have been revitalized. There is also transparency and accountability in the execution of functions which were also lacking in the absence of Councilors.

#### *3.4.3 Power struggle*

Where councilors are present in the council, the honeymoon between the traditional leaders and the MPs as custodians of community development is gone. This is true with Malawi following the reintroduction of Ward Councilors. These two parties [traditional leaders and the MPs] used to engage themselves in a battle over legitimacy and supremacy but now they both acknowledge that the legitimate and authoritative individual on local matters is the Councilor (MoG.1998). This has helped to improve the quality of representation which was once affected. Both the MPs and the traditional leaders who wanted to prove to the communities that they are better agents than the other now work hand in hand with the coordination of the Councilor. They no longer employ tactics that sabotage the initiatives of the other but cherish consultation. The Council Secretariat members also recognize and acknowledge the presence of Ward Councilors as decision makers in the system. They are now aware that it is the responsibility of Councilors to mobilize, plan and allocate resources for enhancing development in their areas, mobilize communities to participate in development activities by developing proposals which are then submitted to the Council for funding, sensitize communities on the development initiatives to be undertaken and monitor and supervise the implementation of all development initiatives. The Secretariat is there to implement what has been decided by the Councilors through the Council meetings and provide technical backstopping where necessary. The coming back of Ward Councilors has assisted so much in citizen participation through the development structures of Village Development Committee (VDC) and Area Development Committee (ADC), where development processes start. Now Community members through these structures are able to come up with their own Village Action Plans which form the Social Economic Profile of the community. In this regard community members now form part in the development of the District Development Plan which contributes to reasonable coverage and even access to social services in the communities.

### **3.5 Challenges of Ward Councilors in Development**

Despite the gains Malawi is registering in her development agenda following the reintroduction of Ward Councilors in 2014, there are challenges that are still blocking the full realization of development in the country. There is still political interference from the political parties. Considering that Ward Councilors are elected into office under the ticket of a political party, they are obliged to pay more allegiance to the party that sponsored them into office and this sometimes compromise their job description. They tend to prioritize their parties ideologies than development itself and this affects the execution of functions which may result into poor service delivery. The other challenge is lack of capacity by most of the Councilors. It has been observed that most of them do not

have high academic qualifications and this limits their thinking capacities. In addition, at the beginning of their Councillorship work they have had no proper training to prepare them for the office and this has made Councilors to be hesitant on their roles and responsibilities. Some Council Secretariat members also take advantage of this inadequate knowledge by the Councilors on their roles and responsibilities and bypass some procedures in undertaking development activities and this leads to corruption. Another problem that refuses to die is the poor relationship between the MP and the Councilors. In some areas this relationship has become so sour in such way that general development is dwindling. The main cause is that MPs see Councilors as their potential threat to their candidacy during the next general elections. MPs, therefore, do not empower Councilors and deliberately frustrate their efforts. The other notable challenge that is jeopardizing the effort of Councils to deliver as required is lack of adequate resources. The observation indicates that most of the Councils rely on financial support from either Central Government or other well wishers like donors and others. This dependency tendency on others limits Councils in Malawi to provide required services to the communities accordingly. Some services die natural death when the financier pulls out its aid. There is also lack of political will to decentralize fully. Some Government Ministries and Departments are still unwilling to transfer some of their functions and resources to the Councils. This grip of power is hindering the Councils to become autonomous on executing their functions.

### Conclusion

This paper has outlined the importance of community participation in decision making process in Malawi in as far as decentralization reform principles demand. Such being the case, the benefits of having Ward Councilors as agents of development cannot be underestimated. According to the legal frameworks on decentralization it is an infringement of people's rights to run the Local governments without Councilors. The Government of Malawi has a huge task to address the challenges faced by ward councilors if the development of the communities is to be fully realized. Councilors' capacity need to be looked into with seriousness considering that they are constitutionally empowered to be decision makers of development at the local level. It is a must to consider raising the level of academic qualification for those interested to contest for the position in order to have Councilors who can critically think and scrutinize issues. Proper training for the elected Councilors including members of the Secretariat should be conducted to prepare them for the task ahead of them as soon as they are ushered into office. This would help even the Secretariat which sometimes undermines the role of Councilors. The Secretariat should be called upon to change its mind-set and begin to appreciate the change in the roles and functions as different from the time Councilors were absent. It is also important for the Government to assist in resource mobilization for the Councils to provide the necessary services. Councils themselves should also strategize to identify and devise possible mechanisms that can enhance resource capacity. The Government in conjunction with political parties is also required to conduct an intensive awareness campaign to sensitize the people on the roles of MPs and Councilors so that a clear division on their job description is highlighted.

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