



ISSN Print: 2394-7500  
ISSN Online: 2394-5869  
Impact Factor: 8.4  
IJAR 2022; 8(10): 282-286  
[www.allresearchjournal.com](http://www.allresearchjournal.com)  
Received: 26-07-2022  
Accepted: 10-09-2022

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## The linkage between citizen participation and improved service delivery in Chongwe municipal council, Zambia

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### Abstract

Citizen participation and local democracy have primarily been used in local government authorities to promote and protect rights of citizens and democratic governance. This notwithstanding, the linkage between community participation and issues of governance at a local level raises pertinent questions about the nature of democracy and the skills and strategies for achieving it to enhance inclusive service delivery. The purpose of the study was to assess the influence of citizen participation in improving service delivery in local government authorities in Zambia using a case study of Chongwe Municipal Council. The descriptive in nature covering a sample of 150 respondents out of a target population of 141,301 comprising the mayor, councillors, Town Clerk, Directors, active Non-Governmental Organizations and residents. Further, the study used both primary and secondary data. The study collected both qualitative and quantitative data using questionnaires, focused group discussions, interviews, and participant observation. Quantitative data was analysed by using descriptive and inferential statistics. The findings indicate that only 45% of the respondents are aware about the presence of the WDC and its membership. Further, 70% of the community members indicated that leaders do not involve them in any political, administrative or financial decision-making process. The study found that skills development that could enhance community members' ability to effectively undertake their participatory role is inadequately done by the Council. Further, the study revealed that the constitution had put in a very progressive provision that supported citizen participation. The only challenge is that there is no additional legislation that has been enacted so as to enforce the powers of the community to take the Council into account if not involved in decision-making. In conclusion, there is a strong link between access to information and citizen participation. Further, some community members have very limited knowledge of their right to participate in the decision-making process for improvement of needs-based service delivery. It is recommended that the efforts should be made by the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development to develop structures and engage in community empowerment to enhance citizen access to information in order to address existing gaps.

**Keywords:** Participation, service delivery, political structures, administration systems, financial systems

### Introduction

Citizen participation and local democracy have largely been used in the local government discourse worldwide. However, most Governments are instituting administrative frameworks that develop public participation with a view to deepening democracy and advancing proficiency within the conveyance of delivery of basic services. According to DFID (2000)<sup>[1]</sup>, participation empowers the individuals to claim their rights; in this manner, prerequisites for successful participation in voices and interface of the poor are to be taken into consideration when the choices are made, as well as engaging poor individuals to hold government authorities responsible. Additional, participation by both men and women could be a key cornerstone of great governance (UNESCAP, 2009)<sup>[6]</sup>. However, since the early 1990s, many African governments have adopted decentralization systems at sub-national levels and are highly pursuing participatory mechanisms in a bid to improve governance and service delivery (Cross & Kutengule, 2001; Leftwich, 2007). For example, Kenya has entrenched public participation in its devolved governance structure based on the Constitution of Kenya, 2010.

Further, the importance of citizen participation is also recognized by the African Union Charter (2003), which encourages local governments to promote the participation of all segments of society in the spheres of planning, execution, monitoring and evaluation of policies, programmes and projects through structured citizens' participatory platforms and other forms of participation, to ensure the delivery of quality services.

In Zambia, citizen participation is not a new concept and the government has chosen to promote citizen participation since 1964. For example, after the country gained its independence in 1964 under Kaunda's UNIP administration, the country passed The Registration and Development of Villages Act legislation. The legislation envisaged the promotion of citizen participation through the establishment of the village productivity committees (VPC) and Ward Development Committees (WDCs). Nevertheless, the Zambian Government's long-term vision is to have a fully decentralized and democratically elected system based on an open, predictable, transparent, efficient and effective participatory policy-making process at all levels of government, especially at the local community level in terms of decision making while maintaining sufficient linkages between central and local government. However, the vision of fulfilling decentralization and local citizen participation has been faced with numerous challenges. For example, the unwillingness to cede genuine autonomy to local councils by the Ministry of responsible for Local Government (MLG) has repeatedly emerged on the premises of lack of capacity. A perception of low levels by the central government is seen in the frequent issuance of statutory instruments and the reinforcement that accountability remains upwards to the Ministry rather than downwards to citizens.

### Statement of the Problem

Citizen participation in local government matters has been a concept that has occupied the centre stage of policy formulators in Zambia. Although the attention and success citizen participation has attracted since the dawn of independence in 1964, the concept seems to have had some challenges that have gone with it. According to Paipi (2008), the major challenges to citizen participation was heavy political interference and political bureaucracy. Another problem Paipi identified was the lack of legislation or law to back it. This means that citizen participation forums had no legal backing for their existence. However, Kunda (2018) <sup>[2]</sup> notes that although the Constitution adequately catered for citizen participatory forums in the Constitution, there seems to be no mechanism in terms of representation of marginalized groups, such as people with disabilities, youths and minority ethnic groups in local government decision-making systems.

In spite of the Zambian Government's effort in trying to enhance citizen participation in developmental projects, even by way of constitutionalizing it, meaningful active citizen participation seems not to be attainable, as observed by the Ministry responsible for Local Government (MLG, 2020). The fundamental and normative concern is about the skills and strategies for achieving effective citizen participation that is focused on improving inclusive service

delivery. Therefore, the study focused on assessing the effectiveness of citizen participation in improving service delivery in Local Government Authorities in Chongwe Municipal Council, Zambia.

### Research Purpose

The main purpose of the study was to assess the influence of citizen participation in improving service delivery in Chongwe Municipal Council, Zambia.

### Research Methods

The study adopted the case study design covering a sample size of 150 respondents drawn from a target population of 141,301 comprising Mayor, Councillors, Clerk, Directors, Active Non-Governmental Organizations and Residents of Chongwe Municipal Council in Zambia. Primary data was collected through questionnaires, group discussions, interviews and observation. The collected data was analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics.

### Results and analysis

#### Participation in political structures and improved service delivery

One of the specific objectives of the study was to determine whether there are any structures that are provided at the council level that offer opportunities for citizen participation in political decision-making or policy formulation. The study sought to establish citizens' awareness levels of such structures. The study findings indicate that 65% of the interviewed residents seemed to be aware of the presence of the WDC and its membership. In addition to the awareness of WDCs' existence and functions, the study revealed that 75% of community members were aware of WDCs' activities are from rural wards. However, 35% of residents who were not aware of the community activities undertaken in their localities accused the WDC of not involving the community as shown in Figure 1.

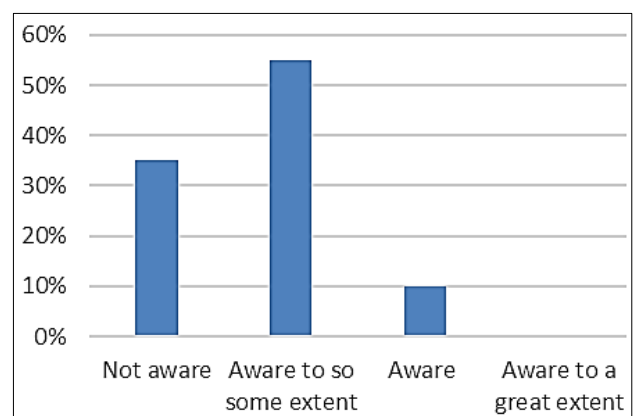
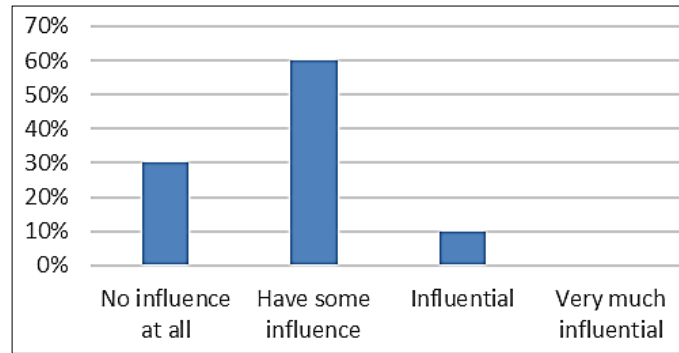


Fig 1: Awareness of WDCs and its activities

Further, the study sought to examine the influence citizen participation on policy and decision-making and whether it affects council decision-making that improves service delivery. When the respondents were asked whether they have the power to influence the decisions of the WDC, a combined 70 % of the community members responded in the affirmative, as shown in Figure 2.



**Fig 2:** Influence on Decision making

**Influence of Participation in Administrative Systems and Improved Service Delivery**

The second objective of the study was to analyse whether citizen participation in the administration of community projects has improved service delivery through the projects. Under this objective, the study assessed the ability of respondents to voice out their concerns on stages of prioritized projects in terms of service delivery improvement. According to the study findings, majority of

respondents (70%) perceived themselves as having at least a voice in terms of the choice of project they would want to happen in their areas. Further, 80% and 90% of respondents reported having no voice as regards the planning and implementation of projects respectively. Overall, 67% of respondents perceived themselves to have a favourable opportunity to voice out project monitoring and evaluation related concerns as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1:** Citizens’ ability to voice their concerns on project stages

Project Stages	No voice %	Very little voice %	Voice most ideas %	Full voice without Hindrance %	Total %
Project Identification	30	15	10	45	100
Project Planning (costing)	80	10	3	2	100
Project Implementation	90	10	0	0	100
Project monitoring/evaluation	33	9	55	3	100

Also, the study sought to establish citizens' satisfaction with services delivered by the Council. Regarding water service, the study indicated that that 90% of the community respondents acknowledge a very significant improvement in accessing clean and safe drinking water. They indicated that the distance to the nearest clean and safe piped or borehole water access point is generally less than 2 kilometres from their residences as shown in Table 2.

**Table 2:** Distance to safe and clean water supply

S/N	Distance to access clean and safe water	% Response by Community members
1	0 -1 kilometre	15 %
2	1 – 2 kilometres	75 %
3	2 – 3 kilometres	6 %
4	4 or more kilometres	4 %
	Total	100 %

In terms of education facilities, it was very evident from the study as shown in Table 3, that majority of pupils (about 60

%) still needed to walk long distances of about 5 - 10 kilometres to the nearest school. The high percentage of school-going children affected by the long-distance is mainly those from the rural part of the district.

**Table 3:** Distance to Schools

S/N	Distance to Schools from home	% Responses by community members
1	0 – 5 kilometres	35 %
2	5 – 10 kilometres	60 %
3	10 – 15 kilometres	5 %
	Total	100%

On health services, an analysis of primary health care systems (Table 4), show that the majority (65%) of citizens in the study area indicated that the nearest distance to the health post or health centre is approximately between 7.5 to 10 kilometres. This implies that the local authorities have not performed well in accessing health facilities to the community.

**Table 4:** Distance to Health Post/Centre

S/N	Distance to Health post or Centre	% Response by community members
1	0 – 2.5 Kilometres	5 %
2	2.5 – 5 kilometres	20 %
3	5 – 7.5 kilometres	10 %
4	7.5 – 10 kilometres	65 %
	Total	100%

Further, the study assessed citizen’s negotiation power with the Council for quality services. According to the study findings, 71 % of the community respondents reported that they had never participated in any negotiation with the local Government for better delivery of any services; 15 % and

10% said that they had minimal negotiation or some negotiation, respectively. Only 4 % of respondents reported a high level of community services delivery related to negotiation with local Government as shown Figure 3.

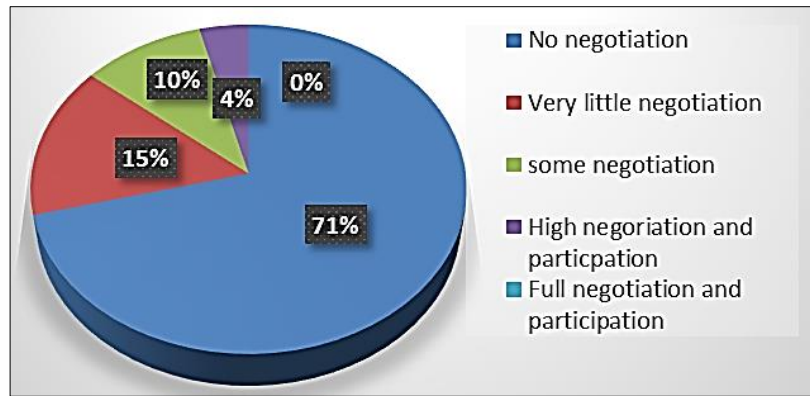


Fig 3: Citizen Negotiating Power

**Participation in Financial Systems and Improved Service Delivery**

The third objective of the study was to explore whether citizen participation in financial systems has influenced service delivery at Chongwe Municipal Council.

On citizens' participation in financial budgeting, the finding revealed that citizens are not involved in budgeting and expenditure process as required by projects' bill of quantity budgeting. The study noted that budgeting and allocation of

resources are done by different council departments. Furthermore, the findings revealed that citizen participation can influence improved service delivery if other pre-conditions like adequate funding are there.

On the knowledge and skills, the findings indicate that only less than 25 % of the active citizens interviewed had only received skills training on how to mobilize community members and financial resources for community projects as shown in Figure 4.

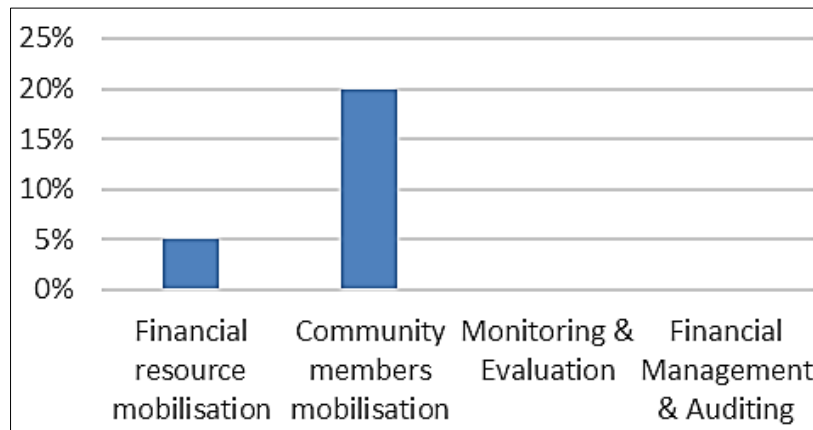


Fig 4: Skills Development

**Conclusions**

The study has established a strong link between access to information and effective citizen participation in service improvement. Also, the finding indicated that although citizens are engaged in projects that foster good safe water, education and health services, community participation has not significantly yielded the required service deliverables results as a direct result of citizen participation. However, citizen participation has not helped in any way in improving service delivery. Furthermore, the budgetary allocation to wards is done equally by the Council as opposed to equitably. This denies the neediest wards adequate budgets thus hindering adequate funding service needs. The lack of proper skills among community members has adversely affected a proper system to allow citizens to effectively undertake social accountability of services rendered by the Council. On supportive legally enforceable provisions that influence service delivery by citizen participation, the findings indicate that lack of enforceable service charter is faulted by community recipient of council services as one of the reasons the Council offers delayed services, inadequate services, poor services or no services at all.

**Recommendation**

The study recommends that the Local Authorities should allocate resources for awareness-raising and capacity building of both local government officials and citizens on their joint role in the participatory process. In line to this, the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development should empower community structures and enhance citizen access to information in order to address existing gaps in access to information. Also, the Local Authorities should allow citizens to voice their concerns about influencing all service provisions in the local government unit. This requires the Local Authorities to promote, create and expand spaces that facilitate citizen voice and accountability. Additional, the Government needs to enhance the proportion of the national budget allocated to the Chongwe Municipal Council. Moreover, citizens need to be empowered with skills to petition their leaders where programmes are not met, and leaders appear not to take on board their demands. Lastly, participation should be entrenched in a well-articulated legal framework and it should be legally enforceable, especially when duty-bearers abdicate their responsibility to citizens.

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