

COMMUNICATING DECENTRALISATION IN MALAWI: A CASE STUDY OF ZOMBA DISTRICT ASSEMBLY

MA Thesis

By

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Master of Arts in Theatre and Media for Communication in
Development to the University Of Malawi, Chancellor College**

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DECLARATION

I LUSIZI RUTH MHONI hereby certify that this is my own original work and has not been submitted in part or in full for any examination and is being submitted for examination with my full knowledge and authorization.

Signature

Date.....

CERTIFICATION

We certify that this thesis has been submitted to the University of Malawi, Chancellor College, with our approval.

Main Supervisor:.....
Name

.....
Signature

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Name

.....
Signature

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my mother Sophie Pakwanja Mhoni.

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ABSTRACT

Ten years since the establishment of the Decentralization Policy, local participation in the decentralization process most especially among the rural communities is minimal. This has been attributed to the low levels of awareness and knowledge. This is regardless of the establishment of the Communication Strategy in 2003, meant to support the implementation of the Decentralization process and meet the communication needs of the stakeholders. The paper set out to examine the process of communicating decentralization in Malawi; assess its impact on the rural communities' levels of awareness and knowledge of the process, as well as its effectiveness in supporting participation in the decentralization process. The study critically examined the Communication Strategy, its implementation plan and process, paying particular attention to the context of implementation, the key players and the approaches adopted in the communication process. Furthermore, an assessment of a sample of the communication tools in print and the Interpersonal Communication channels employed in the strategy also formed part of the study.

The findings of the study indicate that most of the members of the community are aware of the concept of Decentralization, which is synonymous with the term '*mphamvu ku wanthu*'. However, problems of implementation have greatly compromised the effectiveness of the communication process in terms of building knowledge and skills to enable participation in the decentralization process. Lack of human resource and finances are some of the problems that have rendered most of the implementing structures non functional. Furthermore, most of the communication delivered was more informative than

educative which was essential for the empowerment and participation of the rural communities' in the decentralization process. This study submits that the communication process as employed has contributed to the awareness of the process among the target community. However, there is need for readjustment of the approach employed if the communication initiative is to promote participation in the decentralization process. A two – way and 'bottom – up' communication process that puts the rural communities and their communication needs at the heart process will be more aligned at promoting participation.

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ACRONYMS

ACEC - Area Civic Education Coordinator

ADC - Area Development Committee

CBO - Community Based Organizations

CCJP - Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace

CEO - Chief Executive Officer

CHRR - Centre for Human Rights and Rehabilitation

DA - District Assembly

DC - District Council

DCDO - District Community Development Officer

DDC - District Development Committee

DEC - District Executive Committee

DEO - District Executive Officer

DPD - Director of Planning and Development

GVH - Group Village Headman

IEC - Information, Education and Communication

LASCOM - Local Authority Service Commission of Malawi

MALGA - Malawi Local Government Association

MASAF - Malawi Social Action Fund

MEC - Malawi Electoral Commission

MGPDD - Malawi – German Program for Democracy and Decentralization

MLGRD - Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development

MP - Member of Parliament

NAC- National Aids Commission

NICE - National Initiative for Civic Education

NGO - Non Governmental Organization

PCE - Para- Civic Educator

T. A - Traditional Authority

VDC - Village Development Committee

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND

For years on end since the declaration of independence from European nations, Third World countries have struggled to develop, more especially the rural areas where most of its poor and illiterate population lives. Since independence, the need for development has been propelled by a desire not only to improve the economy but also to enlarge the capabilities, choices and opportunities of the people in order to gain access to the basic needs essential in their livelihoods¹.

In reference to Mefalopulos² and Long³ most of the rural development efforts for these countries have failed to improve the standards of living in a sustainable way. Among other factors that have led to such a state of affairs is the beneficiaries' lack of knowledge and skills to enable them to adopt the innovations and their lack of participation and involvement in the assessment of needs and identification of problems to be addressed by such efforts⁴. As such what the beneficiaries perceived as problems and solutions were often overlooked. The beneficiaries were reduced to mere recipients of development programs and not initiators of change and progress. Thus lack of

¹ Mhone G 1992,

² Mefalopulos P et al 2004, p.6

³ Long N 1977,

⁴ ibid

appreciation of the need for local participation and empowerment has led to programs initiated having minimal positive impact on the beneficiaries and rendering most unsustainable⁵.

It has thus been ascertained that in order for development initiatives to be of relevance to the beneficiaries there is need to involve them in the problem identification as well as planning and implementation of development interventions⁶. This has given rise to an appreciation of issues of participation and empowerment among development thinkers. When people are empowered through the acquisition of the relevant skills and knowledge to identify and articulate their needs and problems and given a chance to take part in seeking solutions to their problems, they will be more apt to own the development initiatives that are geared towards effectively addressing their needs and problems. This shift towards participatory development has given rise to development strategies that are process oriented and people centered, as well as the need for a communication system that will link the development agencies to the beneficiaries. In this context, Communication for Development has been identified as a communication system that uses communication research, approaches and methods in ensuring that the development agencies and rural people reach a consensus on their developmental problems, needs and solutions. It has been defined as organized effort to use communication processes and media to bring about social and economic improvements⁷ or as a systematic design and use of participatory activities, communication approaches, methods and media to share information and knowledge among all stakeholders in order to ensure a mutual understanding and consensus leading to development action⁸. Since its conception in the 1980s, Communication for Development approaches have been adopted by most organizations in development work in the developing world. The role of communication in this case has been to provide the beneficiaries with the necessary information on the development

⁵ Yoon C.S 1996, p.2

⁶ Chambers R 1983,

⁷ Paterson C 1998, p.1

⁸ Mefalopulos, P et al 2004, p.10

programs being implemented and .provide a relevant context with which agencies and communities can plan and implement programs suited to the needs of the beneficiaries. The hope is that through communication the beneficiaries will gain the necessary attitude, knowledge, skills and practices that will enable social and economic development.

Despite the broader appreciation of how communication has potential to bridge the beneficiaries with the development organizations, a survey of communication programs carried out in Malawi shows that the programs organizations have designed have had varying degrees of success with others failing to draw the beneficiaries to the development innovations. In Malawi, studies done by Magalasi and Mpekasambo⁹, and Suzi¹⁰ revealed that, despite using multiple communication mediums such as lectures, posters, drama, pamphlets, debates, T-shirts etc. in communicating development messages, there were bottlenecks most especially in adhering to the messages because among other things lack of cultural sensitivity in the message content and the manner of communication. In his study on the awareness of the roles and services of National Aids Commission (NAC), Suzi¹¹ revealed that the subject matter explored through IEC materials did not meet the communication needs of the communities in Nsanje district. The information disseminated did not equip the community with the necessary knowledge and skills to influence the operational environment. Despite the communication being delivered, it did not generate the necessary change on the target community. The findings from the studies above indicate that a clear understanding of the communication needs and the cultural acceptability of the messages needs to be considered if communication is to have any relevance and meaning. Furthermore, communication needs to be delivered in a manner that does not aggressively contradict the way people live.

⁹ Magalasi M and Mpekasambo L 2005, p.31-34

¹⁰ Suzi J 2006, p.7

¹¹ ibid

Apart from the issues highlighted by the studies above, Chinsinga¹² also makes some observations in the practice of Development Communication. He points out that apart from the need for consideration of the context of the target audience in message development and dissemination, no IEC activities can be expected to succeed without establishing the target audience's information exchange system and credible media sources. In evaluating the effectiveness of IEC initiatives by Malawi Social Action Fund (MASAF), the findings revealed that among the wide range of communication channels identified, only a few were recognized by the communities as the sources of information. It is important to note, however that the communication channels that played a significant role in influencing the communities' awareness of MASAF programs such as political and village meetings were not considered in the IEC strategy plan. Even though channels such as radio and newspaper were mentioned as information sources by the respondents, the chiefs through village meetings were indicated as the prominent communication channel.

The studies by Magalasi and Mpekasambo¹³, Suzi¹⁴ and Chinsinga¹⁵ point at some of the problems of communicating development in Malawi. Though identified by development thinkers as the approach that facilitates citizen participation, the practice of Development Communication in Malawi indicates limited success. From the evidence presented, the communication efforts failed to draw citizen participation, negatively influenced the level of awareness, knowledge and adoption of innovations. Clearly, the success of communication in development largely depends on the approach and manner in which communication is delivered and the context and role of the message receiver. Most importantly, there can never be a 'blue print' strategy for communication in development.

¹² Chinsinga B 2003, 210

¹³ Magalasi, M and Mpekasambo, L 2005

¹⁴ Suzi J 2006

¹⁵ Chinsinga B 2003, p.197

Democratic Decentralization is one of the development strategies that calls for a change in the roles of all stakeholders involved in the process. Though mostly adopted as a policy in government administration, decentralization has recently been given much attention as one of the development strategies for the promotion of good governance (in terms of greater public participation and accountability of the public sector) and effective public sector provision among other things. The adoption of the decentralization process was aimed at creating opportunities for the rural people to not only practice their democratic rights of participation but through it be involved in development action. What should be noted however is that the implementation of the decentralization policy entails a change in attitudes, practices as well as a need for new skills and knowledge to enable the players to carry out their roles in the new set up. The introduction of the decentralization policy has therefore given rise to the need for communication that will equip the citizens with the necessary skills and knowledge to enable them to carry out their new roles. However, almost a decade after the establishment of the policy, an assessment of the process points at the rhetoric of the success of decentralization rather than the reality on the ground.¹⁶ There are indications that the progress of the decentralization process has been slow due to among other factors lack of participation among the stakeholders. To a large extent this has been attributed to the low levels of awareness and lack of knowledge and skills to enable participation in the process. My study thus seeks to examine the communication strategy in decentralization which was set up to support the implementation of the decentralization policy by promoting knowledge and skills necessary for stakeholders' participation in the process.

¹⁶ Chiweza A.L 2005, p. 4-8

1.2 DECENTRALIZATION INITIATIVES IN AFRICA

Decentralization can be defined as basically the transfer of power and resources from the higher level of the political system to the lower levels¹⁷. According to Manor¹⁸ there are different forms of decentralization. However the forms largely concentrated on are several. There is Deconcentration which entails the transfer of administrative responsibilities to the lower institutions of government, Fiscal Decentralization which is the transfer of financial resources, the control and use of such resources by the lower institutions of government and finally Devolution also known as Democratic or Political Decentralization which is the transfer of powers and resources from the higher levels of government to the elected institutions at the lower level. Regardless of the form of decentralization adopted, there is an underlying notion that such reforms help governments to deliver efficiently as the lower institutions are better able to direct the resources to the needs of the communities they serve. On the other hand Decentralization is cost effective in comparison with centralization, which is marred by redundancy due to hierarchical procedures and duplication of programs among other things. In terms of Devolution, the process does not only result in efficient service delivery but it also ensures accountability and community participation as the local citizens are involved in the decision making process. All in all, therefore devolution form of decentralization takes on the development language which upholds accountability, community participation and equity in use of public resources and services.

In Africa the concept of Decentralization is not new as it has been part of the government reforms since the colonial period. According to Ribot,¹⁹ African governments have gone through several decentralization reforms since the colonial period. However, it is only as recently as the 1980s that

¹⁷ Manor, J 1999, p.2

¹⁸ *ibid*

¹⁹ Ribot, J 2002, p.1

decentralization reforms have focused on democratization, popular participation and the rule of law. In the colonial period decentralization reforms were more aligned towards national unity and management of the population through the policy of indirect rule²⁰.

From as early as 1917 to the last decades of the twentieth century, decentralization concentrated on deconcentration, almost without exception²¹. In reference to de Valk²², the wave of such decentralization reforms hit Southern Africa in the late 1950s and early 1960s. In the period after independence, Zambia had decentralization reforms in 1969, 1971 and 1980 in which the party's political control over district administration gradually increased. In the same line Kenya went through decentralization reforms in 1964, 1970, 1974 and 1982, reducing the importance of local government. Kenya's last decentralization, called "district focus", in 1983, was "intended to increase efficiency of central government administration rather than promote local autonomy or popular participation"²³: In Ghana, elected District Assemblies were established in 1987. However they had very limited powers and most of the members were appointed by the central government. Mali established elected local councils in 1979 but they had no powers. Malawi's first attempt at decentralization was in 1912 which was aligned with the policy of indirect rule. With the attainment of independence in 1964, the government reversed this situation and adopted a heavily centralized system of governance. It was not until 1993 that Malawi made another attempt at decentralization through the 'district focus' policy based on the Kenyan model²⁴. What prominently emerged out of these reforms (Mali 1979, Ghana 1987, Kenya 1964 – 1983, Malawi 1912) was the need for the governments to reach out by extending central administration to the local areas. Hoping to promote national unity and strengthen the governments' hold on the local institutions. Such reforms worked to undermine local autonomy as the structures established were

²⁰ Msewa, E 2005, p.2

²¹ Cited in Ribot, J 2002, p.1

²² Msewa, E 2005, p.2

²³ Conyers 1993, p. 28

²⁴ Sikwese, L 2003, p. 138

largely dependent on central government. The existence of such reforms implied that the central government therefore remained the overall authority in decision making on matters of governance and development. With the absence of elected local representatives (or lack of influence in the case of their existence), the flow of information was prominently one way and top down from the central government through the local institutions to the local population, creating a feedback vacuum for the government implementing agencies.

By the 1990s a new wave of decentralization focusing on ‘democratic decentralization’²⁵, in which powers and resources are devolved to the elected lower institutions that are accountable to the local communities. Democratic Decentralization²⁶ with a developmentalist undertone, thrived on the need for a more open and people centered system of government that is accountable to the citizens to ensure equity in the access and use of public resources. This new wave of decentralization had new implications on the development approaches employed, the relationship between the governing body and the citizens, and the significance of the local communities in the process. In Deconcentration, the emphasis was more on the governments’ control at the local level which left no room for citizen participation and had little regard for the role of citizens in governance. The people did not have a role in the decision making process and all communication was top-down. With Democratic decentralization, which was people centred, a two way and bottom up communication approach existed as information flowed from the local communities, through the elected representatives to government, and from the government back to the local communities.

From the overview, decentralization during the colonial period until the 1980s, worked to strengthen the governments, perpetuating a centralized system of government which did not

²⁵ In this paper used interchangeably with Devolution (see Manor, J)

²⁶ The internal political and economic factors such as the need for planning approaches that were more people-centred and would reduce levels of poverty and reduce public expenditure among others propelled the governments towards devolution. (Manor, J , Ribot 2002)

facilitate a two- way, bottom up and interactive communication between the government and the citizens. It was only until the 1990s however, that the African governments embarked on Democratic Decentralization aligned towards an open, people-centred and participatory approach to development. Democratic Decentralization allowed for a two way dynamic and interactive communication between the government and citizens through the elected representatives. Nonetheless, different countries have adopted a selective interpretation of democratic decentralization to suit the prevailing development ideologies²⁷ which has an implication on the reality of a two-way, bottom up communication.

1.3 DECENTRALIZATION IN MALAWI

According to Dulani²⁸ Malawi has applied different forms of decentralization policies since the colonial period. The British colonial government adopted a decentralized local government system, which was based on chieftaincy referred to as the policy of Indirect Rule. This paper however, will leave out the colonial period to focus on the decentralization efforts embarked on from the time Malawi gained its independence in 1964 to the present date. At the dawn of independence in 1964, the new government recognized the need for active citizen participation in the socio-economic development and nation building process²⁹. This was manifested in the establishment of the District Development Committees (DDC) in 1965 which ran parallel to the District Councils established by the colonial administration which comprised of elected non traditional leaders and associations of traditional chiefs. The District Councils had the powers and responsibilities in carrying out duties that included local education, public health, public works and customary land tenure administration. The

²⁷ Hussein, M 2004, p. 112

²⁸ Dulani, B 2004, p.5- 6

²⁹ Hussein M 2004,

DDCs were to foster dialogue between the government and the local people through their elected representatives, promote government's development policies at the local level and coordinate the various stages of decision making and project management. It was envisioned that the three institutions (District Councils, DDCs and the Department of Community Development) coordinating at the district level, was what was required for development to take place.

However with the establishment of the DDC, there was a scramble for resources, as each of the two institutions worked independently. As such development programs were duplicated and the vote for citizen participation in this environment was never practically achieved. Of significance in the developments to follow was the role of the ruling party, Malawi Congress Party. At the attainment of independence the government established a single party state that became the supreme organ of the state and was the mouth-piece for the nation, such that the party had overall authority in matters of governance and development. Established parallel to the District Councils, the DDCs worked more like a development and administrative arm of the party at the district and local level with its members pre-selected for elections by the ruling party. With time the DDCs became the prominent development institutions receiving more financial grants and support from government thereby amassing many powers derailing the District Councils. The participatory strategies to development advocated were heavily strangled to a point where the people hardly played a role in local governance and the development process.³⁰ The DDCs became more accountable to the government and party than to the people who elected them to office. As the political environment during this period was marred with party supremacy and intimidation, the DDC worked as an instrument for repression and intimidation, further reducing the significance and role of the local people in

³⁰ *ibid*

the development process. The efforts of the DDC focused more in playing to the politics of the party rather than responding to the development needs of the local people. With the local authorities ousted as ex-officio members of the council and the District council stripped of most of its powers, the local community was left without any representation and their rights to freedom of association and speech stifled by the party. In these circumstances, there was little if any communication on development needs and aspirations from the grassroots to government. All productive information on governance and development was directed from the central government to the local levels. Though defined as a form of decentralization on paper, in reality powers, resources and any form of communication were centralized.

After twenty eight years of such administration, a situation analysis carried out in 1993 indicated the need for an effective decentralization form that would promote citizen participation, create effective structures at the lower levels of government and support the process of development and poverty alleviation³¹. Henceforth the government embarked on selective decentralization in November 1993, referred to as District Focus on Rural Development piloted in six districts and replicated in other districts. The adoption of the District Focus strategy necessitated the transfer of administrative powers and developmental responsibilities to the local institutions. The establishment of a development planning system at the district level and the creation of district development fund worked to establish autonomy of the local government. Furthermore, local structures at community level such as village committees were strengthened to enable citizen participation in development planning and decision making process, as well as to provide a forum for the local communities to articulate their needs. However, despite such a reform, the DDC remained the prominent structure in local governance.

³¹ *ibid*

The appointment to DDC still operated on word from the ruling party, compromising the intended autonomy of the local government. Once again the local government institutions failed to enable ‘bottom – up’ communication and popular participation in development planning and governance.

In 1994 with the introduction of a multiparty democracy, a reorientation in the form of decentralization regarding administrative delegation to devolution (democratic) was adopted. In 1998 the decentralization policy was established and the Local Government Act (LGA), which became effective in 1999³² provided the legal framework for the implementation of the decentralization process. This new form of decentralization abolished the dual administration at the district level and created local government structure that ran to the community level. At the district level, the District Assembly was made up of elected councilors, Members of Parliament within the jurisdiction of the Assembly, and the Secretariat, which comprised of district administration personnel. At the community level, the Area and Village Development Committees became the implementation structures. The creation of elected offices of the Councillors and Members of Parliament as members of the Assembly was expected to promote accountability, transparency and participation of the people in the decision-making and development process.

The new decentralization policy brings in a new status and role to the local communities. As the Councillors and Members of Parliament (MP) who are the official voting members of the Assembly are elected through a democratic process, it is envisaged that they are to be accountable to the communities by working together to

³² Sikwese L 2003, p. 139

respond to the needs and aspirations of the communities. Furthermore, established structures at the community level provide for communication between the citizens and the Assemblies. The VDCs in consultation with their communities draw up the needs and problems which are then submitted to the ADC. This marks the first stage in the communication process. The ADC (which is representative) is the main vehicle through which the community will articulate problems and needs to the Assembly, providing for bottom- up and diagonal communication. On the hand, the Assembly deliberates on the development needs and through the ADC, VDC and Councillors the responses are channelled to respective communities. Thus, there is a two-way and bottom up information flow where the local communities are able to articulate their needs and aspirations and the local government through the Assembly responds to the communities' perceived needs accordingly.

1.4 STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

An assessment from the readings on the decentralization process in Malawi seems to point at the rhetoric of the success of decentralization rather than the reality on the ground³³. In as much as democratic decentralization has been championed as a threshold for grassroots participation in governance and development there has been evidence from studies done by Chiweza³⁴, Hussein³⁵ and Ssewankambo³⁶ that the process has not been fully enabled to incorporate the local masses in the decision making process.

³³ Chiweza A.L 2005, p. 5

³⁴ ibid

³⁵ Hussein M 2004, p. 9

³⁶ Ssewankambo et al 2007,p. 43

A study done by Gaventa and Valderamma³⁷ in assessing particularly grassroots participation in governance highlights the fact that most of the higher institutions are reluctant to share power or to cede power to the lower institutions which has a bearing on the form of communication that takes place in the process. According to Msewa³⁸, despite the adoption of the new decentralization policy the relationship between the local leaders and the community still remains the same as in the centralized system. In writing on Lilongwe District Assembly, he states that the mode of communication is still top down with the Traditional Leaders and Organization imposing development program on the community.

Additionally, in the ten years that the decentralization policy had been established there still lacked knowledge and skills among the various stakeholders. A World Bank report³⁹ indicates that in spite of the communication activities aimed at raising awareness on decentralization and providing the stakeholders with the necessary knowledge and skills, there has been little advancement towards the realization of the concept of democratic decentralization. The findings of the study show that a number of senior staff in the ministries have not 'bought in' to the decentralization policy. Furthermore though community members are now familiar with the term 'decentralization' which has particularly been through the radio campaigns, it has been interpreted narrowly as the power of choice in development programs to be initiated. Consequently, a visit to Sitima Village in Thondwe⁴⁰ revealed that though the communities had heard about decentralization on the radio, they were not equipped

³⁷ Gaventa, J and Valderamma C 1999, p. 7- 8

³⁸ Msewa E 2005, p. 73- 75

³⁹ Ssewankambo et al 2007, p. 41

⁴⁰ This was a practical exercise done by the MA students in Theatre for Development. Though not necessarily focused on Decentralization, the findings from the exercise indicated that the major problem in the area was the comprehension of the decentralizing process. The community is however very eager to see their livelihoods change and the only missing link is a guide that will steer them to the right course.

with adequate information to make informed choices as regards development initiatives. From the Theatre for Development exercise carried out by the postgraduate Media and Theatre Communication for Development class in 2006; it was observed that the communities had the basic knowledge on decentralization. However they were not aware of the structures that had been put in place to ensure government's response as well as the structures that ensured that the governing institutions were accountable to them as a community. Further, Hussein⁴¹ states that in the case where the local community were aware of the committees, they were only viewed as arms of the government which were primarily accountable to the government rather than to them the local population. Conclusively, studies done by Magalasi, Mpekasambo and Suzi point at the problems of communication which influence the level of communities' participation in the development programs. The studies state that the manner and context of communication are some of the elements that will determine the effectiveness of the communication process in raising awareness, imparting knowledge and skills and most importantly promoting participation in development action.

This study therefore seeks to provide a critical understanding and evaluation of how decentralization is being communicated in Malawi. It is envisaged that a critical analysis of the communication strategy adopted as well as the implementation plan and process will provide the basis of understanding the current situation.

⁴¹ Hussein, M 2004

1.5 MAIN OBJECTIVE

The study examines the communication strategy in decentralization, its implementation process and impact on target group.

1.5.1. Specific Objectives

In an attempt at achieving the fundamental objective of the study the following were the specific objectives:

- Examination of the Communication strategy elements in relation to the strategy objectives and outputs
- Assessment of the implementation plan and process in reference to the communication policy objectives and the implementation context.
- Assess the effectiveness of the communication mediums in communicating decentralization.

1.6 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Development communication is a rather broad area in which one finds many approaches and various ideologies such as Participatory Development Communication and Behavioral Change Communication just to mention a few. However beyond all the many approaches and ideologies, development communication refers to the planned use of strategies, processes of communication aimed at achieving development action⁴². In this paper, my theoretical construct is drawn on the principles of participatory development communication as presented by Melkote⁴³, White⁴⁴, Parker⁴⁵ and

⁴² Bessette G 1998, p.1

⁴³ Melkote S 2002, p. 234

⁴⁴ White S 2003, p. 36

Kamlongera⁴⁶. I will investigate the context of communication for decentralization and the principles that have guided the conceptualization and implementation of the communication strategy for decentralization. In understanding and analyzing the context of communication and the communication strategy employed I will apply the principles of participatory development communication advocated by Melkote and White in their exploration of development communication paradigms, while paying attention to Kamlongera and Parker's theoretical grounding.

The shift in development trends from a modernisation paradigm to a participatory one, has assumed a different role for communication in the development process. In the new paradigm, lack of effective system of delivering knowledge and skills to the rural masses thus preventing adoption of innovations and lack of people involvement in the designing planning and implementation of their own development leading to lack of participation in the development process have been highlighted to be among the constraints linked to the present failure of most development programs in improving people's livelihood⁴⁷. This shift therefore, called for a system of communication that ensures coordination between the beneficiaries and benefactors in designing, planning and implementing development program that will be relevant to their needs as well as ensuring an effective system of delivering knowledge that will promote adoption of innovations at the grassroots. As such new approaches that were more apt to empower and enable participation of the beneficiaries in the development process were developed⁴⁸ namely Participatory Development Communication.

⁴⁵ Parker W 1998

⁴⁶ Kamlongera C, 2004

⁴⁷ Melkote S 1991, p. 231

⁴⁸ Bessette G 1998, p.3

White⁴⁹ defines Participatory Development communication as a two - way, dynamic interaction between “grassroots” receivers and the “information source”, mediated by development communicators, which facilitates the participation of the target group in the process of development. Participatory development communication begins on the premise that all people have a right to voice their views and become active partners in the development processes which impact upon their lives. This is based on the assumption that if people are involved in the development process they are likely discover their reality and find means of addressing the problems ensuing, taking hold of opportunities that will better their livelihood in the long run ensuring self reliance and independence. It is both a process through which people interact as well as a product of human interaction. As dialogue between power holders and the powerless, it is both empowering and disempowering⁵⁰. That is to say that through the communication process which is two- way, interactive and dialogic, those in power cede power to the powerless by interacting with them by sharing information and knowledge on an equal basis. The approach further states that in order for the beneficiaries to participate in the development process they need to be aware of the development initiatives and that such initiatives ought to be relevant to their needs and problems as well as take into account the socio-economic and political constraints that are inherent in their environment⁵¹. The assumptions made by the approach therefore while underscoring the importance of communication in the development process, recognises the importance of both the message sender and receiver in the communication process that is aimed at acquisition of knowledge and skills that will enable participation in the development process. From the above discussion, Participatory Development Communication makes the

⁴⁹ White S 2003, p.36

⁵⁰ *ibid*

⁵¹ Melkote, S 2001,p.245

assumption that there is need for communication and coordination in the development process if development is to have any relevance at the grassroots. Participatory development communication therefore sets new stand points regarding the considerations in the formulation of a communication strategy. The process of communicating decentralization was initiated to promote citizen participation in the decentralization process. The principles of Participatory Development Communication will be used to analyse the communication approach adopted in communicating decentralization particularly in meeting its objective of increasing knowledge of the decentralization process as well as promotion of participation in the decentralization process. Some of the thematic areas which the analysis will draw on are; the context of communication and the communication strategy developed.

According to Melkote⁵², development initiatives that require citizen participation and a change in knowledge, attitude and practices should have a communication strategy integrated in the development intervention right from the start. The communication strategy needs to be planned and based on research⁵³. The process of research familiarises the message sender with the context in which the communication will take place. Therefore, giving an insight into the communication needs of the target group as well as resources required in the communication process. Additionally, apart from the need for a communication strategy, principles of Participatory Development Communication draw attention to the organizational value of the communication for communities⁵⁴. Apart from identifying, and defining the problems of the target group and developing the proper messages there is also need to ensure that the messages are

⁵² ibid

⁵³ Kamlongera, C et al 2004, p.8

⁵⁴ Melkote S 1991, p.233

transmitted through channels that are accessible to the target group regardless of cultural and literacy barriers. It should however be noted that in most cases, the target groups participation is viewed as automatic once the above mentioned conditions are met. Though grounded theoretically, this is not however practically always the case. This has been one of the areas ignored in Development Communication studies. In the implementation of the communication strategy it is important to note however that the communication messages are not ‘ magic bullets’ that will transform the targets and make them conform and be involved. Capacity building through communication may enhance resource availability and accessibility and though important in the development process may create variances in knowledge levels causing inequalities and thus be used for manipulating others. New capacities therefore need to be accompanied with guidance and frameworks for responsibility.⁵⁵ Consequently, Kamlongera goes further to state that even though the communication materials have been correctly developed there is need to constantly monitor the impact of the communication as well as evaluate the materials so that they remain relevant to the target group. The principles highlighted provide the checklist for the analysis of the suitability of the communication strategy developed and being implemented. Paying attention not only to the message content, communication approaches, role and nature of communicators as well as the context within which such communication will take place. Though not exhaustive, the principles offered will provide grounds on which the communication strategy in decentralization will be analysed.

⁵⁵ White S 2003, p.46

1.7 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This section outlines the research methodology and design that was employed in the study. It also justifies the design used and gives a brief description of the tools and informants that informed the study. Finally a discussion of how data been analyzed and presented will conclude this section.

1.7.1. Qualitative Methodology

A qualitative approach to research was used to gain an in-depth understanding as well as multiple interpretations into the process and impact of communicating decentralization in Zomba District Assembly. According to Creswell⁵⁶ qualitative research methodology is concerned primarily with the process and not the product or outcome. In addition qualitative research focuses on the meaning in terms of ways in which people interpret their lives, experiences and their contexts. As such qualitative research seeks to understand the variables being explored in order to have an understanding of the overall situation. The qualitative approach was therefore opted because of its nature to focus on the process that is used to derive the insights, perceptions, meaning and understanding of the variables being studied. Additionally, qualitative methodology allows for an in-depth investigation into the situation therefore taking a holistic approach on the description of the events, procedures occurring in the natural setting in order to make an accurate conclusion on the situation⁵⁷. In this study, the major focus of analysis was the *process* of communicating decentralization in relation to the overall impact of the process on the target community's understanding of the decentralization policy and their involvement in the decentralization process. As

⁵⁶ Creswell J. W 1994, p.145

⁵⁷ Patton, M. Q 1996

such the qualitative methodology allowed for exploration of the people's comprehension and perceptions of the decentralization process and role of communication in this regard. It also allowed for an in depth understanding of how the various players in the process of communicating decentralization contributed to the present scenario. From the above discussion therefore, the qualitative methodology was the most relevant research methodology as it did allow firstly, an exploration of the people's interpretation of the decentralization, the purpose, their role in the process and secondly, an exploration of process of communicating decentralization and its impact in relation to the process objectives.

In relation to the research objectives the qualitative methodology allows for the exploration of elements that may otherwise not have been explored using the quantitative methodology.

1.7.2 Selection of Site

Zomba District Assembly was selected based on the researcher's knowledge of the district as well as its proximity to the researcher. The informants were drawn from the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development (MLGRD), the national governing body for decentralization in Lilongwe, Zomba District Assembly, NICE, Bwalo Initiative and the VDCs and ADCs in the Assembly. The qualitative methodology allowed for the purposive sampling of the respondents. Purposive sampling enables the researcher to narrow down the research informants to those that will provide the primary data that will best answer the research question or provide data that will meet the research objectives. As such the informants of the study were selected based on their expertise which was relevant to the process of communicating

decentralization. Furthermore, the informants were also selected according to their involvement and contribution both to the decentralization process and the process of communication the same.

1.8 DATA COLLECTION

There are numerous tools used in data collection in qualitative research methodology. For this study the following were the tools utilized; Document analysis, and Interviews (individual and focus group). Document review provided data that did set the context of communicating decentralization as well as the background that necessitated the formulation of the communication strategy. Furthermore document review did provide the principles that guided the operation and interaction of the various stakeholders in the decentralization process. As indicated above, the interviews were carried out with key informants that were purposively selected according to what the researcher presumed they will contribute to the study. The interviews were carried out in three tiers from the national, district to community level.

1.8.1 Document Review

This involved the review of documents related to communicating decentralization in Malawi. This included the IEC policy on decentralization, handbooks for VDC and ADC, training manuals for Para –Civic educators, Socio- Economic profile for Zomba District, Decentralization Policy and Development planning system handbook for District Assemblies.

1.8.2 Interviews

1.8.2.1 National Level

Two key informant interviews were conducted at national level to gather expert information on issues relating to policy issues on communicating decentralization. The interviews were conducted at the decentralization program unit which was set up to implement the decentralization reforms in the Ministry of Local Government. The unit is also responsible for implementing the communication strategy. The personnel interviewed were the Communications Manager and the Monitoring & Evaluation Officer. The interviews were semi- structured with open ended questions that were intended at collecting as much information as possible on the strategy, communication processes and tools employed by the unit. The questions that were asked were mostly focused on the communication policy inherent in the IEC strategy. Attention was also given to the conceptualization and implementation of the strategy and the assessment of the same in relation to the goals and objectives of the decentralization policy which it was established to complement.

1.8.2.2 District Level

Interviews at the district level were done in two-fold; with the key members of the District Assembly and civil society partners involved in communicating decentralization and capacity building for the local level structures. At the Assembly individual interviews were done with the Director of Planning and Development, District Community Development Officer. The questions focused on the organization of the IEC task force, the areas of focus as relating to their communication needs at district level, the approaches and strategies that are used in carrying out the

communication and the relationship between the assembly and other stakeholders (NGOs, elected representatives) in the district. From the civil society, interviews were conducted with NICE officials and the Executive Director for Bwalo Initiative. The areas of focus were the strategies and approaches used by the organizations in relation to their goals and objectives in respect of the objectives and goals of the national IEC strategy.

1.8.2.3 Local Level

One to one interviews were conducted with traditional authorities, group village headmen, Para-civic educators and other volunteers involved in communicating decentralization. Focus group discussions were conducted with members of the Village Development Committees (VDCs), Area Development Committee (ADCs), and Community. The value of focus group discussions is that they allow for an interaction between the interviewer and interviewees, creating an environment where there are no inhibitions as to what should be said. It also gives a chance for the people involved to be able to have their opinions heard but at the same time provides the much needed information on the opinions and perceptions of the different people involved.⁵⁸

As the committees work as a group it was more appropriate to interview them in the setting they function in. As such the interviews were conducted in a setting which was familiar to ensure that the respondents can discuss issues comfortably. The interviews were intended at getting views on decentralization, their understanding of the concept and its processes, their perceived role in the system and their approach to communicating decentralization. The interviews were also intended at getting an

⁵⁸ Wilkinson D and Birmingham P 2003

understanding of the communication processes and channels utilized at the community level and the constraints that they have in comprehending decentralization. The focus of the questions was on gauging their understanding of the concepts, the relationship between key players at the local level and as well as the communities as regards the changes that have taken place in relation to the reforms. Finally the informants were asked to state any problems or constraints that they are experiencing in relation to their role and the demands that decentralization makes on the individuals.

1.9 DATA ANALYSIS AND PRESENTATION

In qualitative research, data analysis involves the sorting of data into categories and formatting the data by making comparisons and contrasts. The links emerging from the process provide for a descriptive text that is then tested against the theoretical underpinnings to provide a meaningful analysis of the phenomenon being studied⁵⁹. In this study the data was collated through sorting and classification to arrive at the processes and sequences from which meaningful units and themes were developed to inform the study. The data was then summarized and relationships drawn. Analysis of the processes and strategies was employed to capture the relevant issues

1.9.1 STUDY LIMITATIONS

There is little academic and theory based literature in the area of decentralization communication and development communication in Malawi. Research reports constitute a large portion of literature which does not necessarily focus on decentralization. The available literature on decentralization in Malawi is mostly

⁵⁹ Creswell, J. W 1994,

focused on fiscal and administrative decentralization and not on the operation and the communication between sectors in the reformed system.

Nevertheless, I believe that the results from this study give a clear reflection of the situation and issues on the ground and should therefore be reliable.

1. 9. 2 THESIS COMPOSITION

This dissertation has been divided into five chapters with the chapter composition as follows:

Chapter One: Introduction to the Study

The first chapter gives a brief background to the study, its rationale, theoretical and conceptual framework within which this study is grounded and the context within which the findings of this study will be discussed. The objective of the study, the methodology that has been employed in undertaking the study and an outline of the informants that informed the study also form part of the chapter.

Chapter Two: Communication Strategy: Conceptualization, Implementation Plan and Process

This chapter examines the communication strategy elements employed in decentralization. An analytical overview of the implementation plan and process is explored highlighting the context in which the communication process occurred. An overview of the implementation plan and process provides for the institutions involved in the communication process. Lastly the communication approaches and channels used in the process have also been assessed primarily in relation to the achievement of the strategy goal.

Chapter Three: Print Media

This chapter explores the approach used in print media. In exploring the use of print media, a sample print material used in communicating decentralization is analyzed. The analysis involves exploring the print materials design, content, accessibility in terms of the target readers and its overall effectiveness in addressing issues dealing with decentralization. Of note is the problem of lack of information, knowledge and skills to enable the communities to meaningfully participate in the decentralization, the sampled material is therefore analyzed within this context. The chapter therefore applies principles in conceptualization, production and implementation of print media in development communication.

Chapter Four: Interpersonal Communication

The chapter provides a critical analysis of the interpersonal methods of communication that have been employed in communicating decentralization. Emphasis is drawn to the how the implementation of interpersonal communication has managed to interact with and involve the communication in the process of communication. The chapter in a way explores the role of the community in the communication process and how this has influenced the outcome of communication implemented.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

This is the final chapter for the paper and it consequently concludes and draws recommendations for the study in respect of findings and the set objectives and goals of the communication strategy developed.

CHAPTER TWO

COMMUNICATION STRATEGY: CONCEPRTUALIZATION, IMPLEMENTATION PLAN AND PROCESS

2.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter sets out to analyze the communication strategy, implementation plan and process for decentralization. An overview of the conceptualization, development and elements of the strategy will be the focus of the first section. Attention will be drawn to the factors that necessitated a communication strategy setting the background into the implementation context. To follow will be an exploration of the strategy implementation plan and process highlighting institutions involved in the communication process, the approaches adopted and the implications so far. The last section will give an assessment of the communication channels employed in the communication process. I will however focus on the channels that have been identified by the respondents in the study site.

2.1 BACKGROUND TO STRATEGY CONCEPTUALIZATION AND DEVELOPMENT

The adoption of the decentralization policy in 1998, marked a reorientation in the local governance system as it stipulated the opening up of spaces for popular participation in decision making especially at the local level. However, an assessment of readings on the decentralization process indicated that, communities have not taken control of these spaces and thus their participation in the decentralization process has been minimal.

According to Dzimadzi and Chinsinga⁶⁰, Hussein⁶¹, Ssewankambo⁶² and Chiweza⁶³, lack of participation most especially at the local level has contributed to the slow progress of the process. The findings indicate that low levels of awareness and knowledge are some of the aspects that have led some of the stakeholders not to ‘buy into’ the process. These findings necessitated the need for a communication strategy that would facilitate awareness and acquisition of knowledge and skills necessary in the implementation of the decentralization policy. It is against this backdrop that the Communication Strategy on decentralization was conceived, developed and implemented. The strategy was developed in 2003 by the Decentralization Secretariat, with the first phase implemented in the period between 2003 and 2006⁶⁴ with financial assistance from the Malawi - German Program for Democracy and Decentralization (MGPDD). The communication strategy was aimed at supporting the implementation of the decentralization policy through the provision of information to meet the communication needs of the decentralization implementers and stakeholders. Utilizing a multi pronged communication approach, the strategy was to facilitate the development and dissemination of messages aimed at creating awareness, enhancing knowledge and skills to promote the realization of the decentralization objectives.

2.2 COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

In developing the Communication Strategy, the Decentralization Secretariat started with the identification of stakeholders and made an analysis of their communication needs. Through a consultative and participatory process with a selection of representative stakeholders, the communication needs, suitable approaches and

⁶⁰ Chinsinga, B and Dzimadzi, C 2001, p. 104

⁶¹ Hussein, M 2004, p. 106

⁶² Ssewankambo, E et al 2007, p.39

⁶³ Chiweza, A.L 2007

⁶⁴ Ssewankambo, E et al 2007, p. 39

channels of communication for the different sectors were identified. From the findings of the consultative process, a 'strategic' implementation approach and process was developed. The overall communication objectives of the Communication Strategy were: - to create awareness and enhance knowledge on decentralization, the process and its benefits, increase participation in decentralized governance and the development process, to inform those officials and leaders with responsibilities for implementing the policy at local and national levels about the processes involved and also to address any concerns that they might have about the devolution of responsibilities, to create an environment that will enable a consultative and collaborative interaction among the key stakeholders for the realization of the decentralization objectives

From the consultative process a number of communication approaches and channels to be employed in implementing the communication strategy were identified. The recommended approaches were: Advocacy, Dialogue, Education, Communication, Community Mobilization, Group Formation, Networking and Partnership. Though the approaches were recommended and used in the strategy there has been no rationale for their choice. In relation to the communication channels, there were a number of channels identified for each target group taking into consideration factors such as accessibility and viability of media choice. As the strategy was to cater for the communication needs of all stakeholders in the decentralization process nation wide, it called for a wide variety in terms of media mix. Meetings (village and training workshops), Radio, TV, Print materials and Drama were the channels identified for the community and local leaders who were among the primary target groups in the communication strategy.

The table below outlines the media and specific channels identified.

	MEDIA	COMMUNICATION CHANNELS
1.	Interpersonal	Meetings Training workshops Seminars
2.	Print	Guidebooks Booklets Pamphlets, Leaflets, Posters T-shirts, Caps, Banners
3.	Electronic	TV Radio
4.	Traditional	Drama Songs
5.	Other	Mobile vans

Table 1: Communication Media and Channels

Apart from the institutions created to mainstream the communication efforts, the traditional and political leaders also emerged as the prominent communicators in the strategy.

In developing communication strategies, among the determining factors to the success of implementation of the strategy is the process of its conceptualization. A number of variables imminent in the context of implementation have to be critically analyzed in order to determine the potential challenges and barriers that set the stage for the communication problem. Such an analysis will define the strategy implementation process. According to Ramirez and Quarry⁶⁵ the design and conceptualization of a communication strategy that requires a significant change in attitudes, skills and accountability entails a level of critical analysis into the procedures and relationships of the variables influencing the state of affairs. In reference to the Communication Strategy, the rationalization for its development and implementation is to up the low levels of awareness and knowledge on the decentralization policy. However, it should be noted that before the call for the development of the Communication Strategy there were other means of communicating decentralization even though not 'planned' or 'strategic'. These communication efforts did very little to promote awareness and knowledge among the stakeholders crucial for their participation in the decentralization process. As such there was need to analyze the context in which such communication was taking place. How communication was being implemented, and who was involved in the communication process. What constraints were there to the communication efforts, the process, methods and techniques employed? Apart from defining the context, the analysis could have contributed to the focus of the current strategy, in terms of implementation process and planning. This could have provided a sound picture into the choice of approaches, methods, channels as well as determine the potential key stakeholders in the communication process. A look at the Communication Strategy however indicates the absence of such an exercise. Before the development of

⁶⁵ Ramirez, R and Quarry, W 2004, p.5

the strategy in 2003 there were organizations such as NICE, CCJP and Church and Society among others, involved in communicating decentralization. These organizations therefore were familiar with the context within which decentralization communication was being implemented. As such these organizations had knowledge of the factors that affect comprehension of decentralization messages and the challenges to communicating decentralization that may not necessarily be IEC related but need to be considered in setting the stage for implementation. These partners would have provided insights into what works and what does not and why there are such dynamics.

The development process for the communication strategy on decentralization is silent on the role and the significance of other organizations and institutions working in communicating decentralization. These organizations could have been identified as partners not only in the conceptualization of the strategy but the communication process as well. However, the role of organizations in reference to the strategy has been towards the development and design of messages in the strategy. The strategy is not clear on the process and mechanisms for coordination with other organizations communicating decentralization. Nonetheless, the significance of partner involvement on policy and strategy advocacy can not be underplayed. When the partner organization or institutions are involved in the process of development and implementation of the communication strategy they are more likely to support the ideals expressed in the strategy. In other words they will be able to 'buy into' the strategy and thus be able to commit to the implementation of the strategy. The problem of coordination and partnership in development has been highlighted by Bariagaber⁶⁶ in his study on the role of NGOs in urban poverty alleviation in Ethiopia. In assessing the position of the NGOs

⁶⁶ Bariagaber, H 2003, p. 319 - 322

in Poverty Alleviation in Addis Ababa, Bariagaber noted that the city's government lack of effective facilitation, coordination and monitoring mechanism in the operation of the NGOs contributed to the ineffectiveness of the interventions. This was however irrespective of the many scattered NGO projects and programs in the city. Bariagaber points out that the proliferation of the NGOs working in the area gave rise to varied approaches in implementing development initiatives as well as differences in the core focus of such interventions. Such that the lack of coordination and partnership with the city government resulted in most of the approaches being bureaucratic, initiatives being duplicated and therefore the interventions not being effective in terms of addressing the needs of the beneficiaries. A reflection of the Malawian case also points at the necessity of a coordinated and collaborative action with all the actors in the field for effective implementation. As the communication strategy is targeted at a large population there is need for substantial financial and human resource which is limited. In addition, there is a lack of capacity among the implementing structures in the decentralization process. Lastly, the government has limited resources devoted to undertaking crucial procedures in the transitional process. This illustrates that the implementation of the communication strategy requires a significant amount of resources in terms of finance, time and human capacity which could have been drawn from the partner organizations. As such coordination and partnership with NGOs would have put an ease on the financial and human resource constraints and provide for a unified action which was likely going to contribute more to the successful implementation of the communication strategy. A further exploration of the issue is detailed in the next section examining the implementation plan and process, as it is were the problems of coordination and partnership are manifested. Furthermore, the analysis of the implementation context

could have shed light on the power relations at the community level which have a bearing on the communication process.

2.3 IMPLEMENTATION PLAN AND PROCESS

2.3.1 Implementing Structures

2.3.1.1 Formal Structures

With the establishment of the Communication Strategy, the Decentralization Secretariat⁶⁷ established an IEC Unit that was responsible for the implementation of the Communication Strategy⁶⁸. The IEC Unit established structures that ran from the national level to the village level. The different structures at all levels had defined roles and responsibilities in order to avoid duplication and waste of resources⁶⁹

At the National level the National Taskforce on IEC in the IEC Unit was the overall implementing institution. Apart from implementing and disseminating messages the taskforce was also responsible for bringing together different stakeholders in decentralization communication. It was aimed at planning a coordinated action, apart from training government officials and elected representatives in local governance and decentralization. The taskforce comprised of a Manager and IEC Officers who have specialist knowledge and requisite skills in information, education and communication. The roles and responsibilities of the national taskforce range from identifying overall IEC needs for decentralization, working with the operational units to develop disaggregated IEC strategies specific to the needs of the unit, design, develop and

⁶⁷ Was the national governing body for the decentralization process before it was incorporated into the Ministry of Local Government to form Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development (MLGRD)

⁶⁸ IEC Strategy for Decentralization (2002) Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development, Government of Malawi

⁶⁹ *ibid*

produce IEC products and monitor and implement the Communication strategy in collaboration with the assemblies.

At the district level, two institutions were responsible for the coordination of the IEC efforts and the implementation of the strategy. The two institutions are the District Executive Committee (DEC) and District Assembly (DA). The DEC which is the advisory body for the Assembly is comprised of all the heads of departments and partners from the NGOs working in the area. As mandated in the Communication Strategy paper, each of the Assemblies had to establish a structure – a taskforce on IEC that would particularly focus on the IEC needs in its jurisdiction. Thus the IEC taskforce teams were meant to act as a sub- committee responsible for the implementation of the IEC strategy. The District IEC taskforce teams draw their membership from the Assembly secretariat and NGOs specializing in information dissemination. Regular members are the District Information Officer (DIO) who also acts as the secretary of the committee, the Director of Planning and Development (DPD), the District Community Development Officer (DCDO), District Education Officer (DEO) and representatives from NGOs working in decentralization information dissemination. The District IEC Taskforce teams include other officials to the committee depending on the individual's perceived contribution and influence to be made to the process and the community. The District Executive Committee was to supervise monitor and report on IEC activities at the district level, orient communities on decentralization principles and other development methodologies. The District IEC taskforce team which was not meant to replicate the DEC was responsible for conducting training needs assessment for IEC at the district level, organizing trainings in IEC strategy implementation, product design and dissemination.

Responsible institutions in IEC management and needs assessment at the community level included the Village Development Committee (VDC), Area Executive Committee (AEC) and the Area Development Committee (ADC). The VDC being the primary community level institution is a representative body of the village or a group of villages under one Group Village headman. The VDC is the primary development planning and implementation body at the grassroots level. Membership of the committee also includes the extension workers working in different disciplines in the area. The AEC is the advisory body for the ADC and is comprised of extension workers from all departments and representatives of NGOs working in the area. The ADC as the coordinating institution for all the VDCs would consolidate the plans and needs of VDCs in a Traditional Authority. Apart from the above, the ADC also linked the VDC and the District Assembly. The VDC in coordination with the extension officers would then carry out the following IEC efforts: sensitizing communities on decentralization, participation in message design and dissemination of information on decentralization and other development initiatives. The ADC consolidates the IEC efforts of all VDCs with a much broader approach and focus.

The establishment of communication structures at these different levels is crucial to enable the communication process horizontally within the different structures as well as vertically among the structures. The essentiality of such a process in advocating participatory development has been defined by White⁷⁰ stating that communication systems and approaches to message making must reflect a collaborative, interactive, dialogic and transactional relationship among stakeholders. No development

⁷⁰ White, S 2001, p.41

stakeholder can cling to privileged knowledge, privileged information and “power over” models, but must embrace practices of sharing knowledge, information and power. Embracing the ideas of interaction, dialog, and information will ensure that the ultimate goal of empowering local people to take control of their life space is more realistically reached. The establishment of these structures entails that each of the structures is dependent on the other as they feed into and also draw insights on the course of action which will be fitting for the successful implementation of the strategy and the realization of the strategy objectives. Furthermore such a collaborative setting also sets stage for the effective message making process. The empowerment and capacity of the structures at all levels of the implementation framework therefore determines the process and success of the process. Underperformance in any of the structures will therefore have a bearing on the total output of the communication initiative.

At the moment the District IEC taskforce team at the District Assembly is not operational, thus its existence is only on paper. During the research supposed members of the taskforce could not clearly verify as to the existence of the institution. Some members of the team however indicated to have been trained in IEC theme and message development, design and implementation, participatory approach to IEC needs identification and oriented on the IEC strategy implementation⁷¹. Despite undergoing training the IEC team has not implemented any communication program or been involved in message development, design and dissemination exercise⁷². Furthermore, since its establishment, the IEC team has not made any effort in undertaking any of its

⁷¹ Interview with Director of Planning and Development – Zomba District Assembly, September 2007

⁷² *ibid*

responsibilities as stipulated in the strategy; they however acknowledge the significance and need for a strategic communication approach in the decentralization process.

Though mandated to carry out the communication role at the district level, an assessment of the team's operation and status highlighted a number of issues. To begin with, despite being responsible for distribution of IEC materials the team has not been allocated any IEC materials since its establishment. Secondly, the IEC team does not have the financial capacity to produce IEC materials or conduct trainings with other implementing institutions in the District Assembly such as NGO partners (NICE, Bwalo Initiative), local VDCs and ADCs. As the IEC teams at district level are supposed to get support from the national body the National IEC Unit, the phasing out of the program has culminated in loss of momentum for continuity and a new wave perception has overlooked the need for IEC. Lastly, though almost negligible, the Assembly does not seem to 'buy into' the significance of a strategic communication in decentralization as no attempt has been made to revive the IEC team. What has come out instead is that the monthly subventions from the government and the local revenues are not sufficient for such programs. The findings seem to point at the fact that the major constraints to the operation of the IEC team are; lack of capacity in terms of finance and lack of commitment and motivation for the process. The members of the taskforce at the time of its establishment were not aware of the motivation for its establishment as well as the existence of an IEC strategy that provides a coordinated approach towards information, education and communication on decentralization.

The current scenario has posed problems for the institutions that were supposed to undertake the communication task at the community level. To begin with the VDCs and

ADCs were supposed to be trained by the District IEC taskforce team in development communication implementation. In essence the district team had the major responsibility of building the capacity of the community structures. The disablement of the district teams has created a gap in terms of capacity building for the institutions. Out of the members of the VDCs under GVH Sitima, there is no one who has undergone any capacity building training in conceptualizing, developing and implementing development messages. The contact made between the VDC and the implementers at the district level has been to inform them of the need to create a VDC, its composition and responsibility in relation to development planning and implementation.

Bearing in mind the context of local level implementers, it seems that the roles prescribed may be profound. According to the IEC strategy on decentralization⁷³ VDCs and ADCs are expected to carry out the following roles: sensitizing the community on decentralization, participate in message design, recordings and pre-testing of the IEC materials and organizing and participating in community meetings, yet without training. In the past village committees working with government agents in development initiatives have had a ‘top – down’ relationship and thus took a small role in the process. Consequently this environment has resulted in most of them not having the capacity to organize themselves effectively. As such, entrusting the communities and local leaders whose capacity and ability to organize and readjust as institutions is nominal may not be plausible. Additionally presupposing that undergoing trainings that inform them on the processes and implications of decentralization will equip them with

⁷³ IEC Strategy (2002) Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development, Government of Malawi

the necessary skills is no guarantee for action. According to Ramirez and Quarry⁷⁴ and Melkote⁷⁵ communication messages are not ‘magic bullets’ that will totally transform the individual to comply, there is need for a continuous dialogic and interactive communication process between the district teams and the committees at the community level. There is therefore a great likelihood that the committees despite undergoing training; which are to a large extent focused on *informing* them of the processes taking place, may not be able to carry out their roles and exercise their responsibilities. There is therefore need for the strategy to transcend mere awareness and to take into consideration processes that will motivate and empower the target group to take an active role in the process.

2.3.1.2 Parallel Structures

As can be noted from the discussion, the implementation plan as defined by the Decentralization Secretariat has failed to materialize. Some of the institutions established to carry out the communication initiative in the case of the District IEC team are not functional while at the community level, the institutions lack capacity. The gap created has however been filled by parallel structures established by non governmental organizations. The institutions involved vary from one area to another depending on the level of involvement and the capacity of the organization. In the case of the study area, NICE and BWALO Initiative are two major organizations that are involved in the process of communication and capacity building for decentralization. NICE is a national organization with program units in all districts in the country while Bwalo Initiative is primarily based in Zomba. The efforts of these organizations are

⁷⁴ Ramirez, R and Quarry, W 2004, p.13

⁷⁵ In writing on Another paradigm to development in Communication for Development in the Third World: Theory and Practice, Sage Publications, New Dehli (1991)

meant to compliment those of the local government which may at times lack the capacity or resources required.

NICE

As a national organization NICE is a civic education provider working in both urban and rural areas. Though established to conduct civic education on the 1999 presidential and parliamentary elections to encourage and mobilize Malawians to take part in the elections, the organization has extended its program focus to include civic education on decentralization and good governance. NICE has a three tier program structure; the national office, regional coordinating offices and district civic education offices. The district level is the main program implementation office. The Zomba Civic Education Office is run by the Civic Education Officer responsible for planning all the district civic education activities. To facilitate the implementation of the civic education activities NICE has part time employees who work at the Area local level and volunteers at the Community level. The volunteers are the primary contact points at the community level and are referred to as Para- Civic Educators (PCEs). The PCEs help identify the IEC needs of the community, sensitize and disseminate information on decentralization and the fundamental principles of good governance. After identifying the needs of the communities the volunteers report to the Area Civic Educator who then consolidates the needs and refers them to the District Offices where strategies for meeting these needs are identified and developed. As NICE is focused on process and not context, when the problems or needs that are presented fall outside the organization's area of interest, the community is referred to the relevant organization or department. The PCEs are there to identify the communication needs of the

communities and are then advised by the district office as to what is required in terms of information which is made available through IEC materials.

The strategy advocated by NICE does very little to nurture interaction and dialogue between NICE as a message source and the community as the targeted receivers. According to the District Civic Education Officer for Zomba,⁷⁶ the organization is involved in the communication process in as much as they can identify the communication needs of the communities and thus ensure that the messages developed and disseminated are relevant. Such an approach essentially only provides information but does little to engage the community in message development process. The community therefore is on the sidelines and only significant as a source of feedback. According to White⁷⁷ participatory communication is not simply a matter of studying about and dialoguing with so called “stakeholders” to make possible messages palatable, it should be born in mind that it is a

*process methodology that involves people in an interactive way, making the communication resources available to them directly and in turn helping the grassroots people acquire the knowledge and skills that enables a partnership in generating messages*⁷⁸.

From the discussion it can be deduced that NICE through civic education has adopted a communication approach which is more informative than educative. Nonetheless, the existence of communication structures that run to community level ensures that

⁷⁶ Interview with District Education Officer -NICE Zomba, September 2007

⁷⁷ White, S 2003, p.37

⁷⁸ Emphasis mine

information on the decentralization policy reaches the masses. However there is need for a communication approach that will go beyond awareness to provide communities with the necessary skills to enable community members operate in the new set up. This can be enabled through upholding the significance of the community in the process of identifying, developing and implementing relevant messages on decentralization

Bwalo Initiative

Bwalo Initiative is a social and human development organization that was established in 2004, with funding from MGPDD. The organization is focused on capacity building for the poor, disadvantaged and vulnerable with the aim of enhancing and empowering them to define and realize their needs in order to meaningfully participate in the development process. Through the Revitalizing Community Structures Project being implemented in Zomba District Assembly, Bwalo Initiative seeks to revitalize the community structures in decentralization through building the capacity for effective and efficient democratic decentralization. The operation of the organization is at two levels. The first is made up of the Executive Director and Program Managers who act as the advisory and administrative team. Secondly, the Program Officers and Field Assistants make up the body of the implementation mechanism. As an organization, Bwalo Initiative does not have the capacity to design and produce IEC materials. The organization out sources them from other organizations involved in communicating decentralization and local governance or from institutions that fund the programs they run. The main communication approach that the organization uses is training workshops.

From the research however, it is evident that training workshops for the committees at the community level are not sufficient to enable the community to 'buy into' the decentralization process. The ADCs despite undergoing training have not yet managed to carry out communication tasks, citing that they were not aware that IEC was in their realm of their responsibilities. The training approach could have therefore have been complemented by another that involved the committees in an interactive manner to empower them in IEC development and implementation.

As an organization, Bwalo Initiative's main communication approach is the training workshops under the Revitalizing Community Structure Project. However, with such an approach there is need for a complementary communication strategy that will facilitate continual dialogue between the community structures and the organization. Though IEC materials complement the training workshops, the organization's lack of capacity to design and produce them has got an implication on availability and relevance of material.

From the findings NICE and BWALO Initiative are organizations that complement the formal structures established by the Decentralization Secretariat. However the findings indicate that the relation ship between these organizations has not been that of partnership and collaboration for a unified action. Even though NICE and BWALO Initiative are working in the area of communicating decentralization, there is very little if any coordination between the organizations and the District IEC Team. As noted above the District IEC Team is not empowered to guide the NGOs as to the needs of the district and the development focus areas that they can address. This is to a large extent due to the fact that the District Assembly does not have the capacity and

financial resources to address the development needs in their area. As the organizations have the resources they are therefore more able to decide on how they work, who they work with and where they work.

Furthermore, there is no recognition of the Decentralization IEC strategy developed by the Decentralization Secretariat by the organization. Each of the organizations therefore uses its own strategy. Furthermore as a coordinating institution to guide in implementing the communication strategy is not operational there has been a leadership gap that has contributed to the problem of networking and partnership for a unified action. In the communication efforts NICE and Bwalo Initiative have come up with their own strategies and operational frameworks which were developed basing on the organizations' perceived communication needs and in relation to the set objectives and expected outputs.

The challenge with the state of affairs however is that there is no order, monitoring and evaluating mechanism which has led to duplication of efforts and confusion among the target groups. Such a scenario in a way nullifies the efforts of the IEC strategy.

2.4 COMMUNICATION CHANNELS

This section will discuss the communication channels that have been employed by all the stakeholders involved in communicating decentralization in the district assembly. According to Besette⁷⁹ any communication strategy must employ a number of implementation methods which will suit the target group's needs, be conducive with the

⁷⁹ Besette, G 1996, p.8

target group's environment as well as that which will effectively serve to achieve the purpose of the communication initiative. From the list of communication tools identified to be employed in the communication initiative, only a few were employed nation wide these included TV, radio, drama, printed materials such as handbook, leaflets, posters, T-shirts, caps, meetings – village and training workshops. According to the empirical findings from the study site, among those employed nation wide, the ones indicated by the respondents are meetings, training workshops, radio and print materials. Most of the identified communication channels were not employed in the district Assembly due to lack of capacity in the implementing institutions. In the case of printed materials and drama, the IEC Team was required to produce the printed material and contract or train a drama group that would then perform in the District Assembly. However as the IEC team in nonfunctional such activities could not be carried out.

The following is the outline and assessment of the channels employed:

Meetings

Meetings have been identified as the primary methods that are used by the communities as information sources mostly on development issues or if there are issues that affect the community at large. A large number of the respondents indicated that the meetings have been instrumental in initiating them to the concept of decentralization. These meeting vary from political meetings to village meetings which are mostly called upon by the local leaders.

Even though meetings provide a very good opportunity and environment for information dissemination they are not necessarily viable for discussions. The meetings

draw larger audiences and mostly focus on general issues and are not needs specific. Therefore do not provide a very conducive environment for clarification and discussion. However the meetings are ideal for information dissemination and organizing human resource for the implementation of a development initiative. Therefore despite being indicated as one of the methods used in participatory “bottom – up” communication there still is space for the meetings to have an authoritarian tendency where people gather and are told what to do. A detailed exploration of meetings as communication channels employed in Decentralization is given in Chapter 4, which examines Interpersonal Communication.

Training Workshops

The training workshops have been targeted at the committees. Through training workshops the Village Development Committees and Area development committees have been educated on the process, structures and implications of the decentralization policy. The training workshops have not been targeted at all members of the VDCs but a number of them. In conducting the training workshops NICE and Bwalo Initiative have pulled together representatives of the committees for the training. As such some members of the committees have gone through the training while others have not had the chance yet. This has resulted in variances in the knowledge levels of the committee members. Those that have gone through the training which in most cases are the chairperson for the committee and others who hold positions in the committee therefore have an elevated status and tend to dominate in the proceeds of the committee meetings. This affects the level of involvement of the other members who have not been trained. For instance in the course of the interviews the chairperson would interrupt a committee members point if he felt that the views being expressed were in

contrast to his. This points at the fact that in the deliberations as committees there is a 'top down' approach to their discussions and planning. This has been reflected by White⁸⁰ that capacity building though positive, can be used as a tool for manipulation of others for the interest of those that have the resources and not necessarily the group. The new capacities therefore will have to be guided and applied in a framework for responsibilities. Thus in essence even though the training workshops are vital and use a 'bottom up' approach to communication there is room for the method to be used in an authoritarian 'top up' approach. There is need for a change in approach if the capacities developed are to be of benefit to the committees and in the long run the decentralization policy.

Radio

Radio has been extensively used in decentralization communication as a medium for disseminating information. Radio is usually recommended for its capacity to transmit information to a large audience and its ability to transcend literacy barriers. Radio is cheaper in comparison to other communication mediums such as print and television. About 70 percent of the informants at the community level indicated to have learned about decentralization from the radio through the jingles, and programs such as '*Kudzigulira malo*' and Malawi Social Action Fund (MASAF) program on MBC Radio 1. However the knowledge that was grasped from the programs and jingles was not rich enough to empower the people. In the case where the programs provided a feedback element, there was reluctance to use the methods to get clarification or contribute to the program. According to one of the respondents referring to "*Mphamvu*

⁸⁰ White, S. 2001, p.46

ku Wanthu”⁸¹ a radio program on MBC Radio 1 “the issues that were being explored in the program were interesting and educating however that situation is unique to the people of that area.” (*nkhani zake zimakhala zopatsa chidwi komanso zophunzitsa mmene anthu angamathandizikire komano izo ndizimene zimachitika ku Nkhatabayko kuno vuto limenelo kulibe*).

Printed Materials

Mostly targeted at the literate masses and not very effective in the rural areas where illiteracy levels are very high, however leaflets and handbooks contain more detailed information than tools such as radio jingles, drama etc . From the study it was observed that the handbooks were distributed to all members of the ADC, VDCs that had undergone training with NICE or Bwalo Initiative. The content of the handbooks and manuals however was on the ‘what- is’ of decentralization and not the ‘how- to’ in the decentralized framework.

From the discussion it can be deduced that the community is aware of the decentralization policy. This has been achieved through the activities of the communication structures. Communication channels such as Radio, Meetings and training workshops have been identified as the primary source of information on decentralization. However in reference to one of the respondents, the information that has been disseminated has by and large not been very helpful in promoting their participation in the decentralization process. To a large extent the communication carried out so far has focused on the “what is” in decentralization. There is need

⁸¹ *Mphamvu ku Wanthu* , radio program, Malawi Broadcasting Corporation (MBC) Radio 1. *Mphamvu Ku Wanthu* translated literally means “Power to the People”

however for the communication to now focus on providing the target audience with the necessary skills to help them operate in the new structure.

2.5 CONCLUSION

This chapter has examined the communication strategy for decentralization, implementation plan and process. The first section of the chapter has highlighted the factors that necessitated its conceptualization and shed light on its development process. An assessment of the implementation plan and process has focused on the role of the implementation structures established and communication channels employed in the communication process.

An examination into the conceptualization of the strategy has revealed that there was lack of consideration to the context in which decentralization was being communicated which has brought in problems of implementation. Of note is the lack of capacity of the community structures, the absence of a coordinating effort between the formal structures and the informal structures established by the civil society. Furthermore the communication approaches and channels adopted by the implementing institutions have largely drawn on informing the community of the decentralization concept, process and implications. They however do not afford the community opportunities for dialogue and a two way communication that might contribute towards the acquisition of knowledge and skills to enable the community to fully participate in the decentralization process.

CHAPTER 3

PRINT MEDIA

3.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter will look at Print Media in communicating decentralization. An analysis of a sample print media material used by NICE will be what the chapter will focus. Using a booklet titled **Guidebook on Decentralization and Local Governance in Malawi (Buku Lofotokoza za Disentalazeshoni ndi Ntchito za Maboma Aang’ono M’malawi)**, The analysis will focus on content, design and accessibility before the chapter concludes with an overview of the effectiveness of the guidebook on the targeted community.

3.1 ORGANIZATION

NICE is among organizations communicating decentralization through Print Materials. The materials are produced through the country’s main office and then distributed to the District Program Units. However the organization utilizes some print materials that are externally produced but border on the thematic areas that the organization works in. An example of such IEC material is the “**Guidebook on Decentralization and Local Governance**” which is produced by the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development (MLGRD) through the Malawi- German Program for Democracy and Decentralization (MGPDD).

According to the District Civic Education Officer, distribution of the Guidebook is among a number of activities that NICE carries out in line with their focus of equipping members of the community with the necessary skills and information to help them in the decision making process. Among other activities carried out by NICE in the area of Decentralization and Good governance include training workshops which are mostly targeted at the committee members and local leaders. Besides training workshops community meetings which involve every community members are utilized as information dissemination fora.

Through NICE the Guidebook is distributed to members of the VDC and ADC after they are taken through capacity building workshops on Decentralization and Good Governance. The guidebook is also distributed to the Para Civic Educators (PCEs) and Area Civic Education Coordinators (ACEC) for NICE who are the contact persons at the community level.

3.2 GUIDEBOOK ON DECENTRALIZATION AND LOCAL GOVERNANCE IN MALAWI

The guidebook was developed and produced by the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development (MLGRD) through the Malawi German Program for Democracy and Decentralization (MGPDD)⁸². The guidebook has been produced in two languages namely English and Chichewa, the country's lingua franca. The guidebook is meant to be distributed to all communities and stakeholders to be a basis for discussions on

⁸² Guidebook on Decentralization and Local Government in Malawi (2005), MGPDD, Malawi

decentralization and local governance⁸³. Through reading the guidebook, it is expected that the communities will be more aware of the processes and structures in decentralization as well as be informed of their roles and responsibilities in the new system of governance. It is envisioned that if the community is equipped with the necessary information, they will be apt to participate in the decentralization process and make its realization possible.

The guidebook is composed of ten chapters, which address particular themes under decentralization and local government. The chapter themes are broken into sub- themes, which directly relate to the chapter's main theme. At the beginning of each chapter there is either a section, which outlines the question, or the sub themes that the chapter seeks to address. The pages of the chapters range from 10 pages being the most and 4 pages being the least number of pages

The first chapter of the guidebook provides the definition of Decentralization, the background to the adoption of the policy, the rationale of the policy, the implications of the process and the developments that have taken place so far since the decentralization policy was implemented. The exploration on local government areas is done in the second chapter, giving emphasis to how areas are categorized. The different institutions that make up District Assembly are outlined in the third chapter. These include; the Secretariat, the Assembly and the Directorate. These are identified as the key implementers of the process at the district level.

⁸³ ibid

Furthermore, chapters four, five and six give a detailed account of the roles and responsibilities of the Assembly, Councillor and the citizens respectively. The fourth chapter gives an outline of the responsibilities of the Assembly which include service delivery in the areas of health, agriculture, infrastructure and education among others. Apart from provision of social services the Assembly is mandated by the Local Government Act to make policies on local governance and development for the specific local government area.

Besides outlining the roles and responsibilities of the Councillor, chapter 5 focuses on eligibility for those who can become Councillors and how election into the position is done. Of special emphasis in this chapter is the difference in roles of the Councillor, Member of Parliament (MP) and the Traditional leaders and secondly, the working relationship that these different roles have. Chapter six dwells on the role of the citizens. The main take for the chapter is the different ways through which the citizens can participate in local governance.

In chapter 7, the issues of local government elections are explored. Areas such as the local government elections – when they are held, who is eligible to compete in the elections, registration and voting; and lastly the fundamental principles of free and fair elections are outlined. Further than these, the designated structures and institutions in the decentralization process, the structure of planning from the national to the community level in the decentralized system is outlined. Chapter 8 details the areas of planning for each of the institutions from the national to the community level (ADC and VDC). The systems and approach to development planning for all the institutions

are detailed. The chapter further states the functions of the community institutions as regards their role and participation in development planning and implementation.

How the Assembly and Directorates are financed is covered in chapter 9. Besides indicating the different avenues that are available in financing the Assembly, the call for accountability and transparency by the Assembly and how this can be achieved is also explored in the chapter.

Chapter ten, which is the final chapter in the guidebook outlines the implementing institutions in the decentralization process, starting from the president to the associations such as Malawi Local Government Association (MALGA) and (LASCOM).

As indicated in the strategy, one of the major problems in decentralization in reference to the community is lack of information on the decentralization concept, process and implications. The contents of the guidebook border on the themes and key messages that orient the reader to the decentralization policy as such catering for the communication needs of the target audience as defined in the Communication Strategy. According to Kamlongera⁸⁴ print material especially that which is in text form is useful when there is need to inform people about events, processes as well as provide them with the technical knowledge on specific issues. They are also of importance in stimulating interest and discussion on the particular issue. Print materials however are problematic more especially when used in rural areas where a large percentage of the population is illiterate. They are most effective if used as a communication

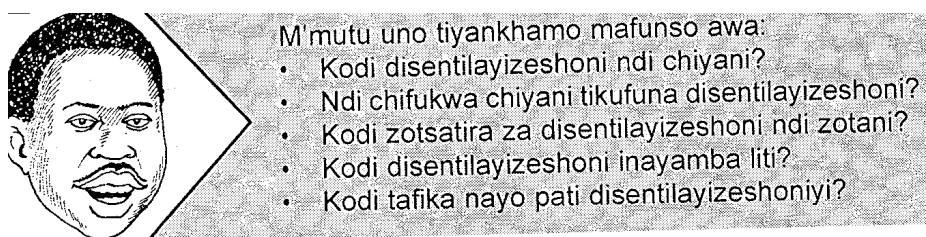
⁸⁴ Kamlongera et al 2004, p.58

complementary aid and not a stand alone tool. As a result of the limited copies of the guidebook available, the guidebook is only distributed at the community level to the VDC and ADC members some of who can passably read. Solely depending on the guidebook to provide information on decentralization is thus not recommendable as some of the ADC and VDC members who can not read will not access to the information in the guidebook. Furthermore, there has been no indication of research prior to the development of the guidebook. This would have ensured that the material contained therein is what is required to meet the information needs of the target group. One of the issues that could have been clearly addressed for instance, is that of the term '*mphamvu ku wanthu*' literally translated as 'power to the people'. The term is heavily value laden due to how it has been used by the various communicators. The term means differently in a political scenario and adopts a different meaning altogether in the development setting. Furthermore, an analysis of the interpretation of the term, which is used synonymously on the local front with the term 'decentralization' has tended to draw on a minimalist understanding of the term. The term is limited to the role of decentralization to enable, choice of development programs and political leaders. Nonetheless, the outlined themes in the guidebook contain functional information more especially in making the reader familiar with the concept of decentralization and the various institutions involved in making its realization possible.

Design

The guidebook is in two languages – Chichewa and English. Apart from the cover of the English version being yellow and the Chichewa version being green the rest of the book is in black and white. These colour differences make it easier to distinguish the two versions. The guidebook has been produced in two versions with the English

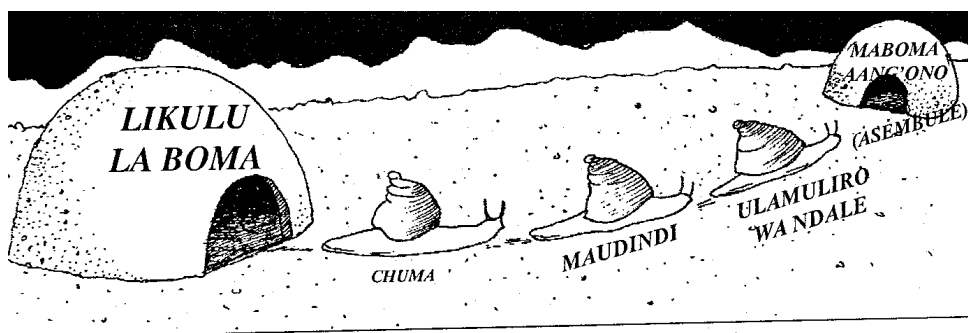
version most probably targeted at the urban and literate masses and the Chichewa version for mostly the rural based masses who can passably read. Most of the information in the guidebook is conveyed through text. However illustrations, pictures and cartoons complement the points highlighted through text. The opening page to each chapter has a section outlining the sub – themes outlined in the chapter as shown in the following extract.



MPHAMVU KWAANTHU (DISENTILAYIZESHONI)

Mayiko onse amakhala ndi likulu la boma limene limayendetsa ntchito zonse za dziko. Ku Malawi kuno likulu la boma **lili** mu mzinda wa Lilongwe.

Udindo waukulu wa likulu la boma ndi kutumikira anthu m'dziko lonse lino powapatsa zosoweka zawo. Koma palinso ntchito zina zimene ziyenera kugwiridwa m'madera amene anthu akukhalamo. Kungakhale kovuta kuti ntchito zimenezi zizigwiridwa kuchokera ku likulu la boma. Pachifukwachi, mayiko ambiri anakhazikitsa maboma aang'ono kuti aziyendetsa ntchito za m'madera osiyanasiyana a dziko, monga m'maboma, m'matawuni kapena m'mizinda.



Each of the chapters contains cartoons, pictures or illustrations that complement the text. As it is with the rest of the guidebook, the cartoons, pictures and illustrations are in black and white.

According to Kamlongera⁸⁵ in producing printed material the context within which the communication is to be implemented has to be taken into consideration and assessed. Elements such as the target audiences' culture, language, education, content and application of the communication materials have to be considered. This influences the level of acceptance of messages communicated as well as effectiveness of the materials. In most cases print media targets the literate masses. In some cases however, print media is not only targeted at the literate but even those that are visually literate. An example of such material would be billboards and slides that have illustrations or pictures, which if comprehended clearly can derive the same meaning as words. Such materials however have to be developed and produced with the culturally acceptable meaning of the symbols in mind and that these must be shared between the message receiver and sender. Therefore, the rural population who are the targeted audience have to be familiar with the symbols used in the illustrations and pictures carried in the guidebook. For example Chapter 2 of the guidebook, which explores the local governance areas, a map outlining all Assemblies in the country, is used as a visual aid to complement the information in text. The map of Malawi is commonly recognized, thus reinforcing the information carried in text. An assessment of the guidebook however points at the fact that it was mostly designed for the literate, those who can read in English and Chichewa. For example, a Map Key is used as a guide to reading the map, with a triangle representing cities, an oval shape for the towns and the square for the districts as presented below. In addition, chapter 3 carries an organ – gram illustrating the administrative structures at the Assembly and a chart in chapter 8 outlines the procedure for coming up with District Development Plans (DPP) (see page 62, 63 and 64). Even though the information carried in the 3 diagrams is in the local language, the form of presentation of such information uses elements that are not in

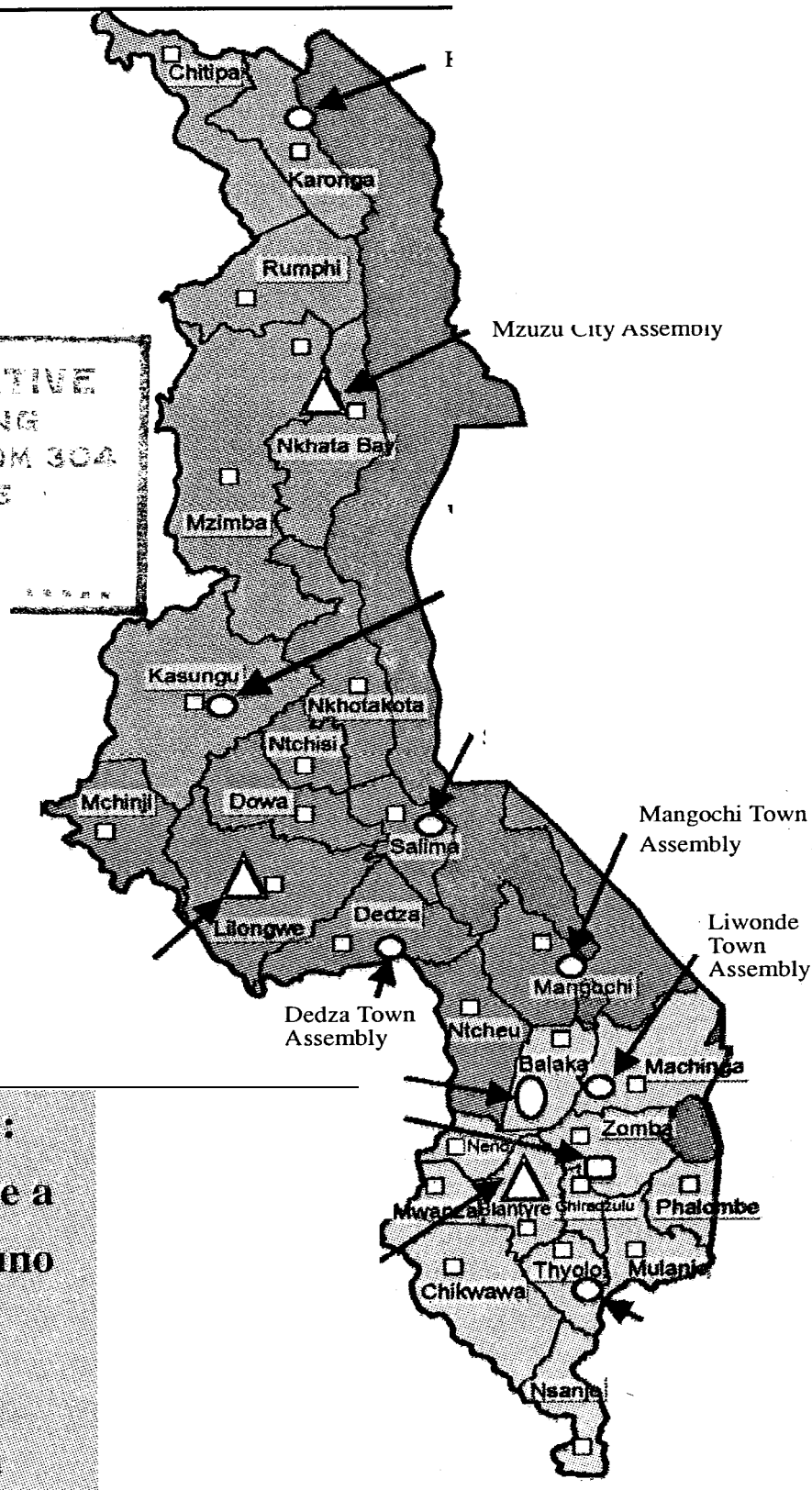
⁸⁵ Kamlongera et al 2004, p.62

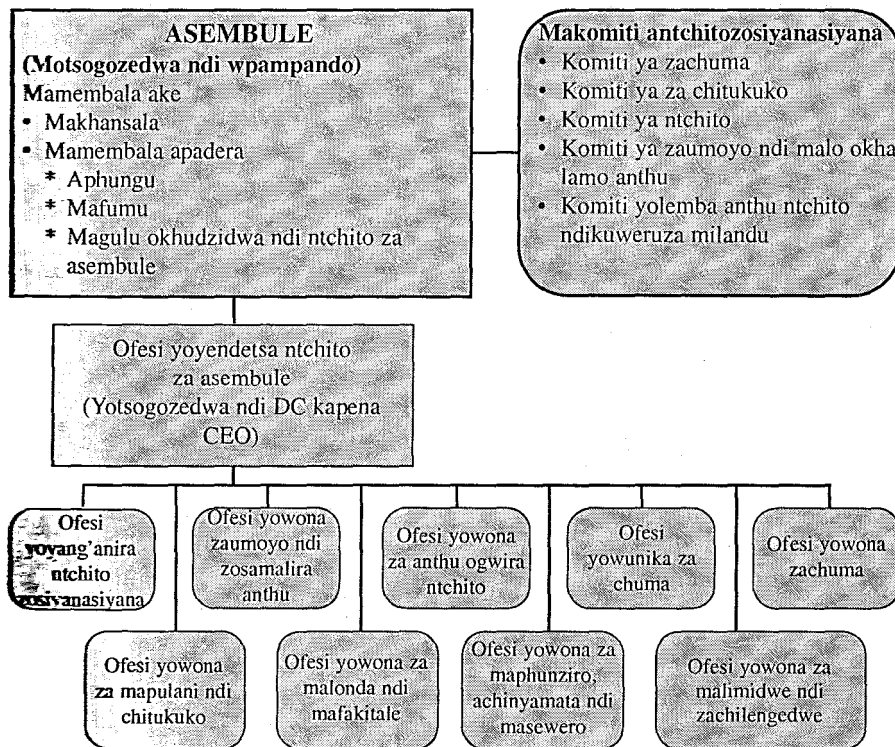
line with context in which the guidebook is be applied. It can be argued that as the guidebook is distributed to act as a starting point for discussion of the decentralization between the committees and field facilitators, the misunderstandings might be clarified. However from the findings there has been no evidence of the guidebook being used in such as way in any of the training or meeting sessions. To a large extent the guidebook is used as a stand-alone tool for the committee members. Thus the following highlight the problem of adopting print material in development communication as indicated by Kamlongera above.

BRALO INITIATIVE
MPC BUILDING
2ND FLOOR/ROOM 304
P.O. BOX 765
ZOMBA

**Chithunzi 1:
Maasembule a
m'dziko muno**

- Matauni
- △ Mizinda
- Maboma
- Manisipalite





Adapted from Guidebook on Decentralization and Local Governance- Chichewa version p. 15

Chithunzi 3: Kukonza pulani ya chitukuko pa boma (DDP)

Ku Asembule pa Boma

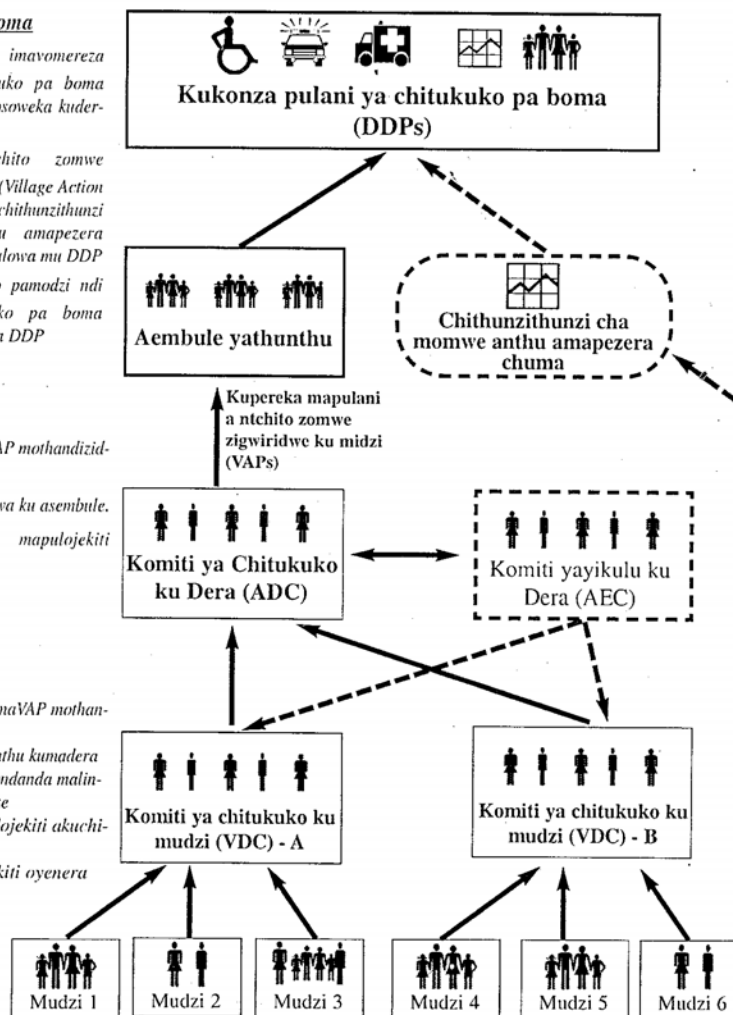
- Asembule yonse imavomereza mapulani A chitukuko pa boma (DDP) poganizira zosoweka kuderako
- Mapulani a ntchito zomwe zigwiridwe ku mudzi (Village Action Plan-VAP) Komanso chithunzithunzi cha momwe anthu amapezera chuma ku Mudzi zimalowa mu DDP
- Komiti ya chitukuko pamodzi ndi komiti ya chitukuko pa boma zimathandiza pokonza DDP

Kwa a T/A

- ADC imakonza ma VAP mothandizidwa ndi AEC.
- Ma VAP amapekedwa ku asembule.
- Kuwona momwe mapulojekiti akuyendera.

Kwa a Gulupu

- Ma VCD amakonza maVAP mothandizidwa ndi AEC
- Kupeza zosowa za anthu kumadera ndi kuziyika mumndandanda malinga ndi kufunika kwake
- Kuwona kuti mapulojekiti akuchitika
- Kukonza mapulojekiti oyenera kuti achitike



In reference to the guidebook, the first section of chapter 4 requires that the reader should make cross-reference to previous or subsequent chapters and illustrations.

Mutu 4

Ntchito za Asembule

2. Kuthandiza mabungwe ogwira ntchito za demokalase ndi kuyendetsa nawo ntchito za demokalase.

Nzika zones zili ndi udindo wofunika pa maboma aan'gono (onani Mutu 6)

4. Kusonkanitsa zipangizo zopezeka m'deralo zonthaniza pa ntchito za chitukuko ndi zoyendetsela asembuleyo

Kuti Madera amene ali pansi pa asembule atukuke, ndikuti akhale ndi zipangizo zabwino komanso kuti athe kukopa mabizinesi, pamafunika chuma. . . (onani mutu 9)

Adapted from Guidebook on Decentralization and Local Governance – Chichewa version

It should be noted however, that the ability to read in Chichewa is not only a resultant of formal education but rather exposure and experience. In general therefore, a majority of the population in Malawi can without formal education, read in Chichewa as it is the locally used language. As such comprehension of symbols employed in formal education for the target audience poses a challenge. Besides in designing reading materials for those with low level literacy it is imperative for the material to be presented simply and with clarity paying attention to the complexity, layout and use of graphics.⁸⁶ As such the presentation of material as indicated above is aligned more towards those that have formal education, making comprehension of material by those

⁸⁶ Matiella A, C 1990, p. 13

with informal education difficult. Furthermore, cross referencing as required in chapter 4 makes the reading of the guidebook complicated as the reader has to keep turning to previous and subsequent pages to understand the material. Additionally, in cross-referencing, the understanding of each section depends on the referred material. As such if material in one section has not been clearly understood, the rest of the material that follows will be difficult to be dealt with. In essence therefore if the reader does not understand the material carried in chapter 6 and 9 then they will not be able to familiarize with the contents in the first two pages of chapter 4.

The organo – gram and chart bring to attention some of the considerations made in designing print material especially that which is targeted at the rural masses most of who can passably read. In designing print material for such an audience it is essential to arrange the information in a manner that will make comprehension easy both in terms of the terms being used as well as the arrangement, be it of the visuals or even the discourse and ensure that the reading is interesting. This is done bearing in mind the little time that the rural people have in between their chores to sit and go through such materials. The use of organo – gram as illustration maybe familiar with people who have at least secondary school education and not be very clear for the average literate person, a category which some of the VDC and ADC members fit. In the organo – gram each of the boxes represent an administrative office of the Assembly. Within the boxes, the personnel that comprise each of the offices are indicated. The links highlight the coordination that is there between the offices. However much of what the organo – gram illustrates is implied through size and positioning of the boxes. As such comprehension of material carried out in the organo – gram poses as a challenge for the members of the community, VDC and ADC.

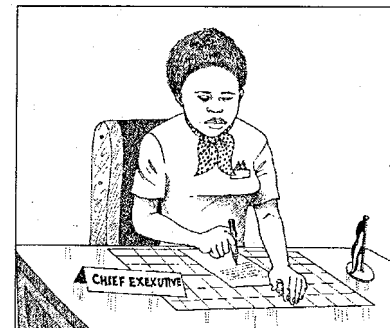
Regarding the chart, some of the symbols used are part of the formal education system, this implies therefore that the information carried in the chart will not be easily understood by a majority of the rural audience who have gained the ability to read in vernacular through informal education.

Furthermore, regardless of the guidebook being in Chichewa, presentation of illustrations and pictures defeats the purpose of the guidebook being targeted at the rural masses. Most notable is the text used within the pictures which are in English. There has been no attempt to identify Chichewa adaptations to the terms as shown in the extracts below.

m'misika yake, ndi udindo wa komiti ya zachuma kukambirana nkhaniyi. Chifukwa chakuti, mukomitiyi mumakhala akatswiri odziwa ntchitoyi, angathe kukonza mwachangu ndondomkeo zothandiza kuti ndalama za misonkho ndi ziphaso zikwere. Angathe kupereka dongosolo limene akonzalo ku msonkhano wa asembule yonse pamene mamembala osankhidwa angathe kuponya voti yogwirizana kapena kutsutsana nayo.

Mu ofesiyi mumakhala anthu ogwira ntchito m'boma amene ndiwokhazikika. Mkulu wa ofesiyi amatchedwa District Commissioner (DC). M'matawuni, manisipalite ndi m'mizinda mkulu wa ofesi ya asembule amatchedwa Chief Executive Officer (CEO).

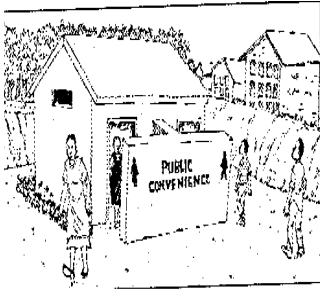
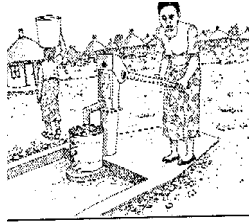
DC kapena CEO ndiye amayang'anira ntchito zonse za asembule. Izi zikutanthauza kuti akuluakuluwa ndiwo amayang'anira kagwiritsidwe ntchito ka chuma cha asembuleyo. Ofesi ya asembule ndi imene **ili** ndi udindo wogwira ntchito zimene mamembala agwirizana.



Adapted from page 14

Madzi

Maasemblinge ali ndi lido wopatsa anthu madzi ndikukonzetsa zipangizo za madzi monga mijigo, mipopi, zitsime zotetezedwa, kagawidwe kamadzi m'madera osiyanasiyana ndi ntchito za madzi a m'mapayipi oyenda motsata mitsetse yamalo.



Zipangizo zogwiritsa

ntchito anthu ambiri

zogwiritsa Zipangizo anthu

Maasemblinge ali ndi lid indo wolimbikitsa ntchi~ to zosanglilitsa anthu ndi zachikhalidwe, komanso kukonza ndi kllsamalira mabwalo a

zamasewero, malo ochitirako zisangalalo ndi kuchitirako masewero komanso zimblldzi.

Mabizinesi

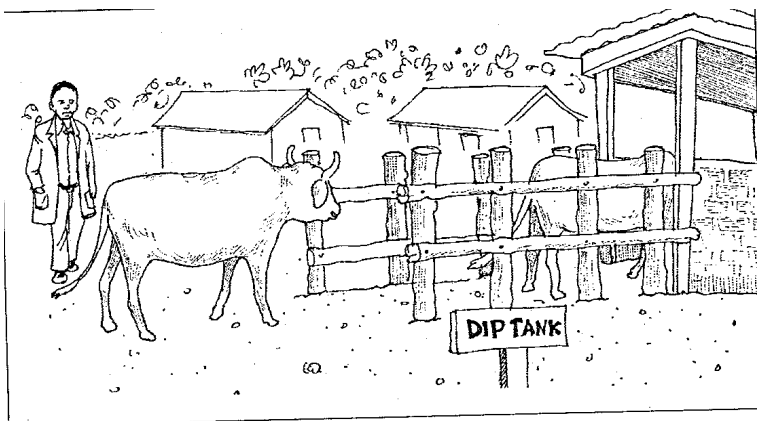
Maasemblinge amalimbikitsa ndi kukhazikitsa malamulo okhudza kayendetsedwe ka mabizinesi ndi ntchito zokopa alendo. Ntchitozi ndi monga kllpereka ziphaso ndi klliyendera mabizinesi aang' onoang' ono, magolosale, masitolo opiklliitsa katllndll, magalaja, slklill ndi zipatala zoyendetsedwa ndi anthu wamba.



Ntchito zina

Palinso ntchito zina zomwe maasemblinge amayenera kugwirira anthu awo. Izi ndi monga kupereka ziphaso za anthu obadwa, anthu okwatira ndi omwalira komanso kuyika maliro.

Adapted from page 23

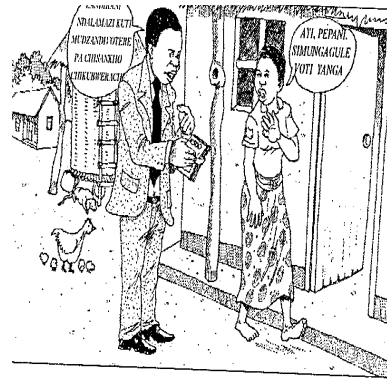


Munthu amene wapeza mavoti ambiri ndi amene amakhala khansala kll wodi yake. Kliwerenga mavoti nthawi zina kllmatengako nthawi. Choncho ndikofllnika kllti aliyense, ovota kapena opikisana azikhala odekha.

Mfundo yofllnika kwambiri ndiyakuti chisankho chizikhala chamtendere ndi chilungamo. Izi zikutanthauza kuti anthll onse opikisana azikhala ndi mwayi wofanana wopambana pa chisankhocho. Voti imakhala ya chinsisi choncho sikoyenera kuti tizinena za munthu amene tikufuna kumusankha. Pasakhale wina owumiriza anthu kuti amuvbtere. Tiri ndi ufulu ovotera amene tikumufuna.

Mwachitsanzo, sipangakhale chilungamo ngati munthu wolemera apereka ndalama

kapena chimanga kwa anthu pofuna kugula voti yawo. Pamenepa ndiye kuti anthu ena opikisana nawo sangakhale ndi mwayi wofanana \opambana pachisankhocho. Ngati tiwona zotere ku mawodi kwathu.tikanene ku Bungwe lowona zachisankho la Malawi Electoral Commi-ssion (MEC) kapena ku polisi.



Adapted from page 37

Terms such as Chief Executive, Public Convenience, District Councillor, Councillor, Dip Tank and Polling Station are used to mark out persons or establish location on the pictures carried out in the guidebook. According to Matiella⁸⁷ educational materials developed for those with low level literacy there is need to use terms that are derived directly from the language and dialect of the target group. Thus confirming the point made by Kamlongera of the need to consider the context and language of the target group in developing printed materials. In designing the guidebook which is in Chichewa and is targeted at the rural masses, elements as highlighted above should have been considered. The material in the guidebook however indicates that there has been no attempt to identify the Chichewa adaptations of these terms. As a result, though the pictures are clearly drawn, the meaning

⁸⁷ ibid

is not fully captured, as the text is in English therefore not understood. This has also been extended to the rest of the guidebook, where terms have not been employed with the appropriate Chichewa adaptations. Terms such as District Commissioner, Chief Executive Officer, District Development Plan (DPP) and Malawi Electoral Commission (MEC) among others are repeatedly used. Therefore even though such terms are carried in the guidebook, they are meaningless for the target group as they are in a language that they cannot read.

Apart from the above, I would also like to draw attention to the text as presented in the guidebook. As already indicated in the introduction to this section, a large part of information in the guidebook is in text. Of interest however is the font size of the text used. For the main text, the font size is about 12, while captions in the cartoons and text used in some of the pictures is one size smaller than that of the main text as shown in the extracts of the map and organogram. Bearing in mind the target audience for the guidebook, the font size employed in the guidebook and in the caption is relatively small for easy reading. According to Matiella⁸⁸ writing for low level literacy audience the material should be pegged at no higher than the estimated grade reading skills. In reference to the field findings most of the members of the VDC have not gone through to secondary education. Evidence from the interview with members of the Sitima VDC, only one among the 7 female members of the committee went up to Form Two the rest are Primary School drop-outs. In comparison with the sixth grade reading material which is an estimated grade level for the VDC members, the font size is considerably smaller and compacted. A look at the English version indicates that the font size of the text not

⁸⁸ ibid

only for the captions in the cartoons but the rest of the guidebook is identical despite the English version being targeted at the literate masses. Despite the Chichewa version targeting the rural masses, a majority who can just passably read, there has been no consideration to adapt the material to correspond with the education of the target group. Prospectively therefore, though accessible to the rural masses, the guidebook will prove a challenge to read for the Chichewa readers most especially those with low level literacy.

From the observations made as regards the design of the guidebook, there are indications that some basic elements in producing print materials are lacking. The two versions have been designed in the same way despite the fact that they target socially different audiences. The Chichewa version has been produced as a translation of the English guidebook, which is not recommendable when producing educational materials for low literacy level groups. Kamlongera says, in producing print materials, there is need to consider the context of the target group in terms of language, literacy, education, culture. Therefore the guidebook should have been produced in consideration of the literacy levels of the target group paying attention to the layout and complexity of the text and drawings.

The other issue is that of accessibility, in reference to the guidelines for implementation of communication strategies in Participatory Development Communication as posited by Besette⁸⁹. The availability of communication materials as well as the target groups' access to such material is crucial to the effectiveness of a communication strategy. This

⁸⁹ Besette, G 1996, p.13

ensures that the target audience has access to the necessary information on the issue being communicated and skills needed for effective participation. Further the urban and rural contexts have an implication on the accessibility of printed materials. In most cases the rural population is marginalized in accessing printed materials. From the findings on the ground, NICE has distributed the guidebook to members of the VDCs and ADCs. The guidebook is distributed to the members after undergoing the capacity building training in Decentralization, which is facilitated by the organization. The members of the committees are the only individuals at the community level that have access to the guidebook and as such privileged to have access to the information contained therein. This is the case as the quantity of guidebooks available is not sufficient to be distributed to a larger section of the community despite it being meant for all- citizen readership. The ADCs and VDCs therefore have proved to be the major target readership as they are the focal contact points at the community level. In most cases this is the norm as regards the use and distribution of print materials in most Third World countries where either the capacity to produce adequate materials is absent or an elaborate strategy for distribution is lacking. In such cases where the rural areas are marginalized as the printed materials are in short supply or that there are structural problems as well as the literacy barrier, there is need for a strategy that will accommodate them if the use of print materials should be productive at all. Besette states that even if the rural masses have access to the printed materials the approach used in the rural context should vary from that undertaken in the urban context. The need for an organized strategy for distribution and use should therefore be very much a part of the communication strategy as regards print media. The implementation strategy should not overlook the traditional communication systems.

Otherwise the use of the print materials such as leaflets, booklets, pamphlets or newsletters becomes ineffective⁹⁰. The approach that NICE uses is to utilize the VDC and ADC members who are part of the community to act as conduits through which information is passed to the rest of the community. As such even though the guidebook distribution is limited to the members of the VDC and ADC, the community at large still accesses the information that they require to understand Decentralization. Such trickling down of information from the VDC and ADC to the community is to be implemented through village meetings held by the committees.

Normally, the extension officers, the village chief and the various development committees are the principal sources of information on development issues. This constitutes the traditional communication system. Through these structures information is passed on through village meetings and door to door visits conducted by the extension workers. This, however, is a reflection of the ideal local communication system. The empirical findings however state something far off from the above cited strategy. Though stated as the primary targets of the printed materials and opted as the channels through which a secondary target group will access information on decentralization, the VDCs, ADCs and the Village Chiefs have not fully managed to carry out this task.

What came out from the field findings was the assumption that if the Traditional Leaders, VDC and ADC members would be informed on the decentralization process then they would be empowered adequately to be able to impart the acquired information to the community. Such an assumption indicated in the strategy as well as advocated by NICE

⁹⁰ ibid

works under the assumption that the ADC and VDC will have been empowered adequately to be able to impart the acquired information to meet the community's information needs. However from the respondents at community level, communication channels established before the guidebook was introduced, such as radio and meetings (political and village meetings called by the Village Headman) were identified as the sources of information on Decentralization. The ADC and VDC were not mentioned in the list of sources. According to the ADC and VDC members, their roles are restricted to identification of development needs, planning and implementing of development programs. Therefore despite their access to the information carried in the guidebook, they were not empowered to communicate to the rest of the community the issues highlighted therein.

From the discussion it has been observed that the guidebook has been of value to the members of the ADC and selected membership of the VDC in acquainting them to the process of decentralization. However in terms of accessibility of the guidebook and the information contained therein, it has been limited to the members of the ADC who have personal copies of the handbook. In terms of disseminating the information acquired, the committee members have been challenged due to the lack of capacity and the shortcomings of the strategy on the use of the guidebook as proposed by NICE. The important considerations in such a strategy are affirmed by Shirley White that 'if such a strategy is adopted of importance is the way of ensuring that the primary targets have the capacity to ably pass down the acquired information as well as a strategy for evaluating

whether the information acquired by the primary targets has indeed been passed on to the secondary target',⁹¹.

Effectiveness

Responses from the members of the ADC on the use of the guidebook indicate that it is mostly used as a reference material on the concepts and issues that may not have been clearly grasped in the training sessions.

From the empirical findings it is evident that the ADC at T. A Mlumbe and some of the VDC members (more especially those that went through the capacity building training) are aware of the Decentralization process. They have knowledge relating to the decentralization process, structures and the implication of the process. Like power relations at the community level. Even though some of the committee members can not clearly articulate the roles and responsibilities of the councilor, they are able to relate the presence of the councilor to the Decentralization process. In contrast to the community members the ADC and VDC members have amassed the basic information regarding Decentralization process, structures and implications of the policy. The members of the committee were able to acknowledge that they form the primary planning unit at the community level. They were also able to discern the approach used by their MP in implementing development projects without consultation with the ADC or any VDC as not in line with the recommended procedures in regard to the development planning system in the decentralization policy. For the community members the issue of decentralization much borders on the definition of the concept which is commonly

⁹¹ ibid

referred to as '*mphamvu ku wanthu*' meaning '*power to the people*'; to decide the type of development projects they want and their ability to carry out such. The community members indicated radio; through radio programs such as '*Mphamvu ku Wanthu*' and '*Kudzigulira M'malo*' aired on MBC radio 1, radio jingles and meetings (political and Village) as the sources of information on decentralization. In terms of some of the policy implications, a small number of the respondents were able to marry the presence of the councilors with decentralization. Indicating that at around the time they started hearing about decentralization was almost the time councilor's office was established.

Even recently incorporated, the guidebook has been indicated by members of the ADC to be instrumental in providing information on the decentralization policy that has contributed to their better understanding of the process and the institutions in the decentralization process.

3.3 CONCLUDING SUMMARY

The guidebook was distributed to members of the VDC and ADC as a reference material. The contents of the guidebook oriented the committee members to the concept, process and implications of the decentralization policy. However, employing the guidebook as a stand-alone communication tool is not sufficient to provide knowledge and skills to enable participation in the decentralization process. As aligned by Parker et al and Kamlongera printed materials provide information that necessitates one's awareness of issues being communicated. However, the information might not be sufficient a motivation for change in attitude or level of participation. The use of Print media in

Participatory Development Communication therefore should be implemented with other communication options that are inclined towards interaction and participation of the target group in reaching a common understanding of the issues being communicated. Therefore there is need for the guidebook to be complemented with other communication methods that promote interaction and dialogue making the committee members a significant part of the communication process.

A critical analysis of the guidebook calls to attention the shortfalls its design. Though targeted at the rural community, a majority of which can passably read, the presentation, layout and complexity of text and drawings greatly compromises the accessibility and effectiveness of the guidebook. Developed as a translation of the English version the guidebook is more oriented towards a literate readership. The symbols, charts and terms that are used in the guidebook are reminiscent of a higher level of formal education, which is absent among the present target group. There is need therefore for the design of the guidebook to be reworked taking into consideration the context, language and education of the target audience. As cited by Kamlongera⁹², production of print materials in development communication need to consider the context, language and education of the target group if the materials are to be effective.

⁹² Kamlongera C et al 2004, p.62

CHAPTER FOUR

INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION

4.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter will review the interpersonal communication (IPC) channels used in the implementation of the Communication Strategy for Decentralization. The review will draw an analysis of the different interpersonal communication tools, how they have been used and the effect they have had on the members of target communities. Identified by the gate keepers at the district level as the most viable media⁹³, interpersonal media is reputed for transcending pro-literacy and pro-mass media biases. In Interpersonal Communication, there is an immediate interaction through dialogue between the message sender and receiver, thereby making prerequisites such as literacy, formal education and previous knowledge of innovation unnecessary for the communication process. Furthermore, messages are encoded in a manner that is comprehensible for both the message sender and receiver encouraging a quicker understanding of innovation and change⁹⁴. As such Interpersonal Communication is rendered feasible for development communication in the rural setting where a large percentage of the population is illiterate and lacks knowledge on development innovations.

⁹³ Interview with Director of Planning and Development (DPD) – Zomba District Assembly, September 2007

⁹⁴ Parker et al 1998, p.59

4.1 BACKGROUND TO THE USE OF INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION

Interpersonal Communication, which involves interactive and dialogue- based approach to communication, has been identified as one of the major communication methods in communicating decentralization⁹⁵. In Participatory Development Communication, Interpersonal Communication has been used in a number of dimensions. Firstly, as a method of message development where both the message sender and audience interact through an exchange of information on a communication need, to arrive at the best possible means to address it. In the process of strategy implementation Interpersonal Communication provides for an interaction between message sender and receiver in which development messages disseminated through other mediums are reinforced. Research has shown that despite good levels of knowledge and awareness on development issues, individuals still have questions or reservations related to their situation. Interpersonal Communication therefore helps in settling misconceptions and works towards development of relevant messages. Over the years, Interpersonal Communication has imposed information. With the revision of the modernization approach to use of participatory methods, Interpersonal Communication has become dialogic and interactive; taking into consideration the context of the target audience, their needs, problems and perceptions, apart from drawing the target audience to participate in the communication process. Through the sharing of information and knowledge between message sender and receiver, human potentials are unlocked as individuals increase their capacity to think, to relate, to act and to reflect on their life and what it takes to improve it⁹⁶.

⁹⁵ IEC Strategy for Decentralization in Malawi (2002), Decentralization Secretariat,

⁹⁶ White S. A 2003, p. 41

According to Parker et al⁹⁷ individuals drawn into participatory communication activities often make marked changes to their own behaviour, and become catalysts for change at community level.

Interpersonal Communication has facilitators who act as equal partners in the communication process. Both the facilitators and the community have to equally contribute to the process by sharing information and knowledge. It should however be noted that though Interpersonal Communication is interactive, dialogic and promotes a 'bottom – up' communication environment, it can also work as a propagandist and manipulative tool for the message sender to advance their perceptions, ideas and values on development issues⁹⁸. As most facilitators are usually people in authority such as traditional leaders and elected representatives, they can easily impose their knowledge and preconceived ideas on the community. It should be noted however that interpersonal communication employed as such manages to only inform and not educate the people.

4.2 INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION IN COMMUNICATING DECENTRALIZATION

In the process of communicating decentralization a number of IPC methods have been utilized. This has incorporated one to one interaction or group interaction at political and village meetings, and training workshops. The rest of this section will analyze these IPC methods as tools for communicating decentralization.

⁹⁷ Parker et al 1998, p.59

⁹⁸ Coldevin G 1990

Political Meetings

These are meetings that are called by elected representatives most especially the Members of Parliament (MPs). Though traditionally political meetings are used for gaining support for the different political parties they are also an avenue for discussion of development needs and aspirations in the communities. They often offer the community a chance to express their development needs with the elected representatives responding. According to respondents from Sitima Village, political meetings are supposed to be avenues where the political leaders listen to the community, understand their needs and concerns and jointly reach a consensus on the means of addressing them.

According to the Communication Strategy, MPs and Councillors are some of the stakeholders in decentralization communication. Apart from being among the stakeholders that communication on decentralization is directed at, they are also information sources for the communities they serve. As MPs and Councillors are bound to interact with the communities regularly they are some of the likely communicators of the decentralization policy at the community level. The findings on the ground have confirmed this fact as was indicated by the members of the focus group discussion at Mwandama Village. They indicated that apart from the radio, they have been initiated to the concept of decentralization from the political meetings they have attended. As one of the women in the focus group said that *‘ifetu nkhani iyi ya mphamvu ku wanthu tinayimvera titapita kumsonkhano wa mamembala a UDF m’mudzi muno’* (it was at a UDF members meeting that I first heard about the decentralization policy).

Though not called on a regular basis there have been a number of political meetings organized both by the ruling and opposition parties. One of such meetings was organized by the aspiring DPP MP for the Zomba – Changalume constituency and it was held in Nswaswa Zone in October 2007⁹⁹. According to the VDC Chairman, all community members regardless of political affiliation were invited to attend. During the meeting, the shadow MP highlighted to the community that in the new government, a decentralization policy had been established, giving the communities the power of choice. Apart from the power to choose development programs they need, the communities were also free, without fear, to elect a Member of Parliament they deemed fit and remove from power the MPs and Councillors that did not serve their purpose. The MP further pointed out that with the decentralization policy, funds for development projects for each constituency are channelled to the Assemblies directly and, the MPs and the VDCs are to decide on the appropriate means of use. Therefore, through the MPs the community could have access to the development funds. However the MP did not clarify as to the procedure that the VDCs should follow to have access to the funds. Apart from the party officials and the shadow MP, the only members of the community not politically affiliated, allowed to address the gathering were the village chief and the VDC Chairman. In this case the community leaders echoed the opinion of the shadow MP, applauding the new government for establishing a decentralization policy giving the people power of choice, to choose the development programs they needed in the area. However to what extent the power given to the community could be exercised, and measures are to be taken in the event where such powers were denied was not addressed.

⁹⁹ The venue for the meeting is correct however the respondents were not exactly sure of the date when the meeting was held but indicated that most probably it was on the 13th of October 2007. Interview with Mwandama VDC, November 2007

An analysis of the information disseminated through political meetings on decentralization seems to point at the problem of establishing political leaders as stakeholders in the communication effort. Political meetings in essence are supposed to be avenues through which matters of concern in the communities are discussed among equally affiliated individuals for the benefit of the whole community. This however, is not the case. Even the meeting was supposed to provide the community with information on decentralization; to a large extent it served the purpose of the political leader. Chisinga¹⁰⁰ writing on MASAF programs elaborates that there has been excessive political interference in development issues such that, the establishment and success of development programs is attributed to the ruling political party and not the government. Consequently, MPs (more especially those from the ruling party) wield a lot of authority and power in the local communities that they represent. It has therefore become imperative for the local leaders to side with the political leaders usually out of fear lest development to their communities is blocked. According to the VDC Chairman for Sitima, though potentially ideal for discussion on issues of development in the community, the positioning of the MPs and community leaders weakens the prospects of an interactive, ‘bottom – up’ communication as one side dominates the process.

*‘Pamsonkhanowo, mafumu ndi ife anthu amaundindo monga ngati
Chairman wa VDC timafuna titayankhula ndithu, kufunsa kapenanso
kufuna kutsutsa zomwe anena a bwana MP koma sizitheka. Monga ngati
kwa sitima kuno kuli vuto la madzi, mijigo yowelengeka, MaMP chaka*

¹⁰⁰ Chisinga, B 2003, p 203

ndichaka amakhala akulonjeza mijigo. Koma tinakhala omangika kunena zosiyana ndi zomwe anena a bwana.’ – VDC Chairman Sitima

During the meetings we would like to make our views known, but it is difficult to do so most especially if what we want to say will contradict the MP’s views. For a long time the MPs have been pledging to build us boreholes but up to date that has not been done. Yet that promise is made at almost every meeting. But we are not free to say this and we just end up agreeing with what is being said.

As highlighted above, the meetings offer the traditional leaders the opportunity to articulate the needs of the community. However the power relations between the political leaders and the traditional leaders, does little to embrace a ‘bottom up’ two-way communication. The political leaders end up imposing views on the community. Furthermore, the nature of the political meetings does not allow for interaction between the community and the political leaders. As the meetings are held in the run up to elections, the focus of the political leaders is drawing support from the community. As such the real needs of the communities are frivolously addressed. As was the case in Nswaswa Zone, the MP guided the direction of the communication process, scoring political mileage by attributing the decentralization process to the current government. On the other hand, feedback and need for clarification from the community on the issues communicated was not sort. Rather through the meeting, the MP advanced political interests by

emphasizing the major role that the ruling party has in development of the country.

An assessment of the community's perception of decentralization further points at the politicization of the policy. Three respondents out of seven in the women's focus group discussions in Mwandama Village identified political meetings as the channels through which they became oriented to the concept of decentralization. They defined the concept of decentralization as: the power to live freely without fear, as was the case during the one party system, the power to be able to freely vote for the people to represent them in parliament; and lastly that it is the power to be able to decide on which party to support. The definitions of decentralization given dwell much on the slogan '*Mphamvu ku Wanthu*' meaning '*Power to the People*' which has largely been popularized in the media as well as by the political players parading it. These responses therefore, to some extent point at how far the members of the community have been involved in the decentralization process. The respondents could not explain beyond the definitions to include not only power to make political decisions, but also to scrutinize issues of development, and even to criticize the leadership. The issues of accountability and the sharing of decision making power in development planning were not highlighted as of importance in the political meetings. It is true that a take on the other roles of the community members could have opened up possibilities for the leaders to share decision-making power with the communities, which for most political leaders is threatening. Thus the community members were marginalized as regards their role in the decentralization process. In such a case therefore, despite the political leaders having the necessary

knowledge on the decentralization process, there has been a deliberate choice of which information to impart to the communities, manipulating the community members by emphasizing those elements of decentralization which favor the leaders politically.

In addition, Interpersonal Communication as with any Participatory Development Communication approach can only be effective if it has a support component.¹⁰¹ Though the meeting provided the community information on decentralization it did not equip the communities with skills to use in the decentralization framework, nor did it provide the community with support structures. According to one of the VDC members at Mwandama, the meeting provided information which though crucial was not adequate to help them in their operation. For instance, though aware of the availability of development funds, the VDCs are uncertain of how to access the funds and who can help as the incumbent MP is rarely available. Consequently, the procedure through which the community could access the development funds made the VDC members question the extent of their so called 'power'. They were not sure of the significance of their 'power' if they had to rely on the MPs to make decisions regarding development of their area. According to one of the VDC members the reality of their role in the development process was indistinct.

'Poti amati chitukuko cha mdera muno chimabwela kudzela kwa MP.

Opanda MP ndiye kuti kulibe chitukuko. Nanga kodi mphamvu ya ife anthu

akumudzi ili pati poti tikuyenera kumangoyang'anira kwa ma MP kuti

atibweretsele chitukuko'

¹⁰¹ Parker et al 1998, p.62

According to White¹⁰² in Interpersonal Communication however, there is need to understand that the communication process has to allow for both parties' equal contribution to the discussion and there has to be consensus on decisions made. Furthermore, the communication process has to be informative, provide knowledge for parties involved and need not be directed by one side. Most importantly no individual can assume a privileged position that allows them more power or authority over the communication process. Such political meetings, like the one held in Nswaswa zone, do not establish the community as co-equal partners in the communication process. If for instance the meeting had provided for interaction between the political leaders and the community, concerns highlighted by respondents could have been raised and most probably means of addressing them jointly identified. If the MP had engaged in dialogue with the community they represent, they in essence would have wielded some of their decision making powers, and the communities on the other hand, gaining decision making powers. Such an atmosphere could have worked on granting the VDC members the required knowledge and skills in carrying out their roles. The interpersonal communication process therefore turned out to be informative rather than educative as is projected.

In conclusion, the positioning of the political leaders poses a challenge to the prospects of Interpersonal Communication. The political leaders wield a lot of power and authority as such; hold privileged positions in their communities. Essentially, when interacting with the communities on development issues, their privileged positions are maintained. Consequently, in the process of communication the political leaders are engaged as

¹⁰² White, S 2003, p. 43

message senders while the communities assume the passive audience. Furthermore, more often than not, political meetings draw a large number of people which makes an in depth discussion of issues problematic. What is afforded therefore is not an in depth discussion and insight into the entirety of the policy but a glossing over of issues. Even though the political leaders have a potential of empowering the people through meetings, they also pose a challenge as they use their positions to influence the communities to further their political careers.

Village meetings

These are meetings that are called regularly by the local leaders. Through these meetings decisions on development projects, problems faced by the community and strategies on how to respond to such are decided. Traditionally this is the time when the local leaders have the opportunity to interact with the community and unanimously decide on the way forward. It is also a time when the community is given an account of the issues taking place in their community. As such village meetings have been identified as the primary source of information on development issues. During meetings the Chiefs report on issues that have been communicated to them through the representatives. When the matter is raised at the meeting chances are, it has either already been discussed by the chief and his representatives, a decision reached is then reported to the community. It could also be that the matter has been discussed by the leaders and is reported to the community for a decision to be made. As such the meetings though providing information it does not offer the community a chance to influence the final decision.

It has been indicated in the Strategy¹⁰³ that in particular people prefer that messages about decentralization should reach them through Chiefs and Village headmen. However, the format of the village meetings betrays the purpose of interpersonal communication in development. Interpersonal Communication should provide for discussion as well as bring together the people involved as co-equal partners in the communication process¹⁰⁴. Furthermore, as cited by Chiweza¹⁰⁵ and Dzimadzi¹⁰⁶ village meetings called by the chiefs do not facilitate dialogue providing for the community members articulation of needs, suggestions or appropriation of solutions. In most cases it is the chiefs who make suggests on development projects and the communities agree as usually the projects may fall within the list of the needs however not the priority. As such though falling within the interpersonal communication channels viable for decentralization, the village meetings do not provide spaces for dialogue, and sharing of information.

The village meetings held so far relating to the issue of decentralization have been on the revitalization of the Development Committees. Held on two occasions, one was held to choose members of the VDC and another to choose a representative for the ADC. The meeting called to identify the members of VDC was facilitated by the village chief. While the other one in which members were to choose an ADC representative was facilitated by community officers for Bwalo Initiative.

¹⁰³ IEC Strategy for Decentralization (2002) Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development, Government of Malawi

¹⁰⁴ White S 2003, 43

¹⁰⁵ Chiweza A. L 2007

¹⁰⁶ Cited in Chiweza A.L 2007

In the meeting called to form a VDC, it was only the members of the community development committees who were invited. Invited guests were briefed on the agenda of the meeting. They had been invited to elect the new VDC which was supposed to have either, one member from the Health or Agriculture Committees from each of the 14 villages under GVH Sitima. The VDCs responsibility was to put together development plans for all the villages in the GVH Sitima's area and pass them on to the ADC for consideration at the District level. At that point members of the committee were selected through an open vote.

I would however like to draw attention to the capacity building meeting for the VDC held by Bwalo Initiative. Apart from the aforementioned, the meeting was also served to choose the ADC representative for Sitima VDC. The capacity building training workshops were aimed at ensuring that the members of the committees had adequate knowledge and information on decentralization. In the training process the areas covered included firstly, coming up with Village Development Plans (VDP) at the village level (which in most cases takes on development plans from all villages under the GVH). Secondly, prioritizing and consolidating the VDPs for consideration at the ADC level. Thirdly, reporting back to the community on the development programs to be implemented as well as the progress of those being implemented. Lastly, how to present financial reports on projects implemented, and mobilize local resources for the implementation of development projects. Much of the roles and responsibilities of the VDC and ADC revolved around development planning and not issues of governance. The meeting largely focused on what the members of the VDC needed to know on the

operation of the committees. The meeting did not, however, extend to look at the practicality of operationalizing activities once the committee was established. As such matters of accountability, transparency and the relationship between the other members of the community and the institutions were not tackled. Apart from the members present being asked to elect a representative for the ADC, the training went on as would have happened in a formal learning setting. For example an analysis of the VDC members' knowledge on decentralization focused on defining decentralization as 'people's power to choose development projects for their community'. In conversation, the respondents did not highlight other aspects such as their role to communicate decentralization to the community members as well as the powers that they had in the decentralized system. The sphere within which the VDC viewed its operation to a great extent was limited to development planning and implementation. In a decentralized system on the other hand, what is of importance is not only choosing the development programs but also planning on how development projects are to be implemented. It goes further to include the citizens' power to question the process and make well informed decisions for the good of the community, besides communicating with others.

The other issue that is worthy highlighting in this process is the manner of communication. During this meeting the VDC members were required to elect a representative at the ADC. The process of choosing a representative for the ADC is supposed to be undertaken in the same way members of the VDC were elected; through open vote. The member of the VDC indicated that they had been working together for about 6 months, which for them is good enough time to have known each other's

capabilities to ably decide on who can represent them at the ADC. The VDC members indicated that Bwalo Initiative attached conditions to the selection of a representative, which, according to them were discriminatory and contrary to their perceptions on the role of development committees. Bwalo Initiative indicated that the ADC representative for the VDC should have an MSCE¹⁰⁷ insisting that the role required a lot of writing, reading and calculations. As the VDC did not have anyone among its membership that had such qualification, it was requested that the representative be sought from without the group. Consequently, the VDC members resorted to exempt membership at the ADC. The VDC indicated that from community (which is made up of 14 villages) a good number of those with MSCE are young and therefore could not ably represent them at a higher institution on development matters. Secondly they stated that, if they were to consent to the method proposed, it would mean getting someone who was not a part of their committee, and not familiar with the operation of the committee. Thirdly, even though none of the members of the VDC had an MSCE qualification, they were able to read, write and do basic calculations. The argument put forward by the VDC borders on the argument put forward by White¹⁰⁸ that in any communication effort there is need to understand the environment of the target group not only to ensure relevance of messages but to be acquainted with the environment of the target so as to understand the attitudes, perceptions and beliefs of the community which shape the interpretation and acceptance of information .disseminated. If the empirical findings are anything to go with, it is clear then that the principles on the Interpersonal Communication approach were not

¹⁰⁷ Malawi School Leaving Certificate – a certificate awarded on merit upon fulfilling secondary school .

¹⁰⁸ White S 2003, p. 39

considered. An understanding of the context in which the VDC operated could have shed light on the best possible way to handle the group formation process.

White further states that in most cases in interpersonal communication, the subject specialists are bound to impose their preconceived ideas and their knowledge on the people. This is however problematic, most especially if the ideas posited contradict the perceived reality of the beneficiary. According to the VDC members formal education was not a quality that they needed to rely on regarding issues of development in their community. Rather one's ability to understand the needs of the community and the enthusiasm to develop the community was emphasized. Furthermore, Melkote¹⁰⁹ states that in a communication effort meant to solicit participation, it is recommended that the perspectives of the beneficiaries be respected. It is best to draw the beneficiaries into the decision making process. The absence of a representative of the VDC at the ADC would not only affect the development planning process but marginalize the community in the decentralization process.

4.3 CONCLUDING SUMMARY

From the discussion, it is clear that interpersonal communication methods used in the process of communicating decentralization have been instrumental in initiating the community to the concept of decentralization and some of the implications. However, the ultimate goal of such communication, which is to draw the community to be involved in the process, has not been highlighted. This has been a reflection of the content and

¹⁰⁹ *ibid*

manner of communication. The Political leaders even though potential communicators, have more or less communicated decentralization with a political inclination which is in line with their end, which has affected the level of knowledge on decentralization. Furthermore instances such as what happened during the election of ADC representative is bound to limit the level of participation of the community at large in the decentralization process. In any interpersonal communication effort the facilitators are not supposed to impose decisions but engage in a dialogue where other sides are involved and able to contribute to the total outcome. The process of Interpersonal Communication should engage the community as co- equal partners in the communication process which will draw them to participate in the development process. As Parker et al¹¹⁰ highlights that individuals drawn into participatory communication activities often make marked changes to their own behaviour, and become catalysts for change at community level

¹¹⁰ Parker et al 1998, p.59

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

5.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter consolidates the findings of the study and the arguments made therein. The present study set out to examine the communication strategy for decentralization, its implementation plan and process as well as the impact that the initiative has had on the target group. In an attempt to achieve this fundamental objective I have in the preceding chapters explored the factors that necessitated the conceptualization and implementation of the strategy. Additionally I have explored the context within which the communication was taking place, assessing the role of the key players, communication approaches and channels employed in enhancing acquisition of knowledge and skills to enable participation of target group in the decentralization process. Grounded in Participatory Development Communication theory, principles of strategy development, appropriation of communication approaches and message development provided the basis for analysis of the empirical findings.

5.1 SUMMARY

From the observations made in the preceding chapters it is consistent to state that the process of communicating decentralization has contributed to raising awareness on the decentralization process among the target group. However most of the communication

implemented has primarily focused on providing information on the concept, process and implications of the decentralization process and not support the operationalization of the policy by equipping the target group with the knowledge and skills to promote participation in decision making. This goes to reconfirm the rhetoric of the success of the decentralization process rather than the reality on the ground. In as much as democratic decentralization has been championed as the threshold for participation in governance and development, the implementation of the communication strategy has contributed little progress in terms of people participation in the decision making process.

Nonetheless, there have been strides taken in as far as the target groups' recognition of the changes taking place in their communities with the ushering in of the decentralization process. Among the most indicative is the role of the VDC in the development planning process in comparison with the period before the establishment of the policy. However bearing in mind the essentiality of communication in promoting participation and acquisition of knowledge and skills to enable involvement and commitment to the development process, the following are the recommendations that are being drawn in the implementation of the communication strategy in Zomba District Assembly.

To begin with, if the communication strategy in decentralization is aimed at stimulating and motivating the communities to participate in the decentralization process, there is need for the focus to be on methods of communication that will foster participation. Therefore a move towards communication approaches that are interactive, dialogic aimed

at not only informing but educating the masses will enable, the operationalization of the stakeholders in the decentralization process.

Furthermore the communities need to be recognized as significant and equal partners in the both the communication and decentralization process. Lack of which has in the present scenario contributed to the communities being passive about development initiatives that are supposed to improve their livelihood. Thus there is need to fully involve them in the process of developing, implementing and evaluating the communication strategy. Additionally, the tools employed in communication need to reflect the context of the target group in terms of design, content and manner of delivery. Such an approach will ensure that the communication delivered is relevant in providing the necessary skills and knowledge.

Bearing in mind the problems of lack of financial and human resource there is need for coordination and collaboration between the organizations working in decentralization communication through the establishment of a coordinating body. This will ensure that all the available resources are pulled together for a unified action. Furthermore working in coordination will overcome duplication of efforts and set guidelines within which all the organizations can work in.

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