

**AN ASSESSMENT OF THE REPRESENTATIONAL ROLE OF
COUNCILLORS IN MALAWI'S LOCAL GOVERNMENT COUNCILS**

MASTER OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AND MANAGEMENT THESIS

GARETH TWAPONA MWENIFUMBO

UNIVERSITY OF MALAWI

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GARETH TWAPONA MWENIFUMBO

B. A. (Public Administration) – University of Malawi

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the degree of Master of Public Administration and Management

UNIVERSITY OF MALAWI

MARCH, 2022

DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that this thesis is my own original work and has not been submitted to any other institution for similar purposes. I have duly acknowledged the sources where other people's work has been used in this thesis.

GARETH TWAPONA MWENIFUMBO

FULL NAME

SIGNATURE

DATE

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

The undersigned certify that this thesis represents the student's own work and effort and has been submitted with our approval.

Signature_____

Date_____

Dan Banik, PhD (Professor)

FIRST SUPERVISOR

Signature_____

Date_____

Michael Chasukwa, PhD (Associate Professor)

SECOND SUPERVISOR

DEDICATION

To the Almighty God, for His guidance and protection throughout this academic journey.

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ABSTRACT

The study sought to analyse the representational role of councillors in local government councils. It was conducted in Lilongwe City Council, Mzuzu City Councils, Nkhatabay District Council and Rumphi District Council. It employed a qualitative approach through interviewing councillors, MPs, traditional leaders, representatives of interest groups and council secretariat. The study established that citizens accept councillors as their local representatives because they are the ones found on the ground in communities. In addition, MPs are viewed as national level representatives who depend on collecting information from councillors which they use in performing their national duties. The findings further reveal that councillors are more trusted and responsive to local needs than parliamentarians. The study also established that people contest as councillors even when the position is not rewarding in order to build momentum for a future political career as parliamentarians. Therefore, the study concludes that the representational role of councillors is valued more than that of MPs in local government councils.

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ADC	Area Development Committee
CDF	Constituency Development Fund
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DC	District Commissioner
DEC	District Executive Committee
DDC	District Development Committee
DDF	District Development Fund
DCF	District Consultative Forum
DoA	Director of Administration
DoF	Director of Finance
DoPD	Director of Planning and Development
EDC	Education Development Centre
MCP	Malawi Congress Party
MEC	Malawi Electoral Commission
MP	Member of Parliament
NICE	National Initiative for Civic Education
NPM	New Public Management
TA	Traditional Authority
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
VDC	Village Development Committee
WHO	World Health Organization

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction and background to the study

Public participation as an essential democratic principle has been on the agenda of African governments since the 1990s when most countries on the continent were migrating from autocratic to democratic rule (Chasukwa et al., 2014). It is citizen participation that dictates the activities of governments across the world through citizens' involvement in the public policy process (Canales, 2015). Sikander (2015) argues that development, whether social, political or economic, becomes meaningful only when it stems from the lowest societal levels, called the grass-root. It is governance at this lowest level that enables ordinary citizen to access the decision-making machinery and thereby having a say on issues that directly affect her/his daily life.

Broadly, local government refers to the provision and maintenance of public services and infrastructure at local levels by utilising funds generated from the local community, in addition to grants and loans from central government, and other sources (Masunungure & Musekiwa, 2005). Local governance makes democracy suitable as government of the people and by the people.

Nevertheless, Sikander (2015, p.172) highlights that local democratic governance is impossible in modern nation states as it is illogical to expect an entire population of millions of people to literally have a direct say in the daily affairs of their governments.

In democratic nations, government is run by delegating power or authority to elected representatives who exercise that power or authority for the benefit of the masses. Thus, representation becomes a necessary precondition for democracy in modern nations. In corroborating the above assertions, J.S. Mill states that “The only government which can fully satisfy all the exigencies of the social state is one in which the whole people participate... But since all cannot participate, it follows that the ideal type of perfect government must be representative (Mill, 1863, p. 80) [sic].” In substantiating J.S. Mills assertion of a representative government, Thomas Hobbes, the great English political philosopher was amongst the first thinkers to describe representation as acting in place of another person who has endorsed the action of the representative (Doctor, 1994).

However, the central question in operationalizing representation lies on the role of the representative, such that there is a classic dilemma as to whether the representative should obey mandates and instructions of her/his constituents or she/he is at liberty to serve constituents as she/he deems best in pursuit of their (constituents) wellbeing (Verstein, 2012). These two opposing representational roles are referred to as the *delegate* and *trustee* debate or problem (Verstein, 2013). In Africa and beyond, representation in the local government machinery is conducted by a category of politicians known as councillors, which is the area of interest of the study.

The literature on representative government indicates that local citizens feel that they are not satisfactorily represented in local councils (Kayuni, 2005). In the case of Malawi, it is worth noting that the 2010 amendment to the Local Government Act has affected the functioning of councillors since MPs now vote at both local level (councils) and national level (parliament) and this has created role conflicts among the two groups of representatives in representing citizens (O’Neil et al., 2014; UNDP, 2014). In addition, there is growing concern that most councillors fail to articulate policy issues convincingly in the councils and with the electorate, possibly because most of them only have a Junior Certificate of Education (JCE) qualification (Amundsen & Kayuni, 2016).

A synthesis report on African local council oversight and social accountability, a cross-country analysis of four East African countries of Uganda, Tanzania, Ethiopia and Kenya, which was aimed at analysing how local government councillors oversee local administration and are in turn held accountable by citizens, established that in Tanzania, Ethiopia and Kenya there were no educational requirements for one to become a councillor and hence councillors often had low levels of literacy (World Bank, 2010). This educational deficiency coupled with a lack of financial literacy makes councillors susceptible to bureaucratic abuse by technocrats in the councils who are supposed to be implementing policy and not influencing the decision-making processes.

It might not be wrong to conclude that local representation through councillors has lost the confidence of the electorate as witnessed by the disappointingly low retention of councillors in local government elections and protests experienced in some African countries against local councils (Paradza et al., 2010). In Malawi, for example, a

Principal Secretary in the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development bemoaned low retention of ward councillors by indicating that only 15 percent of councillors country wide returned their positions during the tripartite elections held on 21st May 2019 (Malawi News Agency Online, 24th June 2019).

Further to the above, Malawi took a time span of 14 years to replace councillors in local councils after expiry of the previous cohort of councillors whose term ended in 2005 contrary to the Constitutional requirement that councillors should be replaced after a 5-year term in office (Government of Malawi, 1995). Similarly, it takes quite an extensive amount of time for government to organise by-elections to replace offices which have suddenly fallen vacant due to unplanned happenings, such as death. Furthermore, councillors' emoluments leave a lot to be desired when compared with their parliamentary counterparts. While MPs have access to a number of lucrative benefits such as comfortable salaries and car loans, on the other hand councillors only depend on sitting allowances. Therefore, with the foregoing arguments, the purpose of the study will be to analyse the value of the representational role of councillors, especially in a political hostile environment.

1.2 Problem Statement

The Constitution of the Republic of Malawi (GoM, 1995) clearly stipulates that the main responsibility of councillors is to represent their constituents in the councils on issues related to local governance and development initiatives. If analysed, section 66 (1) of the Republican Constitution endows MPs with the responsibility of making laws of the land. Apart from law-making, MPs also perform oversight functions on the affairs of the executive arm of government. In addition, MPs perform a representational

function. It is this representational function of MPs that brews up tension and confusion in local government councils, although their jurisdiction was meant to apply at the national level by the framers of the Constitution. Even though in theory MPs are expected to exercise their representational function at the national level this is not the case as MPs are also seen to be performing representational functions at the local level. This creates role confusion in local government councils as councillors are also elected to perform the same function MPs are performing at the local level.

A study by Tambulasi (2009) established that poorly designed decentralization programmes in Malawi was a leading cause of conflicting relationships between the central government and local governments; councillors and members of parliament; councillors and traditional authorities; councillors and assembly secretariat; and even among councillors themselves. The conflicting relationship between councillors and MPs has been exacerbated by the 2010 Local Government Act amendment which gave MPs similar voting powers like that of councillors in local councils. In his study, Chinsinga (2006) found that the problematic relationship between councillors and traditional authorities in local assemblies is mainly because traditional authorities want to constitute the primary structures of local government especially in rural areas.

A study by Buck and Cain (1990) established that MPs, councillors and traditional authorities compete with each other in handling local cases in order to demonstrate their solidarity with and concern for the people they represent. These representational activities that are mostly aimed at gaining the competing representatives' credit and visibility in the communities, have a great potential of creating conflict. Representation is duplicated because councillors and MPs are elected to represent the same people in

the communities. These role conflicts coupled with the low calibre of councillors elected into office and a lack of central government commitment towards councillors raises questions on the quality of representation performed by councillors towards their electors.

1.3 Objectives of the study

1.3.1 Main objective

The main objective of the study is to analyse the representational role of councillors in local government councils.

1.3.2 Specific objectives

- i. to analyse how representative roles performed by councillors differ from those performed by other agents of representation such as MPs in local councils;
- ii. to analyse the level of trust voters place on councillors;
- iii. to understand why some individuals wish to contest elections for the post of councillor;
- iv. to analyse how granting MPs full voting rights in councils has affected the representational role of councillors.

1.4 Research questions

1.4.1 Main research question

What value does the representational role of councillors have in local councils?

1.4.2 Specific research questions

- i. How and what representational roles performed by councillors differ from those performed by other agents of representation such as MPs in councils?

- ii. How much trust is place on councillors by the people they are meant to represent?
- iii. Why some individuals wish to contest elections for the post of councillor?
- iv. How has granting MPs full voting rights in councils affected the representational role of councillors?

1.5 Significance of the study

The study is significant because it analyses the value of the representational role of councillors in light of other competing representational agents in local councils. Participation of local people is an important ingredient for good governance. However, it would be impossible to expect each and every citizen to attend council meetings to debate on issues that affect her/his wellbeing. As such, the Constitution of the republic of Malawi 1995, local government Act 1998 and 2010 (amendment), and national decentralisation policy 1998 provide for the election of councillors to represent the interests of citizens. However, there seems to be deviations on the representative roles played by councillors between what is engraved in legal instruments and what is actually happening on the ground.

The study attempts to explore if there are significant differences in local governance between the time Malawi operated without councillors from 2005 to 2014 and the time councillors were elected into office between the period 2014 to 2019. Consequently, a question can be raised on what exactly councillors do on the ground in fulfilling their representational obligations towards the people who elect them into office. Reputable local governance scholars such Sikander (2015) have suggested that democratic governance cannot exist without involving the people on matters that directly affect

them. But should people's involvement or people's participation be done through elected councillors or we should consider strengthening alternative systems of representation already functioning in the councils such as traditional leaders, MPs and special interest groups without councillors? The study attempts to investigate the value of the representational role of councillors in local government councils.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Introduction

This chapter gives a general direction of the study by reviewing relevant literature. The chapter begins by explaining general concepts that are pertinent to the study such as decentralisation, representation, and governance as well as their connectedness. It then proceeds to give a synopsis of decentralisation structures in Southern and Eastern Africa. In the end, the chapter discusses theoretical framework informing the study. The theories will help to externalize the study's objectives.

2.2 General concepts

The general concepts are key terms that will help project the focus of my study and also provide a guide for logical arguments. Some of the concepts that will be discussed in this section include decentralisation, governance, political representation, popular participation, transparency and accountability.

2.2.1 Decentralisation

Several definitions of decentralization have been offered by different authors. However, Rondinelli (1999) offers a comprehensive definition of decentralization that it is the transfer of authority and responsibility for public functions from the central government to subordinate or quasi-independent government organizations or the private sector.

In general, decentralization can be viewed as the transfer of authority and resources from higher to lower levels of government. Eryilmaz (2011) has further developed Rondinelli's definition of decentralization by extending it to modern times where he defines it as the transfer of administrative authority such as planning, decision making and the collection of public revenue to provincial institutions, federal units, local governments, semi-autonomous public institutions, professional organisations and voluntary organisation. The study adopted this definition of decentralization.

2.2.2 Governance

Literature on governance suggests that the concept of governance began when the United Kingdom and United States governments under the leadership of Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan, respectively sought to restructure society and government around the principles and ideas of markets and private property (Sundaram & Chowdhury, 2012). It was generally presumed that restructuring society and government based on markets would end problems of economic inefficiency, corruption and arbitrary rule especially in developing countries (Sundaram & Chowdhury, 2012). Surprisingly, although the term governance has been widely used, it is not clearly what the term stands for (Wasim, 2011; Stivers, 2009). The early definition of governance implied statesmanship in performance of public duties by public servants (Wasim, 2011). Wasim (2011) goes on to state that governance used to be defined as a mixture of public duties and public authority in order to fulfil a public purpose by applying administrative techniques and management approaches in a political sense.

However, the modern definition of governance has taken on board principles advocated by the New Public Management (NPM) model. The NPM model endeavours to apply

private sector management practices to the public sector (Fakhrul, 2015). This model emerged as a new approach to overturn traditional public administration by enhancing efficiency, productivity, improved service delivery and accountability (Dzimhiri, 2008). Bingham et al. (2005) provide a modern definition of governance as the creation, execution, and implementation of activities backed by the shared goals of citizens and organizations, who may or may not have formal authority and policing power. This is the definition the study adopted.

2.2.3 Political representation

The concept of political representation is ambiguous and a disputed concept. As such, there is not one universal definition of the concept. However, despite political representation being an elusive concept, there is general consensus amongst scholars on the importance of this concept to democracy and it is viewed as an anchor that connects the citizenry to their governments (Doctor, 1994; Edigheji, 2006; Rehfeld, 2009; Dovi, 2018). This assertion is summarized by J.S. Mill when he points out that “the only government which can fully satisfy all the exigencies of the social state is one in which the whole people participate.... But since all cannot in a community exceeding a single small town, participate personally in all but minor portions of the public business, it follows that the ideal type of perfect government must be representative.”

One of the most simplistic definitions of political representation has been provided by Hanna Pitkin (1967) who indicates that it means to make present again. Representation implies the notion that one is made present by another (Doctor, 1994). From Pitkin’s definition, political representation is the activity of making citizens’ voices, opinions, and perspectives “present” in public policy making processes and it occurs when

political actors speak, advocate, symbolize, and act on the behalf of others in the political arena (Dovi, 2018).

2.2.4 Popular participation

It is believed that good governance in developing countries cannot be achieved minus public participation (Kwame & Chowdhury, 2012). Actually, popular participation has been viewed as a necessary ingredient in improving the welfare of marginalised or poor people in countries where elites have unduly benefitted from policies conceived at the top without reference to ordinary citizens at the bottom (Mutebi, 2004). Kasfir (1992) further illuminates that popular participation mechanisms such as boycotts, strikes, and mass assemblies are responsible for the abandonment of one-party rule in some countries, the introduction of competitive elections, and even the peaceful change of heads of government in nations such as Czechoslovakia, South Korea, Benin and Zambia just to mention a few. In defining popular participation, Quick and Bryson (2016) suggest that it involves the direct or indirect involvement of stakeholders, through representatives, in making decisions about policies, plans or programmes in which they have an interest.

2.2.5 Accountability

Although some scholars (Kluvers & Tippet, 2010; Caron & Giauque, 2006; Sinclair, 1995) have argued that accountability is a complex and multifaceted concept such that it is not easy to define, the core of accountability according to Cutt and Murray (2000) is an obligation to provide an account for a responsibility that has been conferred. For instance, governments collect revenue from the public to produce public goods and services and hence it is expected that governments should be accountable to the public and utilize the public resources in a transparent manner so as not to raise any doubt of

abuse of public resources. To elucidate further, the concept of accountability is based on the notion that one person is responsible to another and is therefore obliged to render an account of their decisions and actions to that another (Kluvers & Tippet, 2010).

2.2.6 Transparency

In order for accountability to be maintained in the public sector, the principle of transparency demands that the decisions and actions of those holding public office should be open to public scrutiny and information should be accessible to the public. An essential aspect of transparency is the availability of government or public information to citizens. According to Mitchell (1998) transparency entails the demand for information, the ability of citizens to obtain information, and the supply and actual release of information by government and NGOs. Johnston (2002) further states that transparency entails official business conducted in such a way that substantive and procedural information is available to, and broadly understandable by, people and groups in society, subject to reasonable limits protecting security and privacy. From Johnson's definition of transparency, we see that it is important for governments to avoid compromising national security when releasing information as some information is highly classified.

2.3 An African perspective of decentralization

In Africa, decentralization dates back to the colonial periods of the 1900s and is not a new concept to the continent. The term attracted much attention in the 1950s and 1960s when British and French colonial rulers were preparing their colonies for independence by devolving responsibilities for certain functions to local authorities (Massoi & Norman, 2009). Mawhood (1983) defines decentralization as any act in which a central government formally cedes powers to actors and institutions at lower levels in a

political-administrative and territorial hierarchy. During the colonial rule, decentralized governments which were called “associations” by the French and “indirect rule” by the British were established to penetrate and control traditional African communities (Ribot, 2008).

The two major forms of decentralization that have prevailed in Africa and beyond are deconcentration and political decentralisation. Deconcentration has been defined by Dubois and Fattore (2009) as handing over some administrative powers to some lower level within a ministry or agency. This decentralization is synonymous with administrative decentralization which simply means functions that were being performed by the state government at headquarters are transferred to agents in local communities. Deconcentration is the transfer of responsibilities within the state bureaucracy (Børhaug, 1994). Deconcentration sought to shift administrative responsibilities from central ministries and departments to regional and local administrative levels by establishing field offices of national departments and transferring some authority for decision making to regional field (Cheema & Rondinelli, 2007). A research study by Msewa (2005) indicates that from the colonial period until the last decades of 20th Century the prevailing form of decentralization has been deconcentration. This form of decentralisation can be seen as repressive in the present age since it is deficient of democratic principle of public participation, accountability and transparency.

Unlike deconcentration, political decentralization refers to the form of decentralization that is open to local popular participation in decision making (Kessy, 2013). Ribot (2008) suggests that this form of decentralization which is also called democratic decentralization aims to increase public participation in local decision making.

Advocates of political decentralization assume that decisions made with greater participation will be better informed and more relevant to diverse interests in society than those made only by national political authorities as is the case in deconcentration (World Bank, 2001). We can propagate that political decentralization embraces a realistic reflection of democratic preferences in governance (Dubois & Fattore, 2009).

According to the European Council (2020), the first principle of good democratic governance is participation, representation and fair conduct of elections. The interpretation of this is that no governments can qualify to be democratic minus their citizens direct participation in the affairs of the state, including the process of directly electing their representatives through fair elections. The other democratic principles as stipulated by the European Council (2020) include governments' responsiveness to the needs of the people; efficiency and effectiveness of the state; openness and transparency in the state's dealings; respect of rule of law by those in authority; ethical conduct in both the public and private sector; authority being exercised by individuals or agencies that are competent and capable; public agencies being innovative and open to change; sustainable and long-term orientation to governance; sound financial management of public sector actors; respect of human rights, culture diversity and social cohesion; and accountability of state actors.

Similar principles have been spelt out by the African Union through the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance, to which Malawi is a member state. In particular, sections 3,4 and 8 of the African Charter requests member states to promote a system of government that is representative; hold regular, transparent, free and fair

elections; and promote effective participation of citizens in democratic and development processes and also in governance of public affairs (African Union, 2007).

Therefore, since democratic decentralization which is also called devolution entails local authorities which are elected by the people represent the peoples interests and make decisions on their behalf, it qualifies as a vehicle for good democratic governance as stipulated by the first principles of governance described above. Decentralization is a famous phenomenon such that there is not a single country in Africa in which some form of it is not in operation because it is believed that decentralization strengthens democratic governance and service provision (Ribot, 2002).

2.4 Decentralisation structures in southern and eastern Africa

In South Africa, Cameron (2010) indicates that local government reforms were introduced in the 1990s in that country to achieve maximum devolution of power, decentralization of administrative functions and minimization of central control of local authorities. This was a contrast to the early 1980s where South Africa's local government structures were highly centralised in order to maintain apartheid at the local level (Cameron, 2010). Botswana is said to have a commendable track record since independence of the growth and functioning of local government (devolution) in the African context (Sharma, 2010: 137). In East Africa, we find that governments such as Kenya and Malawi were devolved to improve the delivery of public services and assist the central government in governing grassroots' communities in a cost-efficient manner, as well as increasing the administrative capacity and productivity of the public sector (Hope, 2014).

In Tanzania, decentralization focused on devolving key authorities and functions of government from the centre to the grassroots level so as to enable communities to participate in decision-making which reflected President Nyerere's strong conviction that people must be directly involved in shaping the decisions that affect their lives (Massoi & Norman, 2009). However, it has been argued that although local governments in east and southern Africa have grown in strength and capacity, they are still not able to perform their roles and discharge their functions as anticipated by the framers of decentralization structures. The central government has continued to play a dominant role in formulation of local government policies and development plans and their implementation, as such in reality these local government structures can be seen as operating as deconcentrated agencies of central government (Sharma, 2010).

In Southern and Eastern Africa, it is common to find local authorities divided into two settings, namely, urban and rural councils. In each council, whether urban or rural, we further find two other divisions, namely, the political and the administrative arms. In terms of membership composition, councils consist of councillors as elected voting members and district commissioners, chiefs, special interest groups and members of parliament of constituencies that fall under the local government area as *ex-officio* none voting members (Kenya Local Government Act, 2012; Botswana Local Government Act, 2012 Amendment; South Africa Municipal Systems Act, 2000; Malawi Local Government Act, 1998; Tanzania Local Government Act, 1982).

However, in Botswana, Kenya and Tanzania the minister responsible for local government is given power to appoint additional councillors in the councils to complement the councillors that citizens elect in local government elections. In theory

the appointment of councillor by the minister(s) of local government is done on merit based on the appointees social, economic and educational expertise and that no political consideration are taken into account during their nomination. On the contrary, Nengwekhulu (2008) indicates that such appointments of councillors by the minister(s) to the councils are political in nature because in most cases nominees are candidates from the minister's political party who have lost the general election and the intention is for the political party to have a voting majority in the council, which is apparently against the wishes of the people and demoralizes the fundamental principles of democracy.

2.5 Conflicting representational roles between councillors and MPs

The debate on the role performed by councillors in representing local interest and initiating local development projects in communities has not covered much ground in academic circles. In particular, there seems to be confusion between the roles performed by councillors and those performed by MPs. In a study by Tambulasi (2009), it was established that there was no clear and real division of labour between councillors and MPs and that no civic education was conducted for both councillors and MPs for them to adequately distinguish their roles. This is likely to lead into conflictual relationships between the two agents of representation. At the same time, Chinsinga (2009) suggests that the main cause of conflictual relationships between MPs and councillors is that MPs perceive councillors as a threat to their candidacy in the subsequent general elections. This conflictual relationship between councillors and MPs has been increasing in intensity with the potential of collapsing the decentralization framework that is yet to mature (Chiweza, 2005).

It is unfortunate that this role confusion is happening despite countries which have adopted local government systems defining roles for councillors and MPs in their legal guiding documents. For instance, the Constitution of the Republic of Tanzania under section 46 (1) defines the main function of local government authorities as

“transferring authority to the people. Local government authorities shall have the right and power to participate, and to involve the people, in the planning and implementation of development programmes within their respective areas and generally throughout the country.

On the part of MPs, section 97(1) of the Constitution of the Republic of Tanzania confers legislative power to MPs through the process of debating and passing Bills. Similar roles of councillors and MPs are also defined in the constitutions and local government Acts of other Countries in Africa such as Uganda, Kenya and Zimbabwe. In Europe, the British Parliament (2020) provides a clear and comprehensive description of the roles of an MP as checking and challenging the work of Government (scrutiny); making and changing laws (legislation); debating important issues of the day (debating); and checking and approving government spending (budgeting and taxation). The British government is a good model for understanding the duties of the legislature and MPs. This is the case also because most systems of government in Africa are modelled after the British system.

From the above it is clear that the issue of initiating economic and infrastructure development is under the jurisdiction of councillors and that the main responsibility of MPs is to legislate. Councillors initiate development through formulation and execution

of national development plans. In clarifying the roles councillors play in local governance, (1996) suggests that it is local government that has a vital role in establishing the ground rules for the development of local areas through working in partnership with other agencies with an interest in the fabric of the community. But this is not the reality on the ground as MPs have without invitation involved themselves with local government business. For instance, in Kenya and Tanzania MPs have a considerable say in running the affairs of their local governments which has a potential of weakening the local governance system. On the contrary, it is suggested that Uganda has a vibrant local governance system because MPs have a very limited role in local government affairs (World Bank, 2010).

2.6 Conflicting representational roles between councillors and traditional leaders

Other literature on representation has focused on the conflicts that have existed in councils between councillors and traditional authorities. Logan (2013) collected data in 19 African counties which revealed an intensity of support for traditional authorities. This challenges dissenting views from other sectors of society who argue that traditional leaders are unwanted and undemocratic. Furthermore, some scholars have argued that traditional authorities have remained an integral part of the modern political arena just like MPs and councillors, since traditional authorities play an important symbolic role of representing community identity, unity, continuity (Logan, 2013). This concurs with a study by Chinsinga (2006) on the relevance of traditional leaders in local government structures which established that traditional leaders are a resource that can be tapped into in order to effectively domesticate decentralization reforms, since traditional leaders embody values and virtues of political accountability, transparency and probity.

Generally speaking, traditional Chiefs are the ones closest to the local people in rural areas and thus have the most interaction with the local people on issues surrounding social life. However, traditional leadership is not a perfect institution as local media is flanked with stories of several Chiefs who have entangled themselves with politics and lost confidence from the people because of aligning themselves with the governments of the day. For instance, Chinsinga's study (2006) found out that the conflict between traditional leaders and councillors is in various ways fuelled and provoked by widespread self-seeking tendencies by politicians, in this case MPs. MPs are edgy about councillors because they fear that given a platform, councillors might build a fierce political base with which to challenge their candidacy in the subsequent general elections (Chinsinga, 2006). Chinsinga (2006) suggests that MPs are able to connive with and lure traditional leaders because they have effectively emerged as prime patrons in local level politics, one of the reasons being that MPs use their financial muscle since they get perks to the tune of more or less than 2 million kwacha per month. In a study on the relevance of traditional authorities in Zimbabwe's governance structures, it was established that traditional leadership was a concern because most chiefs had aligned themselves to the ruling ZANU-PF and this raised doubts on their relevance to modern-day society anchored on democratic values (Chigwata, 2016). In Zimbabwe, Chigwata (2016) indicates that this power struggle has ensued because communities believe that traditional leaders play the role of mediating between the government and the people in their areas, something which rural district councils cannot fully execute especially in circumstances where people need to be persuaded. From the foregoing we can see that most of the literature on local governance has focused on whether the roles played by traditional authorities in councils are relevant or not (Hartmann, 2004; Mhlanga, 2012;

Taabazuing et al., 2013; Chigwata, 2016; Kurebwa, 2018) and the conflicts that have arisen between councils and traditional authorities (Chinsinga, 2008; Tambulasi, 2009), whereas not much has been written on the value of the representational role of councillor in local councils.

2.7 Influence of party politics on local representation

Another area of research has focused on the influence party politics plays in the representational function of councillors. Literature in this area suggests that because a large number of councillors are sponsored to their positions by political parties, the welfare of the party group and not the community takes priority on the councillors' responsibilities (Copus, 1999). This is to say that councillors will be first loyal to their political parties before they can consider the needs of the communities they are elected to represent. Further research by Kayuni (2005) suggests that party politics in local councils has discouraged people from setting up organisations or groupings that can adequately mobilise people for much demanded local community activities. Research by Hartmann (2004) found that in Botswana the National Assembly empowered the President to appoint an unspecified number of additional councillors, hence enabling the ruling Botswana Democratic Party to have majority control on the affairs of district councils.

Representation in local councils is never independent of the influence of political parties as the majority of councillors prove to be aligned in one way or the other to a political party. This tends to compromise the work of councillors as they have to promote the interests and ideologies of their political parties at the expense of representing the interests of ordinary citizens. These tendencies are not only unique to

African local councils but have also marred local governments in Asia, Europe and America. Some scholars have even argued that councillors who claim to be independent are not independent as most of them have concealed features linking them to political parties present in the political machinery. A case in point is England in Europe where Copus and Wingfield (2014) argue that independent councillors in England are actually conservatives in disguise. According to Copus the local representation process is affected because political parties interpose themselves between the local representatives and the electorate demanding undue loyalty from the councillors, a demand which councillors are willing to meet (Rao, 2000). In Asia, OWA (2008) stipulates that elite driven patronage politics continues to hinder people's participation at the local level even through popular representative bodies in countries such as Thailand and Philippines. This is to say that local citizens feel disconnected from local governance processes as interests of well-connected local politicians and political parties dominate council resolutions during meetings.

2.8 Public participation in governance

In an attempt to achieve governance and service delivery throughout Africa and beyond governments are continuously adopting participatory instruments through devolving authority from the centre to citizens. This adjustment in authority has seen the decision-making machinery move closer to the people so that the grassroots get much involved in making decisions on matters that affect their daily lives and promote their participation in public affairs (Chasukwa et al., 2014). Participation in governance can be categorised into two broad categories of direct and indirect participation. In direct participation ordinary citizens take an active frontline role in the affairs that affect them. While in indirect participation citizens participate in the affairs that affect them or the

public policy process through representative or their proxies, elected or otherwise (Chingaipe & Msukwa, 2010). However, citizen participation in the decentralization policy framework is structured on the basis of political representation, which is a form of indirect participation (Chingaipe & Msukwa, 2010).

One of the most important qualities of representation in democratic governance is gender equality (UNDP, 2011) as citizen participation is supposed to take into considerations gender differences (Mishra et al., 2018). It has been proven that diverse groups make better decisions. However, women have traditionally occupied subservient positions in relation to men in the social, economic and political spheres of life (Musingafi et al., 2015). Theoretically, it has been argued that fewer women than men participate in local governance and that the probability for participation is higher for men than for women (Hue, 2019). A study by International Knowledge Network of Woman in Politics (Mishra et al., 2018) found that women face numerous challenges that prevent them from full and equal political participation and representation in local level governance. Some of the most common challenges include negative cultural perceptions and attitudes about women in leadership in Africa and beyond; violence against women in politics; lack of education and training among women; lack of access to knowledge and support networks; discriminatory election systems and processes; and lack of financial resources to support women in politics.

In spite of the rigorous efforts that have been made to empower women, through for instance deliberate strategies encouraging participation like quotas and national gender policies, women's level of political participation and representation in institutions of governance has remained very low as the electoral playing field continues to be

congested with male dominance (Musingafi et al., 2015). A survey by Tolley (2011) indicates that women representation is low and disadvantaged at the local governance level (councillors) similarly as it is disadvantaged at the constituency (members of parliament) and state (presidency) levels.

2.9 Emerging trends in representation

To represent means to make present again (Dovi, 2018). An influential representation theorist, Hanna Pitkin (1967), defines political representation as the activity of making present again citizens' voices, opinions and perspectives in public policy making processes. The responsiveness of elected representatives to their constituents through authorisation (direction of representatives) and accountability (a representative's sense of obligation to explain and justify their conduct to those they represent) is considered to be the determinant of the democratic quality of representation (Bovenkamp & Vollaard, 2019). In this traditional view of representation, citizens authorise and hold local councillors and political parties accountable for actions taken on their behalf by means of elections (Bovenkamp & Vollaard, 2019). However, the sustainability of this form of democratic representation has begun to pose a challenge due to problems such as declining voter turnout and political parties losing their popularity in society (Mair, 2005). As such, Bovenkamp and Vollaard (2018) indicate that non-elected actors like special interest groups and civil society organisation, are emerging progressively often as potential representatives in local governance structures, and hence challenging traditional electoral democratic systems.

These non-elected actors ensure responsiveness of the state machinery through measure such as petitions, organising public debates, organised protests, membership to public

organisations, and publishing public consumption information. Despite these democratic efforts by non-elected actors, it is believed that non-elected representation is still prone to leave out a voiceless section of the society since non-elected representation is seen to only capture the interests and aspirations of a dominant and vocal group in society. Therefore, the best system of democratic political representation is one in which non-elected representative complement elected representatives. Elected representatives such as councillors may base their representative mandate on their elected position, but also act on behalf of special interest groups on a non-electoral basis through shared experience, common identity or expertise (Bovenkamp & Vollaard, 2019).

2.10 Theoretical framework

I will discuss a number of theoretical frameworks that appear relevant to the study before identifying the most ideal theoretical perspectives that helped in answering my research questions. Models of representation as advanced by Andrew Heywood, the concept of political representation as advocated by Hanna Pitkin and the principal-agent theory will be discussed as particularly relevant theoretical perspectives supporting the study. These theories or models are based on political philosophies and assumptions that are held by individuals, political parties and governments (Dovi, 2018).

2.10.1 Andrew Heywood's theories of representation

Renowned scholars in the field of representation have argued that there is no fixed, single and dominant theory of representation that can work in isolation within a political system (Rehfeld, 2009; Heywood, 2013; Dovi, 2018). Hence, Heywood (2013) submits that it is not surprising for more than one model of representation to operate within the same political system, which suggests that no single model is sufficient in itself to

secure a representative government. I provide a description of each model in the paragraphs below.

2.10.1.1 Delegate

A delegate is a person who acts as a channel conveying the views of others, with little or no capacity to exercise her or his own judgement or preferences (Heywood, 2013). She or he acts as an agent or servant advancing the views of the electorate rather than her or his own. In this model the representative is bound closely to the electorate and the mechanisms which are used to legitimize that bond are regular elections. Again, in this model representatives are not mandated to think for themselves similar to the way sales representatives and trade union officials operate in the corporate and employment world. This model prevents representatives from abusing their position of authority since their mandate comes from the electorate. The representative is expected to ignore her or his expert judgement about which policies promote the general welfare, and instead simply pursue whatever policies happen to be popular at the moment (Fox & Shotts, 2009). This theory can be criticised for its narrow view on representation since it assumes that representatives act as robots and are not rational in making public decisions.

2.10.1.2 Trustee

A trustee is a person who acts on behalf of others, using her or his superior knowledge, greater experience and better education (Heywood, 2013). In this model of representation, the representative acts with substantial independence, using his/her own judgement as to the best way to help constituents without necessarily obeying their requests (Verstein, 2012). The classic expression of trusteeship is found in Edmund Burke's speech to the electors of Bristol in 1774:

You choose a member indeed; but when you have chosen him he is not member of Bristol, but he is a member of parliament. Your representative owes you, not his industry only, but his judgement; and he betrays, instead of serving you, if he sacrifices it to your opinion (Burke, 1975).

According to Burke, the essence of representation was to serve the interests of the nation as a whole and not just the interests of the constituency or ward or smaller group the representative is representing. This model views representation as a moral duty such that those with a good fortune to possess education and higher understanding should act in the interests of those who are less fortunate (Heywood, 2013). This model is premised on the belief that knowledge and understanding are unequally distributed in society, in the sense that not all citizens know what is best for them (Heywood, 2013). As such, citizens need educated politicians to make rational decisions for them.

However, the trustee representation model is not without limitations to the study. Just like the delegate model, it portrays a narrow view to representation as it assumes that the public is poorly educated and ignorant of politics as such elected representatives should think for themselves and not consult the people. In addition, this model fails to justify the connection between representation and education. Although it is an undisputable fact that education aids in understanding complex local and national problems, it is less clear how it helps political representatives make correct moral judgements about the interests of the electorate (Heywood, 2013). Finally, this model assumes that representatives always exercise their judgement in good faith and cannot use their positions to pursue their own selfish interest.

2.10.1.3 Popular Mandate

This is a newer theory compared to the two theories of delegation and trusteeship. It springs from the idea that representatives are now hardly elected based on their personal qualities and capacities. Rather, the political party and not the individual is the agent of representation in this model. This view is supported by Heywood (2013) who contends that when a political party wins an election it gains a popular mandate that authorizes it to carry out whatever policies or programmes it outlined during the campaign period. However, this model also presents some shortfalls. It assumes that voters are rational-beings who elect political parties and their representatives on the basis of policies and matters (Dunleavy & Ward, 1981). On the contrary, voters can be influenced by a range of irrational factors such as their social conditioning, personality of leaders and the image of political parties (Heywood, 2013). In addition, a vote for a political party cannot be taken as an endorsement of its entire manifesto since voters will be attracted to some policies while opposed to others (Heywood, 2013).

2.10.1.4 Resemblance

The resemblance model focuses on the social make-up of representatives. It proposes that elected politicians should share the same characteristics as the people in general and be comparable to a representative sample of the public, in which different groups are equally represented and everyone has the same chance of being elected (Bengtsson and Wass, 2010: 59). This model propagates that a representative government should constitute a microcosm of the larger society, containing members drawn from all groups and sections in society (in terms of social class, gender, age and so on), and in numbers that are proportional to the size of the groups in society at large (Heywood, 2013).

This model believes that all opinions of the people can be heard if all groups are represented. In order to achieve this, this model suggests that only people who come from a particular group, and have shared the experiences of that group can fully identify with its interests (Heywood, 2013). A good example would be an activist who sympathises and supports interests of physically challenged persons when she/he is not physically challenged herself/himself. Although such an activist might be concerned, she/he will never take problems of the physically challenged as serious as the physically challenged would do themselves because frankly speaking they are not her/his problems. However, this model portrays a narrow view of representation as it advocates for principles such as the physically challenged representing the physically challenged, or minorities representing minorities. If representatives were simply to advance the interests of their own social groups, the end result would be social division and conflict, with no one being able to defend the common good or advance a broader public agenda (Heywood, 2013).

2.10.2 Hanna Pitkin's models of political representation

Pitkin is an American political theorist who is best recognized for her seminal study titled the concept of representation, which was published in 1967. In her seminal study, Pitkin identifies four different dimensions of representation which are formalistic, symbolic, descriptive and substantive representation (Kurebwa, 2015). Each dimension provides a different angle of examining representation. However, although they are noticeable differences between the four dimensions, Pitkin (1967) insists that the different models do not work in isolation as they are all part of a coherent whole. This is similar to Heywood's models where no single model is sufficient in itself to secure a representative government. The following arguments are provided for each of the four dimensions of Pitkin's model of representation.

2.10.2.1 Formalistic representation

This view of representation emphasizes on initiating representation through the use of institutional arrangements. These institutional arrangements refer to rules and regulations that are followed in placing representatives in their positions to represent others. A common method of fulfilling formalistic representation is by conducting elections where citizens choose representatives by casting votes in an open, transparent and fair manner to represent them in making policies and initiating development. This view is concerned with the process by which a representative gains authority to act on behalf of the people and whether or not he or she is responsive to the preferences or wishes of the people (Kurebwa, 2015). Where the people feel that the representative has not met their preferences and expectations, they vote him or her out of power.

However, in formalistic representation systems citizens are unable to hold representatives to account when they are serving their term of office as sanctioning mechanisms are unfunctional or unavailable to the citizens. This is also aggravated by the fact that most political systems lack clear guidelines to assess how well a representative is performing in the course of his or her term of office (Kurebwa, 2015; Arnesen & Peters, 2017). The only option available to citizens is to remove a representative at the next election if he or she is not performing to their expectations. Unfortunately, this model's major focus is on the mechanism (formal elections) by which representatives are voted into office. However, representation is a complex activity which goes beyond the ballot box.

2.10.2.2 *Symbolic representation*

Symbolic representation entails representatives standing for the represented by use of symbols. Pitkin illustrates this by using an example of a flag as a symbol of a nation. She further indicates that it is not the symbol that matters but rather the symbol's power to evoke feelings or attitudes (Pitkin, 1967). This model is particularly associated with representatives who represent minority groups in society such as women, physically challenged, and racial minorities. Thus, in symbolic representation people feel represented if they notice that a representative has qualities or interests slightly similar to their qualities or interests. Here it should be clarified that symbolic representation is concerned not with who the representatives are or what they do, but how they are perceived and evaluated by those they represent (Kurebwa, 2015). Although this model believes that the inclusion of minority or special interest groups plays an important role to the wider population, there is lack of empirical evidence to prove how inclusion of these minority groups affects the wider population to feel inclusively represented (Lawless, 2004).

2.10.2.3 *Descriptive representation*

In this interpretation of representation, a representative is viewed as standing for the people by virtue of sharing similar characteristics with them such as gender, sex, age, race, occupation, class, ethnicity or geographical area. For instance, black people representing black people. Some scholars define descriptive representation synonymously with symbolic representation (Carroll, 2001; Barker, 2006). Advocates of descriptive representation proclaim that elected representatives who share similar demographic characteristics with their constituents have sufficient compassion to analyse and create representative policies (Young, 1990; Phillips, 1995; Mansbridge, 1999).

However, descriptive representation has been criticised on several grounds. The common argument is that demographic characteristics bear minimal or no connection to the ability to actually perform representation functions (Mansbridge, 1999). Kurebwa (2015) expounds that descriptive representation is simply about counting the number of members of a particular demographic group, for instance women, in a decision-making position or political office and not necessarily examining what those women representatives are actually saying. It has also been argued by other scholars that descriptive representation erodes the bonds among representatives whose task is to produce inclusive policies for all rather than a demographic subset of their constituency by over-emphasising group differences (Phillips, 1995). Just like symbolic representation, descriptive representation limits the core values of inclusive representation as it focuses on representation of factions of society.

2.10.2.4 Substantive representation

Substantive representation has been defined by Pitkin (1967) as acting in the interests of the represented in a manner responsive to them. Pitkin (1967) argues that representatives should be judged by their actions (substantive representation) and not just their closeness in characteristics to their constituents (descriptive representation). Contrary to Pitkin's view, other scholars have argued that descriptive and substantive representation cannot be separated (Phillips, 1995). The argument is that members of a demographic group will be more inclined to accept a representative as one of them if she or he portrays both qualities related to their interests and identity. However, other scholars have argued that there is no empirical evidence that shared experiences of members of a particular demographic group, for example women, will translate into shared beliefs and goals (Phillips, 1995).

2.10.3 Principal-Agent theory

It has been argued that principal-agent relations can be found easily and in more complex forms in the public sector than in the private sector (György, 2012). In the principal-agent theory the principal appoints the agent to make decisions in the best interest of the principal. In a democracy citizens choose public officers to govern in their place and hence these officials become agents of the people they represent. Literature (Lane, 2005) provides a number of examples of principal-agent relationships such as “citizens (principal) and elected candidates (agent), taxpayers (principal) and elected officials (agent), parliament (principal) and public authority (agent), central administration (principal) and decentralized local administration (agent), public authority (principal) and people working for government (agent), public authority (principal) and contractors (agent). The principal-agent theory originated in the 1970s as a combined discipline of economics and institutional theory by two scholars, Stephen Ross and Barry Mitnick (Mitnick, 2013). Gauld (2016) provides a basic definition of the principal-agent theory that it is as a theory of interaction between an agent and the principal whereby the agent acts on behalf of the principal and the principal has to structure incentives so that the agent will act to benefit the principal.

In order to attain public policies, citizens elect and instruct a set of agents (politicians) to come up with a list of policies that are preferred by the citizens (Lane, 2013). Unfortunately, these politicians do not have the time and expertise to put these policies into practice, and hence rely upon a set of agents (bureaucrats) to deliver public policies and services (Lane, 2013). But in most cases the principal and the agent have conflicting interests which creates what is known as the principal-agent problem. In both central

and local government, officials are incentivised to act in their own interests rather than acting as agents of citizens who are the principal (György, 2012).

The greatest challenge in the principal-agent problem is information asymmetry. Information asymmetry, which is also known as “information failure,” occurs when one party in a transaction possesses more information than the other (Roach, 2016). For example, when a seller of a good or service possesses more information about the good or service than the buyer. However, the reverse can also stand as in some situations the buyer has more information than the seller. In the case of government, the principal-agent problem arises when government officials lack material knowledge to act capably as agents for citizens.

In the same vein, this problem can arise between politicians or elected representatives and bureaucrats or unelected officials when politicians are uncertain about bureaucratic performance and the resultant advantages are enjoyed by bureaucrats because the politicians lack knowledge (Bendor et al., 1987). But again, politicians have incentives to capture rent through all kinds of opportunisms. Lane (2013) defines a rent as an unearned benefit or payment in excess of the opportunity cost, for instance an excessive remuneration compared with what had to be paid. Rent seeking behaviour entails diversion of productive resources to inappropriate activities. It is argued by some scholars that government officials endogenously increase the amount of red tape in order to extract more rents (Banerjee, 1997). Other scholars (Norris & Paul, 2006; Lane, 2013) have also argued that the rent-seeking ambitions of political agents lead them to engage in illegal activities such as patronage, corruption, embezzlement, tax evasion, kick-backs and commissions on public contracts.

To mitigate the principal-agent problem in the public sector some practitioners and scholars have suggested introducing incentive, sanctioning and monitoring mechanisms. Proponents of this view believe that agents refrain from rent-seeking if private sector methods such as paying competitive salaries, bonuses and benefits are applied in the public sector. Miller (2005) argues that by manipulating the agent's incentives the principal is able to minimize shirking or agency costs. Shirking is defined as the tendency to avoid or abrogate work, duties, or responsibilities (Cambridge, n.d.). Agency costs are losses imposed on the principal by an inability to align the agent's self-interests with that of the principal (Miller, 2005).

Empirical evidence suggest that rent seeking is reduced when organisations pay higher wages because more competitive salaries reduce incentive to take bribes or engage in other illegal activities (Cappelli & Chauvin, 1991; Goldsmith et al., 2000; Norris & Paul, 2006). In addition to providing incentives, the agents should be closely monitored to ensure that they do not deviate from the principals' interests and where deviations have been recognized the agents should be sanctioned. However, this implies that the principal will have to spend a considerable amount of time and resources on providing incentives and monitoring the behaviour agents, which is likely to skyrocket the principal's budget.

2.11 Operationalization of the study's research questions in view of the conceptual framework

Andrew Heywood's theories of representation help to provide an understanding of where councillors get their mandate to make decisions on behalf of voters. Hence, Heywood's delegate, trustee, popular mandate theories aid in answering the first

research question about how councillors are viewed as representing interests of voters. In addition, Andrew Heywood's resemblance model aids in answering the second research question on how voters perceive and trust councillors to be representing their interests. Furthermore, the resemblance model is used in expounding the third research question by providing reasons people contest as councillors. Here the model assumes that people contest as councillors in order to represent their social groups or sections in society in terms of social class, gender, age and so on. Hence the study aims to validate these assumptions to see if they are reasons enough for one to contest as a councillor.

Similar to Heywood's resemblance model, Pitkin's descriptive representation model is used in answering the study's second research question which assumes that voters are more likely to trust a representative with whom they share similar characteristics such as gender, sex, age, race, occupation, social class, ethnicity and geographical area. Another model proposed by Hanna Pitkin, substantive representation, offers guidance in understanding the study's first research question on how councillors are responsive to the interests of voters as the model assumes voters judge representatives for their actions.

Pitkin's symbolic representation model further helps to expound the study's first research question on how the representational role performed by councillors differs from those performed by other agents such as traditional leaders. The symbolic representation model assumes that traditional leaders are accepted as legitimate representatives of their subjects by virtue of inheriting the chieftaincy or leading an ethnic group.

The study's final research question on how granting MPs full voting rights has affected councillors' representational role is analysed through Pitkin's formalistic representation model which emphasizes the use of institutional arrangement to place representatives on their positions through elections and institutional arrangement that representatives use to make decisions in the interest of voters. In this case, the model aids in understanding how voting for decisions by MPs in councils has counter-affected the decisions councillors make and how decisions made by councillors are implemented in councils following this amendment in voting rights.

In the study, the principal-agent theory helps to provide an explanation of the effects of delegating decision-making power to councillors who exercise authority on behalf of the principal (citizens) in local government councils. This theory helps to answer the study's first, second and fourth research questions.

2.12 Conclusion

There is not a single Country in African where some form of decentralization is not in operations. Advocates of the different forms of decentralization in Africa have emphasised that the major objectives of introducing decentralization policies and reforms is to strengthen democratic governance and promote service provision. However, there seems to be confusion between the roles performed by councillors and those performed by MPs. In addition, there is also tension between councillors and traditional Chiefs. Traditional Chiefs believe that they are the ones closest to the local people in rural areas and thus have the most interaction with the local people on issues surrounding social life. Yet other scholars believe that the best system of democratic political representation is one in which non-elected representatives complement elected

representatives. Three theoretical models helped to inform the study. Andrew Heywood's model of representation, Hanna Pitkin's concept of political representation, and the principal-agent theory.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses how the study was undertaken to achieve its intended objectives. It describes the research design, the sampling techniques and how the data collected was analysed and managed. Finally, the chapter discusses the scope and limitations of the study.

3.2 Research design

The study adopted a qualitative approach because it was an exploratory study. According to Dudovskiy (2016), exploratory research intends merely to explore the research questions and does not intend to offer final and conclusive solutions to existing problems. This type of research merely explores the research topic with varying levels of depth (Dudovskiy, 2016). In this case, this type of research offers room for further research on the topic of study. As such, the researcher has to be willing to change her/his focus as a result of revelation of new data and new insights (Dudovskiy, 2016). In this view, the study aimed to analyse the value of the representational role performed by councillors in local councils.

Johnson and Christensen (2008) state that the main objective of qualitative research is to explore and gain understanding of problems or reasons. The study used words, descriptions and quotes to explore meaning of the phenomenon being studied, in this case, the value of the representational role of councillors in councils.

According to Shields and Twycross (2003) qualitative research usually has no measurements or statistics but uses words, descriptions and quotes to explore meaning, and at times it can even use arts. A case study approach was slightly used in the study in order to explore experts' or practitioners' attitudes towards the phenomenon being studied and also to investigate the phenomenon within its real-life context. As such, the exploratory case study approach was supposed to answer the questions "how and what representational roles performed by councillors differ from those performed by other agents of representation?" and "how granting MPs full voting rights in councils has affected the representational role of councillors?" The study used case studies of Mzuzu City Council, Lilongwe City Council, Nkhata-bay District Council and Rumphi District Council.

A phenomenological research paradigm was employed to the study. This is a qualitative strategy in which the researcher identifies lived-experiences about a phenomenon as described by participants in a study (Creswell, 2018). This paradigm helped to amplify the research design.

3.3 Sampling techniques

The study engaged purposive sampling to sample participants from Mzuzu City Council, Lilongwe City Council, Nkhata-bay District Council and Rumphi District Council. Terrell (2016) defines purposive or intentional sampling as a sampling

technique which involves the researcher choosing a sample on purpose because the sample meets a specific criterion. This type of sampling is used in many qualitative studies because it allows the researcher to identify small specific groups to work with (Terrell, 2016). The study engaged participants who were likely to have the required information to meet the objectives of the study and were willing to share it as suggested by Kumar (2011).

In the four councils' people who participate in council business at village, area or full council level and had some reasonable knowledge of local government operations and legal instruments such as the Local Government Act were sampled. This is because an understanding of the representational role of councillors is embedded in understanding the functions of the various council committees and binding legal instruments. As such, participants at secretariat level included District Commissioners (DCs) or Chief Executive Officers (CEOs), Directors of Planning and Development (DoPDs), and Directors of Administration (DoAs). At council level participants included Councillors, Traditional Chiefs, MPs, and Representatives of Special Interest Groups such as the youth, women and business community. In order to determine trustworthiness, findings from each council aided in triangulation of the data. Triangulation as defined by Brink (1993) refers to the use of two or more data sources, methods and approaches to analysis in the study of a single phenomenon and then validating the congruence among them.

The saturation point was a determinant of sample size in the study. Creswell (2018) indicates that an adequate sample is reached (saturation) when gathering fresh data no longer sparks new insights or reveals new properties. In each of the 4 councils, 8 interviews were conducted making a total of 32 interviews in the study. These

individuals were purposively selected on the assumption that they are either involved or influence business of the councils or their sub-committees.

The DC or CEO is highly influential at district level because he/she is the general overseer of the administrative arm of the council. The DoPD, apart from being a member of the local assembly, coordinates all development work in a district and hence comes into contact, almost on a daily basis, with the local politicians and other key stakeholders, including people at grassroots level (Kayuni, 2005). The DoA works for the council on administrative and human resource tasks, and is a custodian of information that council staff need to know to do their jobs effectively. The councillors and chiefs are local representatives of the people in councils and represent the people on political and traditional matters, respectively. In the study the saturation point emanated from cases where similar themes were emerging from interviewees.

3.4 Data collection methods

3.4.1 Key informant/ in-depth interviews

A key informant interview is a loosely structure conversation with people who have specialized knowledge about the topic being studied (EDC, 2004). In the study, semi-structured interviews were utilized to collect data by asking participants specific questions. Key informants for the study included DCs, DoPDs, DoAs and special interest groups. An interview guide was used as a tool. The key informants possessed technical knowledge and experience on functioning of the councils and the role of councillors in the councils. Key informants helped to achieve the first objective of the study.

Boyce and Neale (2006) define an In-depth interview as a qualitative research technique that involves conducting intensive individual interviews with a small number of respondents to explore their perspectives on a particular idea, program, or situation. The primary advantage of in-depth interviews is that they provide much more detailed information than what is available through other data collection methods, such as surveys (Boyce & Neale, 2006). In the study, in-depth interviews were conducted on a sample of councillors and traditional chiefs. In-depth interviews attended to the third objective of the study. However, it should be clarified that key-informant interviews are just the same as in-depth interviews. Alshenqeeti (2014) argues that interview research has a potential for creating subconscious bias as the respondent may get stimulated with the interviewer's physical presence and give responses that are imaginary or what he/she anticipates the interviewer wants to hear. Nevertheless, interview research has fewer incomplete responses since the interviewer's presence can clarify seemingly inaccurate responses with the respondent unlike in other methods of data collection like questionnaires.

3.4.2 Documentary sources

Data was also drawn from documentary sources. According to Scott and Marshall (2015), documentary research is research that uses personal and official documents as a source of data for a study. A broad definition of a document is a 'written text' (Ahmed, 2010). But in documentary research, documents may include things such as newspapers, diaries, stamps, directories, handbills, maps, government statistical publications, photographs, paintings, gramophone records, tapes, and computer files (Scott & Marshall, 2015). Documentary research method refers to the analysis of documents that contains information about the phenomenon we wish to study (Bailey 1994). Ahmed (2010) elucidates that this research method is just as good as and

sometimes even more cost effective than in-depth interviews, social surveys or participant observations. For the study, a review of key government legislation and publications, newspapers and relevant publications was done.

3.5 Data analysis and management

LeCompte and Schensul (1999) define analysis as the process undertaken by a researcher to reduce data to a story and its interpretation. Kawulich (2004) argues that data analysis is the process of reducing large amounts of collected data to make sense of them. According to Patton (1987) three things happen during analysis, which are data is organized; data is reduced through summarization and categorization; and patterns and themes in the data are identified and linked. In the study, collected data was analysed manually in order to establish the value of the representational role performed by councillors in local government structures in Malawi. Study findings largely depended on the experiences of local councils as expressed in individual interviews with key participants. In addition, attitudes and perceptions of local communities and individuals also contributed towards study findings. The study focused on attributes of good governance, citizen participation and representative democracy in order to determine how councillors represent interests of voters in local government councils.

The study adopted a thematic data analysis method. Caulfield (2020) suggests that thematic analysis is a good approach to research where you're trying to find out something about people's views, opinions, knowledge, experiences or values from a set of qualitative data – for example, interview transcripts. This data analysis method was well suited with the objectives of the study in analysing how councillors represent the interests of voters in local government councils in Malawi. A deductive approach to

thematic analysis was used in the study since the researcher interrogated the data, as indicated by Caulfield (2020), with some preconceived themes he expected to find based on theory or existing knowledge. All audio taped data was manually transcribed and analysed through thematic analysis. In order to minimise losing data, all data was saved in Google drive and personal flash drives which were not accessible to the public domain.

3.6 Scope and limitations of the study

One of the limitations was that the study had to take what people said in interviews at face value and therefore risked collecting data biased on selective memory and exaggerations. Selective memory is defined as the act of remembering or not remembering experiences or events that occurred at some point in the past (Spalding University Library, 2020). On the other hand, exaggeration in research refers to the act of representing outcomes or aggrandizing events as more significant than is actually suggested from other data (Spalding University Library, 2020).

In addition to the above, the study was not able to interview some key informants on time or at all as they were not found at their offices when required by the researcher citing that they were working from their homes due to the covid-19 pandemic. In some instances, the researcher had to resort to telephone interviews as a way to counter this limitation. However, sometimes the telephone responses were not forthcoming as some interviewees requested the researcher to call again later or requested him to send the interview questions via email to which they never provided a response. Furthermore, the study failed to access some key informants at Mzuzu City Council due to a prolonged sit-in which staff had staged against their management. Even efforts to get

their telephone and email contacts proved futile as some officials including their Secretaries at the council were not willing to provide their bosses' contacts to the researcher.

In order to mitigate these limitations, the study emphasized triangulating the findings collected from each study area. For instance, the limitation of failure to interview some key informants at Mzuzu City Council due to a prolonged sit-in was mitigated by interviewing the same category of participants in Nkhatabay and Rumphi District Council. The same approach also assisted in mitigating the limitation of collecting data biased on selective memory and exaggerations.

3.7 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the research design and how data was collected, analysed and managed in order to address the objectives of the study. The chapter winds up with a discussion on some of the limitations of the study and how these limitations were mitigated.

CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF STUDY FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a detailed discussion and an analysis of the study findings. The chapter is outlined in such a way that a brief overview of local representation in Malawi's local government authorities is presented at the beginning. This is done with an aim of contextualising the study in line with the Malawian experience. This is followed by an analysis and discussion of the study's findings which are presented according to the study's research objectives.

4.2 Brief overview of local representation in Malawi's local governance structures

The advent of multiparty democracy in 1994 which succeeded the fall of the autocratic one-party state machinery in Malawi saw the adoption of a liberal democratic constitution in 1995 which, apart from promoting civil, political, social, cultural and economic rights also recognised local governance structures as a fundamental part of the new found democracy (Chinsinga, 2008). The 1995 Republic of Malawi Constitution, the Local Government Act No. 42 of 1998 and National Decentralisation of 1998 recognised local government authorities also called councils and local representatives called councillors as critical elements for guaranteeing local democracy

as well as efficiency and effectiveness in running local affairs (Hussein, 2017: 3222). The main focus of these legal instruments was to develop capacity for grassroots institutions and create adequate fields of local participation (Chinsinga, 2008). According to the 1998 Local Government Act, although a full council includes MPs, traditional chiefs and special interest groups it is actually the councillors who are the political custodians of the councils and essential initiators of development at the local level (GoM, 1998a; The Nation Online, 24th May 2019).

The first local government election in the era of multiparty democracy was held in 2000, and was not held again for a span of 14 years until 2014 despite a clear provision in the Local Government Elections Act, section 23(1) requiring local government elections to be held after every 5 years. Chiweza (2016) states that this hesitancy to hold local government elections in their due season during the terms of office of Presidents Bakili Muluzi and Bingu wa Mutharika was a political strategy as the regimes were fearful that if local councils remained uncontrolled through political competition, they would be used by opposition parties to gain momentum at the grassroots. This failure for citizen to elect councillors between 2005 and 2014 affected citizens' participation in governance as it meant that their interests were not represented in the local councils.

Machinjiri et al. (2017) established that participation of local people gets negatively affected when councils are dissolved and no follow up elections are held because councils do not function accordingly and people do not exercise their political right to participation as enshrined in the Republican Constitution of Malawi. However, Malawi was able to elect its next cohort of councillors during the country's 2014 tripartite general elections which saw 401 men and 56 women take up local representational roles

as councillors in district, town, municipal and city councils (MEC Results, 2014). Unfortunately, no studies have been conducted to assess if these councillors who served between 2014 and 2019 fulfilled their expected representational roles as highlighted in the local government legal instruments but most importantly, if they served the interests of the people who voted them into public office.

4.3 How councillors represent interests of voters

Representation which is democratic should be able to respond to the needs of all the people equally without other sections of the population such as women or ethnic minorities, feeling left out. These sections of society, which are often side-lined from public decision-making processes, express their interest in local community fora such as the ADC or VDC and it is necessary for them to feel confident that their contributions have been taken on board by their representatives to the councils for implementation. In this way representatives are seen as acting in the interest of the represented and in a manner responsive to citizens. The study showed that councillors represent the voters' interests because they frequently consult them before making decisions at full council meetings. This was confirmed by one interviewee at Rumphi District Council who indicated:

In my area, councillors try their best to present development initiatives as suggested by the Area Development Committees (ADCs). So, they really do represent the interests of the people who elected them. (key informant interview, 14/7/2020).

Furthermore, the study established that an increasing number of voters were now willing to participate in local government decision making and programmes with the election of councillors as their local representatives. It was observed that the number of voters participating in ADCs and VDCs had increased with the return of councillors in 2014. This observation was supported by key informants interviewed at Rumphi District Council (25/01/2021) and Lilongwe City Council (28/01/2021) who indicated that more voters seem to have gained confidence to participate in ADCs and VDCs because they know that their concerns will be carried forward to Councils for action by their local councillors.

From the above, it can be asserted that councillors get the mandate to make decisions on behalf of voters from the voters themselves through rigorous consultation processes and, they do not want to deviate from resolutions made by voters in consultative fora like the ADCs and VDCs. Here we see the action of councillors leaning towards Heywood's delegate model. In this model councillors ignore their expert judgment and follow whatever decisions and policies are popular at the moment in order to gain favour from the voters.

4.4 Differentiating representational roles performed by councillors and MPs in local councils

Prior to 2014, communities had to depend on MPs to represent their interest. However, MPs were not able to perform this representational function to the satisfaction of communities according to responses that were given by local participants to the study. This is in line with what the Local Government Act (1998) stipulates that the function of councillors is to represent local interests while that of MPs is to make national laws. The positive outlook towards councillors in local councils is a clear indication that the

people, who are the principal in the principal-agent theory, appoint councillors to act as their agents on matters to do with local governance. The people have conferred the responsibility of making decisions on their behalf to councillors. In supporting this statement one key informant to the study said:

Councillors are found in hard-to-reach areas that not even an MP can reach. Therefore, the presence of councillors in the wards since 2014 has helped people to develop an interest and participate in local decision-making processes. (Interview with key informant at Nkhata-bay District Council, 17/7/2020)

From the outlook there might be no clear dividing line between what councillors do in representing citizens interest and what MPs do in representing the same interests. However, the most identifiable difference among these two elected representatives is that councillors represent local interests whereas MPs represent national interests (Constitution of Republic of Malawi, 1998, sections 48 and 146). It is the councillor's office that is assigned with the responsibility of promoting local development and sustainable rural transformation according to the Local Government Act, 1998 and Amendment, 2010. The councillor has an important part to play in local governance as she/he represents her/his ward in the council, makes plans and by-laws for development, provides feedback to their wards and provides checks and balances to district council secretariat (The Nation Online, 22nd March 2019). On the other hand, an MP has an important job of being a national representative of her/his constituents at the National Assembly.

Nevertheless, although councillors and MPs are expected to operate in different domains, their relationship is not mutually exclusive since MPs represent the same people councillors represent in the wards and hence MPs are likely to collide with councillors on their representational functions.

The study further established that the problem of MPs interfering in the responsibilities of councillors was prevalent in constituencies where MPs and councillors belonged to different political parties. On the contrary, constituencies where MPs and councillors belonged to the same party, conflicts over responsibilities were nominal. A case that can be cited is Nkhata-bay where a councillor indicated that his MP avoids stepping on the toes of councillors by minimising or refraining from intervening in local government matters requiring the attention of councillors. He indicated that by doing so, the MP was helping the councillors to receive credit for helping local citizens.

4.5 Conflicting representational roles between councillors and traditional leaders

In Malawi, as in many other African countries, the primary responsibility of traditional leaders, namely chiefs, is to offer traditional leadership to their communities and perform duties assigned to them under customary law. Most communities in Africa have great respect for their traditional leaders. The study established that in Malawi chiefs continue to play a latent representational role in society beyond their customary duties. This observation was made in Nkhatabay and Rumphi where participants indicated that chiefs, to a larger extent, were the ones who represented their interests in most community meetings with government agencies, non-governmental organizations, political parties and security agencies such as the police on issues to do with social welfare and development. In addition, chiefs' representational roles can be

viewed to some extent as being more prominent than those of councillors since councillors also seek approval of chiefs before undertaking community-wide development projects. In other words, chiefs represent the wellbeing of their subjects, who are also the voters, in local councils.

Chigwata (2016) argues that traditional leaders are generally regarded and accepted as the custodians of customs and traditions entrusted to them to provide traditional guidance to their respective communities. For instance, Malawi's 1967 Chiefs Act, section 7 outlines that the functions of chiefs include: preserving public peace; performing traditional functions under customary law as long as those functions are not contrary to the constitution or any written law and are not repugnant to natural justice or morality; assisting in collection of local taxes; assisting in general administration of the district in which his/her area of jurisdiction falls when required by the District Commissioner; and carrying out and enforcing any lawful directions of the District Commissioner.

From the above we can see that Chiefs are supposed to exercise their authority under the direction and supervision of local government authorities as specifically stipulated in section 7(d) and (e) of the 1967 Chiefs Act. However, a study by Chinsinga (in Crawford & Hartmann, 2009) found that there were contentions by chiefs that all people – whether councillors, MPs, DCs or even the president were their subjects at the local level and therefore by invoking tradition, chiefs greatly undermined the capacity of councillors to carry out their developmental mandates because they cannot do anything without first being sanctioned by the chiefs. This is similar to findings of the study that chiefs undermine the authority of councillors to represent voters even when councillors

have been given a mandate to represent local interests through an election. Chigwata (2016), while admitting that traditional leaders are still relevant to modern day society, appears to concur with scholars like Chinsinga (2008) when he indicates that the existence of the institution of traditional leadership which is parallel to local government authorities has in some instances resulted in conflicts and duplication of duties.

In the present study, it was established that in situations where conflicts between councillors and traditional chiefs have existed in Malawi after electing councillors in 2014, such conflicts were exacerbated due to a lack of clearly defining roles to be played by councillors and traditional leaders (Key Informant Interviews at Rumphi District Council, 14/07/20 and Nkhata-bay District Council, 17/07/20). This is the case because chiefs were the ones who assumed the representational roles of councillors in the absence of councillors. Chiefs wanted to continue performing those roles even when councillors returned into office in 2014 since no efforts were taken by government to clarify their roles following the return of councillors. This confirms findings from similar studies conducted in South Africa (Mhlana, 2012) and Ghana (Mahama, 2009) which established that current legal provisions for local government are inadequate in terms of clarifying roles of traditional authorities in local administration, as such, this deficiency has led to a gloomy relationship between traditional authorities and councillors.

4.6 The level of trust voters place on councillors

The level of trust citizens' place on councillors when compared with other agents of representation helps to access how citizens feel that their interests are being represented in local assemblies. This trust is reflected in how citizens view councillors to be listening or responsive to their needs. Here the focus is on the viewpoint of citizens towards their local representatives. A cross-national survey of countries in Sub-Saharan Africa including Malawi done by Bratton (2012) established that citizens regard local councils as weak institutions which rarely perform well and that elected councillors are largely unresponsive. This assertion borders on how councillors as elected public office holders fulfil democratic governance principles. The study solicited views from citizens on how they perceive their councillors' performance in the areas of accountability, transparency, and responsiveness.

4.6.1 Accountability in local governance

Although there has been an increase in the voter turnout in local government elections in Malawi by 5.18%, from 68.99 % to 74.17% between 2014 and 2019 elections (MEC 2014 & 2019 Reports), participants in the study were not sure if councillors were accountable or how to demand accountability from their councillors. During one of the interviews, a participant at Rumphi District Council indicated that:

Citizens demand accountability from councillors maybe through other platforms at community level, but I haven't seen that yet. (In-depth Interview, 14/7/2020).

The above outcome reiterates findings by Kayuni (2005), which established that it was not easy for the public to demand accountability from political representatives in local

government. The findings from Kayuni's study were reciprocated among three districts of Zomba, Mulanje and Salima (Kayuni, 2005). However, the present study found that the presence of councillors in local government councils has brought in some level of accountability on council secretariat (Key Informant Interviews, 21/7/2020). This observation was also made in a study by Chasukwa and Chinsinga (2013) who discovered that accountability was negatively affected in the absence of councillors in local governments as council secretariats were prone to abuse power since they acted as both decision-makers and implementers of decisions. In such a scenario power is abused because council secretariats are seen as being accountable to nobody. A similar observation was made in a study by O'Neil et al. (2014) which established that from 2005 to 2014 there were no councillors to exercise oversight of local civil servants and decision-makers, and the ad hoc DCFs had no formal authority to hold the DEC or a DC/CEO to account.

4.6.2 Transparency

The term transparency has been widely discussed in recent governance literature and relates to concepts such as open government and freedom of information (Tavares et al., 2018). It can be understood as the extent to which citizens have access to information that can facilitate their understanding of decision-making (Arif et al., 2010). In general, elected representatives make decisions on policies, budgets and projects that affect the public. One councillor at Rumphi District Council stated that:

The best way to represent local interests in the community it to get the needs of the local people, present them to the council and lastly feedback the local citizens. For me, I have explained local government policies to

my community members many times. (Interview with councillor in Rumphu, 14/7/2020).

Communities view councillors as more transparent representatives as they are the ones closest to the people. When representatives of special interest groups in Nkhata-bay and Rumphu District Councils were asked to define transparent representatives, they indicated that to them a transparent councillor is the one who provides as much information as possible to his or her constituents about council business (interview with key informants in Rumphu, 14/7/2020 and Nkhata-bay 23/7/2020). This relates with the sentiments quoted above from the councillor interviewed in Rumphu on 14/7/2020. Hussein (2017) indicates that councillors are normally the ones who call for transparency and accountability in the administration of constituency development funds although this does not seem to boil down well with MPs as the MPs view the councillors as potential competitors in the next parliamentary elections since they win favour from the people by calling for transparency in MPs' dealings (Hussein, 2017).

However, it is not all sections of the community that view councillors as being transparent. Some participants in the study felt that councillors fail to provide sufficient information about local conditions and development initiatives to the people they are elected to represent. For instance, an interviewee at Nkhata-bay District Council narrated the following:

As an interest group we also have to filter information to other people in the community, and we depend on councillors to feed us with such information since most of it (information) passes through them, for

example when councillors have requested that a certain amount of money should be used for a particular project it is important for us to be checking together with them (councillors) if indeed the allocated money was used for that specified project. But it is surprising to see that there are inconsistencies between what is on paper, for instance a project of MK4 million on paper will be inconsistent with what is actually on the ground. Therefore, as an interest group representing the business community, we find that there is an information gap. Another example would be when councillors claim that a road which was being constructed has been completed, we also need to be checking to see if indeed the development they (councillors) are talking about in terms of constructing the road was finished.... because it is possible on paper to be talking for instance that a school block was finished and costed a certain amount but when you go to the building site you find that construction work is still in progress. And when you ask the councillors about it, they respond that we run out of funds so the project (school block) was halted. But yet on paper indications are that funds were released and the project was completed. So, indeed an information gap exists in the councils. (Key informant interview, Nkhata-bay, 17/7/2020).

The study also established that some citizens see councillors as untrustworthy representatives who connive with project contractors to gain personal benefits at the expense of development for the greater community good (Interview with representatives of special interest groups, 24.7.2020) It can be assumed that councillors

are induced to act in this way in order to supplement their very low-income since their only source of remuneration are sitting allowances during council meetings. This confirms the principal-agent assumption that the agent, in this case councillors, capture rent by diverting productive resources to inappropriate activities for their personal benefit. Inappropriate activities here may include soliciting or receiving kick-backs and commissions on public contracts.

The Constitution of Malawi (1995) indicates under Section 13(o) that the State and all other local authorities shall actively promote the welfare and development of citizens by adopting policies and legislation that ensure public trust and good governance (GoM, 1995). This section of the constitution further appeals to public entities to introduce measures which will guarantee accountability, transparency, personal integrity and financial probity and which by virtue of their effectiveness and transparency will strengthen confidence of the people towards these public institutions (GoM, 1995).

Transparency in public affairs has more to do with how public finances are utilized and managed by those given the mandate to do so by the electorate for a common good. With the emergence of the “Cashgate” scandal it can be appreciated that most Malawians are now aware of, and express interest in, following how their finances are managed by the central government, although the opposite is the case with local government structures (The Nation Online, 24th June 2015). Therefore, in local government structures it is essential for the voters to be knowledgeable and keenly follow the dealings of the people they elected into office to represent them and also the people responsible for executing decisions of representatives through a process of public finance or expenditure tracking. Chiweza (2015) defines public expenditure

tracking as a method of gathering information which helps ward councillors, citizens, and other stakeholders to track down, understand, and discuss the flow of public money from the original source to the beneficiaries, including how the money is spent, and whether the money is being spent according to defined local priorities.

During the study it was also observed that there was an information gap on policies and development programmes between councillors and citizens. This is a typical principal-agent problem of information asymmetry in the principal-agent theory where the agent, in this case councillor, is assumed to have more information than the principal, in this case citizens (Roach, 2016). The principal-agent theory goes on to assume that the agent uses the information that he/she has to maximise his/her interests. From the study, it can be argued that councillors hoard information on development programmes and budgets and are not willing to easily share such information with citizens because they wish to capitalise on the development projects and budgets.

Councillors may capitalise or exploit development projects by participating in illegal activities such as receiving kickbacks from potential contractors of a development project or granting a project to party sympathisers (patronage) for political advantages (Norris & Paul, 2006; Lane, 2013). In order to alleviate these rent-seeking behaviours among councillors, the principal-agent theory proposes introducing incentives such as competitive emoluments and stringent monitoring mechanisms of councillors' activities.

4.6.3 Responsiveness of councillors to citizens' interests

Afrobarometer surveys conducted between 2008 and 2009 across 20 African countries generated mixed popular feelings about the political responsiveness of local government councillors as 28 percent of respondents felt that councillors “never” listened to people like themselves, 33 percent felt that councillors listened “only sometimes” and 31 percent felt that councillors listened “always” (Afrobarometer Round 4, 2008). Another interesting outcome of the Afrobarometer surveys conducted between 2008 and 2009 was the different perceptions respondents had about councillors’ responsiveness against MPs responsiveness to their needs. In all the 20 African countries that the surveys were conducted respondents felt that councillors were more responsive to their needs than MPs (Afrobarometer Round 4, 2008).

The Afrobarometer (Round 4) survey findings on councillors’ responsiveness against MPs responsiveness to local needs augurs well with the study’s findings as interviews conducted on most participants showed that they trusted councillors more than MPs on being responsive to their local needs because they were the ones closer to them in the communities and hence were more able to listen to their needs. Of course, most participants were of the view that interest groups in local government councils were more responsive to their local needs.

Denters and Klok (2013) suggest that for a representative (councillor) to be responsive she/he should be well-informed about the needs and preferences of his constituents and accessible to communicate with them. However, responsiveness does not necessarily suggest that the representative should always exactly act in response to the principal’s wishes (Denters & Klok, 2013; Pitkin, 1967). Supposing the demands of the represented

conflict with the decisions of the representative, then the representative owes the represented a good explanation of why their wishes are not in harmony with their interest (Pitkin, 1967). This view is in line with Andrew Heywood's trustee concept which encourages representatives to use their superior knowledge, greater experience and better education to guide constituents who often times have a narrow view of the world and are selfish.

The study further established that some sections of society, such as women and the youth, perceived councillors more likely to act in their interests and hence to be more responsive to their needs if they shared some characteristics with them such as gender, age, social class, and religious affiliation (responses from key informants interviewed in Rumphi on 22/07/2020, Mzuzu on 10/08/2020 and Lilongwe on 28/01/2021). These shared characteristics formed the basis of their perceived trust towards representatives in the councils. This augurs well with Andrew Heywood's resemblance model of representation which proposes that voters elect representatives who share similar characteristics with them or at least representatives who share characteristics of a representative sample of the public. From the study, voters trusted representatives with characteristics similar to them more than those who did not. Hanna Pitkin's descriptive representation concept which proclaims that representatives who share demographic characteristics with their constituents are trusted representatives further supports this observation. The issue of closeness of characteristics between voters and representatives also provides an explanation as to why voters place much more trust on representatives of special interest groups when compared with councillors in the study.

4.7 Why some individuals wish to contest elections for the post of councillor

The rationale for contesting for the position of councillor helps in explaining whether indeed councillors have the interests of the voters at heart in an environment that is not very conducive to work in when compared with their counterparts MPs. Councillors do not earn salaries for representing their wards in the council, although they may receive allowances to cater for their transport and upkeep during council and committee meetings (Guidebook on the Local Government System in Malawi, 2013). Hence, it is important for people intending to contest as councillors to be very committed in serving their wards or communities in development work, as opposed to contesting in order to fulfil self-interests such as personal financial gain. This is the major assumption of Pitkin's substantive representation theory which assumes that public representatives like councillors' act in the interest of the electorate because they voted them into office as such, they are obligated to be responsive to citizen's needs (Pitkin, 1967).

However, there are several non-financial reasons that motivate people to contest as councillors and some of them include: making sure people get the right services; making sure people's rights are heard and taken into consideration when government is making decisions that affect its citizens; and making a difference in the lives of others by utilizing business or professional skills (Thurrock Borough Council, 2020). From the view point of participants in the study it was established that most people contest as councillors to build momentum on the ground for a future political career as an MP. For example, a councillor at Mzuzu City Council narrated that:

If given an opportunity to contest for a political position in 2024, I would rather contest as an MP and not a councillor. My motivation to do so is

not out of the perceived benefits that are associated with being an MP. You see, when you become a councillor you tend to start knowing things like what are the roles of a councillor and what are the roles of an MP. Therefore, after 5 years you are equipped with knowledge of what a councillor is supposed to do and what an MP is supposed to do. And fortunate enough you do not need a lot of education for you to become an MP. (In depth interview with a councillor in Mzuzu City, 4/08/2020).

Following from the above, an investigation of the official 2019 MEC list of candidates who contested as MPs in the 2019 tripartite general elections in the study areas uncovered that 3 candidates were individuals who previously contested as councillors in Nkhata-bay district in 2014. Similarly, 4 parliamentary candidates who contested in Mzuzu in 2019 had previously contested in 2014 as councillors. It was only in Rumphi district where no parliamentary contestant had previously contested as a councillor in 2014. This observation confirms further studies by Chinsinga (2009) and Hussein (2017) that most councillors are considered a potential threat to MPs positions in subsequent general elections since they would use their position to build political capital as potential challengers in the next polls.

Furthermore, the above observation concurs well with what a key informant at Nkhata-bay District Council said, that:

Councillors show interest in and talk about the needs of the people in their communities in order to gain favour from the people when they will be contesting for an MP position in future, in most cases the next

upcoming election. (Key informant interview in Nkhata-bay, 17/07/2020).

In addition to building a future political career as an MP, some representatives of interests' groups when asked why they felt people are motivated to contest as councillors indicated that the position of a councillor offers people an opportunity to have a sense of actively belonging to a political party, since a councillor is the smallest unit of political representation in the community (interview with key informants, Rumphi District Council, 14/07/2020). However, as observed by Copus et al. (2015) that the organisation and activities of political parties and the role they play in local government has an influence on the way councillors act as local representatives, decision makers and governors of their localities.

It can be concluded that political parties interpose themselves between the councillor and the citizen and make demands on the loyalty and representative focus of the councillor, drawing him or her away from a direct link with the citizen (Copus et al., 2015). This observation was made on local governments in Europe but can also apply to local government in Malawi as councillors are more inclined towards fulfilling their political parties' mandates since the parties brought them into power. In the study, this observation was confirmed by an interviewee at Nkhata-bay District Council who indicated that:

To my side I think if councillors were elected with no party affiliations, then they would be serving the interests of the people. And also, sometimes councillors fail to act on people's interests because they are

scared of resultant actions from their political party if the party hears or sees that they prioritize the larger community's interests instead of their political party's interests. Therefore, because of these party affiliations we have noted during our meeting with councillors that they fail to be open enough to assist people. (Interview with key informants, Nkhatabay, 17/07/2020)

Further to the above, Kayuni's study (2005) confirmed that indeed party politics significantly affects the way politicians adopt models of representation such that Malawi's local government politics has attributes of the popular mandate theory of representation which is premised on the idea that the political party rather than the individual is the agent of representation. However, this negatively affects constituents as they feel that their interests are not adequately represented by councillors in local assemblies. Although it might be argued that the popular mandate theory does not apply to councillors who contest as independent candidates, eventually they are affected since most of them end up joining political parties once voted into office with an aim to extend their resource and political influence base. This is because being connected to a political party offers candidates with funding opportunities for local development projects in their localities and widens their political reach in society with the help of party members.

4.8 How granting MPs full voting rights in councils has affected the representational role of councillors

4.8.1 Background to amendment of the Local Government Act

As MPs amended the Local Government Act in 2010 which gave them full voting powers in councils similar to councillors, some local governance practitioners and scholars have expressed concern of how this amendment has affected democratic governance in local authorities. Before looking at the effects of this amendment on local governance it would be important to understand that the idea of giving MPs full voting powers in the councils was initiated by MPs themselves. The reason being that MPs felt they were failing to take council meeting seriously since by having no voting rights the Local Government Act did not recognize them as full members of the assembly (NICE, 2015).

Furthermore, research conducted by Mbwele (2019) indicates that MPs amended the Local Government Act so that they could have control of the DDF, which in actual sense is a development pocket for councillors. It was presumed by MPs that by making this amendment they would have an upper hand in controlling development at the local level. Mbwele (2019) suggests that although MPs are a minority as voting members, it was more about the resources MPs controlled that made them powerful and influential over councillors such that at times MPs manage to entice some councillors to their side through dishing out bribes and favours.

Another study by Chasukwa et al. (2014) indicated that MPs felt they were in a better position to take over from councillors as voting members because, just like councillors, they were also appointed through an election. However, this suggestion by MPs has been rejected by traditional leaders on the basis that MPs lacked knowledge about

problems faced by rural community dwellers since MPs are based in town, and therefore the traditional leaders see themselves as the right people to sit in for councillors in their absence (Chasukwa et al., 2014). On the contrary, MPs feel that traditional leaders lack democratic favour from the electorate to sit in for councillors because they are not elected (Chasukwa et al., 2014).

However, the present study established that although traditional leaders are not appointed through an election like their counterparts' councillors and MPs, they see their representational role as a symbolic function bestowed to them by their subjects (interview with traditional leader in Mzuzu, 18/02/2021). This view by traditional leaders supports the symbolic representation concept which suggests that representatives stand for the represented by use of symbols, which in this case is the chieftaincy.

4.8.2 Exacerbation of power struggles

Participants in the study expressed that giving MPs full voting powers has exacerbated the already existing power struggles between councillors and MPs. This seemed unanimously to be the view of key informants interviewed in Rumphi (22/07/2020), Mzuzu (10/08/2020) and Lilongwe (28/01/2021). Unfortunately, these power struggles have tended to frustrate and dominate deliberations in the local assemblies (key informant at Lilongwe City Council, 28/01/2021). The amendment to the local government Act which gave MPs full voting rights seems to have pampered MPs into taking up responsibilities which are ideally meant for councillors. For instance, it is common to find both aspiring councillors and MPs in most wards and constituencies saying and doing the same things, for example during campaign period, both councillors and MPs promising to construct roads for citizens once they are elected into

office (The Nation Online, 20th May 2014). MPs confidently make these promises because they know that they will be able to deliver since they also participate in the process of voting for local projects in local assemblies.

In addition, the study also established from participants that the local government Act amendment was a tactical move by MPs to eventually scrap off the representative functions of councillors in councils so that MPs gain absolute control of local development which they can use to their political advantage (interview with councillors at Rumphi District Council, 22/07/2020 and Mzuzu City Council, 10/8/2020). Further to the above, the study found that in most development initiatives, MPs want to be recognized as the sole initiators of the development projects to gain favour from constituents for the next election even when it is clear that councillors also play a crucial role in initiating the development projects (interview with key informant at Mzuzu City Council, 4/08/2020).

Hussein (2017) argues that MPs have viewed councillors as a potential threat to their authority in situation where a councillor is getting credit for initiating local development projects in an area. As already stated in the study, communities have a higher regard for councillors since they are the representatives who are found on the ground and are seen to practically represent local interests. In a situation where a councillor is being respected by the community as an initiator of local development MPs tend to use unethical political tactics such as mudslinging, hate speeches and slander to tarnish the image of the councillor (Hussein, 2017).

MPs seem to have an upper hand in bringing development to communities just because of their control of resources like the CDFs. A study by Mabveka (2014) found that most of the conflicts that have arisen between councillors and MPs have bordered around control and utilization of development resources, to be more specific the Constituency Development Funds (CDFs). Furthermore, Van Zyl (2010) indicates that decisions about how CDFs are allocated and spent are heavily influence by elected MPs, which is a diversion from their primary law-making and oversight roles. Presently, this may have been exacerbated by the granting of full voting rights to MPs as they view themselves as having full control of local development matters in local councils.

Chiweza (2016) argues that project identification and resource allocation is largely influenced by MPs with the aid of party officials with little or no control of the council as the main decision-making body. Councils also to a large extent depend on revenue collection to provide services to communities. This revenue collection is mostly done through rate charges and issuing of business licenses. However, as Jagero et al. (2014) indicate that the revenues collected are very low due to limited revenue base and poverty. In addition, there are a lot of defaulters since the masses complain that the services do not warrant the rates paid (Jagero et al., 2014). With these limited resources, a councillor's job may not be appreciated by the people he/she is representing as an initiator of local development.

4.9 The future of local representation in councils

From the study, some participants such as interest groups argued that councillors should be abolished for among other reasons their inadequacies in representing local interests and promoting local development. Their argument was that the granting of MPs full

voting rights in councils brings MPs at par with councillors including on representational functions, hence councillors' services may no longer be required. Furthermore, some participants in the study felt that the roles played by councillors in representing local interests can be played by chiefs and interest groups in communities if councillors are to be abolished. For instance, one participant indicated that:

If government does not have enough resources to sustain councillors it would be better for government to appropriate the available resources it has directly to development programmes in the communities, which could be managed by chiefs, MPs and interest groups. The interest groups would be there to hold chiefs and MPs accountable for their actions. In such a scenario, the MP would be the one to represent our interests even at national level, since in the present case it is an MP and not a councillor who takes our problems to parliament. Just imagine at present a councillor has to hand over community issues to an MP for him to take them to parliament hence it seems the representational function is being replicated. Had it been that councillors were also allowed to go to parliament then their presence would have been of value in ensuring that MPs are held accountable in parliament. But again, we have ADC chairpersons in the villages who collect issues on the ground. So, we can do without councillors since the ADC Chairpersons will be bringing community concerns to the attention of traditional chiefs, MPs and interest groups. (Interview with key informant, Nkhata-bay, 17/07/2020).

The above observation seems to be convincing if you compare the previous state of local government councils in the absence of councillors. Prior to 2014, traditional chiefs were seen as filling the representational gap by relaying information from government to the public, and at times they would access resources for localised development projects (O'Neil et al., 2014). Similarly, MPs were using their influence and CDFs to fill this gap (O'Neil, 2014). However, other participants in the study perceived the presence of councillors in local councils as a critical element for enhancing accountability and transparency in decision making processes at the local level. This view was expressed by some key informants at Rumphi District Council (interviews held on 14/07/2020). The views augur well with findings from a study by O'Neil et al (2014) which established that before councillor were elected, MPs were widely reported to distort budget allocations at District level, but when councillors became involved, they had the formal authority to monitor district plans, budgets and their implementation.

Councillors play a vital role in the democratic governance process at the grassroots level such that their abolishment would cripple the people's participation in matters that affect them. Citizens participate in the democratic governance process through their involvement in Service Committees. Service committees are structures that bring the state machinery closer to the people for their participation. Service committees enhance local participation because a councillor consults local people for a detailed discussion before recommendations from the community are forwarded to a full council meeting for endorsement or rejection. A study by Chasukwa et al. (2014) established that even service committees were no longer operational with the absence of councillors and this negatively affected participation of the locals at the lowest possible level.

4.10 Conclusion

The study findings indicate that councillors are valued in the councils and that they play an active role in representing local interests on the ground. The general perception in the four study areas of Lilongwe City, Mzuzu City, Nkhata-bay District and Rumphi District Councils is that councillors are more representative of the people's interests because they consult the people through local forums such as VDCs, ADCs and DDCs. Findings further indicate that councillors make their decisions based on public consultation processes and not basically out of their personal judgement. Secondly, the study findings indicate that councillors are located in hard-to-reach remote areas where even MPs do not reach and MPs have to depend on input and feedback from the councillors for them to know what is happening in their constituencies.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

The study was assessing how councillors represent interests of voters in local government councils. In order to achieve this, the study adopted a qualitative approach in collection and analysis of data. Through interviews, the study engaged participants who were likely to have the required information to meet the objectives of the study. As such, the study purposefully sampled local government councillors, MPs, representatives of interest groups in councils, traditional leaders and council bureaucrats. The idea was to capture accurate in-depth insights as opposed to working on speculations.

5.1.1 How councillors' representational roles differ from other agents of representation

With regard to this objective, the study established that communities have embraced councillors as their representatives on local issues since they are the ones found on the ground in the communities. Councillors are custodians of local interests in councils. On the other hand, MPs are viewed by citizens as national representatives whose representational function ends at the National Assembly. Furthermore, councillors are

seen as critical even to MPs since they are the ones who provide information on citizens' interests to MPs for their subsequent presentation to the National Assembly. However, there is tension between councillors and MPs on representation of local interests as MPs still wish to control local decision-making processes and projects because of associated political gains.

Also related to this objective, was the conflicting representational functions between councillors and traditional leaders. The study revealed that at the local level, councillors and traditional chiefs both represent interests of the people. Although councillors are supposed to represent political interests and traditional leaders represent traditional interests, this seems not to be the case because traditional leaders have encroached councillors' jurisdiction resulting to conflicts. The study also found that in situations where conflicts between councillors and chiefs have existed in local government councils such conflicts have emanated from a lack of clearly defined roles to be played by each category of representative.

Therefore, on the first specific objective, the study established that the representational role of councillors is highly valued and that the representational roles of councillors and MPs are clearly defined and differentiated. However, confusion exists between representational roles performed by councillors and traditional leaders.

5.1.2 The level of trust voters place on councillors

The study revealed that the level of trust citizens placed on councillors was dependant on whether they perceived them as being accountable, transparent and responsive to their local needs. On accountability, the study established that citizens were not able to demand accountability from councillors and furthermore, were unsure if accountability

platforms existed in councils. As for transparency, although it was councillors' role to call for transparency on council projects, the study established that it was councillors themselves who were failing to fulfil this democratic principle as they themselves were the ones who were not being transparent on use of funds as overseers of community development projects. The study established that there were information gaps on community development programmes as councillors are perceived to be hiding information in order to benefit their personal interests..

In terms of councillors' responsiveness to local needs and interests, there were mixed perceptions on how people viewed councillors to be responsive. However, there was a greater view that special interest groups were more responsive to the people's local needs and interests. Hence, from the second objective, the study revealed that councillors were more trusted and responsive to citizen's needs than MPs.

5.1.3 Why some individuals wish to contest elections for the post of councillor

The study revealed that people contest as councillors in order to build momentum on the ground for future political careers at national level. The study established that a councillor's position is viewed as a channel for gaining popularity on the ground before making advancements into frontline politics. As such, most people who contest as councillors are not bothered by the minimal personal benefits the job offers as their focus is on establishing a foundation for future political prospects at national level.

The study also established that other people contest as councillors in order to feel connected to a political party they sympathise with. The position of a councillor offers people an opportunity to have a sense of actively belonging to a political party since

the position is the smallest unit of political representation in the community. Therefore, from the third objective, it can be concluded that people contest for the position of councillor to establish a future political career at national level.

5.1.4 How granting MPs full voting rights in councils has affected the representational role of councillors

The study established that the 2010 amendment on the local government Act which gave MPs full voting rights in councils has encouraged MPs to take up representational responsibilities that are ideally meant for councillors. Some participants in the study felt that councillors should be abolished and their representative roles shared among MPs, traditional leaders and interest groups especially now that MPs have similar voting rights as councillors. Participants who advanced this view felt that government was duplicating the representational function by having both councillors and MPs representing their interests.

Another view was that councillors played a vital role in the democratic governance process at the grassroots level and hence their abolishment would cripple the people's participation in local matters as people trusted councillors more in being responsive to local needs when compared with MPs. The representative role of councillors in local government councils cannot be replaced by either chiefs or MPs even after MPs were granted full voting powers in councils. Hence from the fourth objective, the study established that councillors' representational role was still being valued even after granting MPs full voting rights in local councils.

5.2 Recommendations

As the study sought to analyse how councillors represent interests' of voters in local councils, it engaged participants who were at least knowledgeable about local government structures and operations through interviews. The purpose of using such a qualitative technique on the participants was to gather factual data rather than working on speculation. However, for future areas of research, the study recommends using a mixed methods approach to analyse the extent to which decisions made by councillors on development programmes and projects represent interests of the voters at the local level where MPs also play a critical role. This would assist in vindicating the study's findings that councillors' representational role is highly valued by the voters even when compared with other representation agents such as MPs and traditional leaders.

The study further recommends that citizens should be civic educated on the roles of councillors and how their roles differ from that of MPs. This would help in imparting a comprehensive understanding and appreciation of the functions of councillors among voters. Furthermore, this would assist voters to check whether councillors are being transparent and accountable in performance of their duties. In the same vein, councillors should be given job descriptions with clear targets and oriented on how to perform their functions once they assume office.

Finally, the study recommends that roles of other agents of representation in councils, such as traditional leaders, should be clearly defined to alleviate the tension that is currently existing between them and councillors in councils.

5.3 Areas for future research

For future areas of research, the study proposes an analysis of how voters are able to hold their local representatives to account as the present study has revealed that it is unlikely accountability platforms exist for voters in local councils apart from elections. As a way to check corruption and mismanagement of resources in local councils it is important for local councils to incorporate accountability mechanisms that are adaptive to their local context. Some of the accountability mechanisms that have been designed to address these accountability concerns include participatory budgeting.

Another area of focus for future research would be an investigation of how limited resources in local councils impacts on the quality of decisions made at local councils with regard to representing the interests of voters. Related to this is an assessment of how availability or scarcity of resources impacts on the organisational structures and management systems of local councils. This is an interesting area of research because different local government councils may portray different resource mobilization strategies which affects how local councils respond to the needs of citizens. Because most councils find themselves in a predicament of meeting growing demands from citizens against limited resources, councils are expected to find ways of attracting investment in their area of jurisdiction.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Interview Guide for District Commissioner/ Chief Executive Officer/ Council Directors and Traditional Chiefs

1. Whose interests are councillors more concerned about representing in their communities? Are councillors more concerned about representing the interests of their political parties, explain?
2. How do councillors make decisions?
3. How do councillors perform different functions from those performed by other representational agents such as MPs or traditional leaders?
4. How do local people propose or get feedback from government on development initiatives or local service delivery?
5. What motivates local people to participate in decision making activities in the council? And how has the level of public participation changed since the year 2014?
6. How has granting MPs full voting rights affected the way councillors perform their representational role in councils?

Appendix 2: Interview Guide for Representatives of Special Interest Groups (Women, Youth and Business Community)

1. Whose interests do councillors serve when they are elected to authority?
2. How did the councillor you elected during the period 2014 to 2019 represent your interests on development initiatives and projects?
3. How does the representative functions performed by councillor differ from those performed by other representatives such as MPs or traditional leaders?
4. What would you say motivates people to contest for a councillor position?
5. How do you demand accountability from your councillor?
6. How does the councillor disseminate information about local conditions and development initiatives?
7. Which agent of representation do you trust most? And why?
8. What would you suggest is the best way to represent local interests in the community?

Appendix 3: Interview Guide for the Councillor (some of the questions also used to interview MPs)

1. What do you think are the main roles of a councillor?
2. How do you make decisions for the public good in your ward?
3. In what ways does party politics inhibit your work?
4. Whose interests are you concerned about representing?
5. What procedures do you following when calling for a community meeting?
6. How often do you engage in the following:
 - Facilitating the provision of material and staff by the council for local projects;
 - Attending meetings of Village Development and District Development Committees to contribute towards solving problems;
 - Appraising the council on the state of services to and the welfare of the community;
 - Explaining local government policies to the community.