



## Challenges of urban community management in Lusaka

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THIS PAPER AIMS to bring forth issues of urban community management as experienced in Lusaka, Zambia. Community management is strongly linked to the idea that communities own their own development assets and systems, for instance, water supply systems, sanitary facilities or road networks. As part owners they have responsibilities and decisions to take.

### Experiences of community management in Zambia

In general community management in urban areas of Zambia emerged through community participation in the early 1990s, it was more pronounced in rural areas. The approach was adopted in urban areas due to the challenges of service provision in formally mushroomed squatter settlements. These are domestically known as Peri-urban settlements in Zambia. The use of conventional supply driven approach proved to be problematic in these Peri-urban areas when much of the infrastructure installed was vandalised due to minimal involvement of communities in the project cycle.

### Community management institutional arrangement in Lusaka

Lusaka houses 33 Peri-urban settlements and these have posed a great challenge as regards service delivery. Lusaka City Council and other development partners have since adopted the community management approach. To facilitate the process, development actors utilise a community development structure known as Residents Development Committee (RDC). Local authorities form these committees with assistance from existing local leaders and devel-

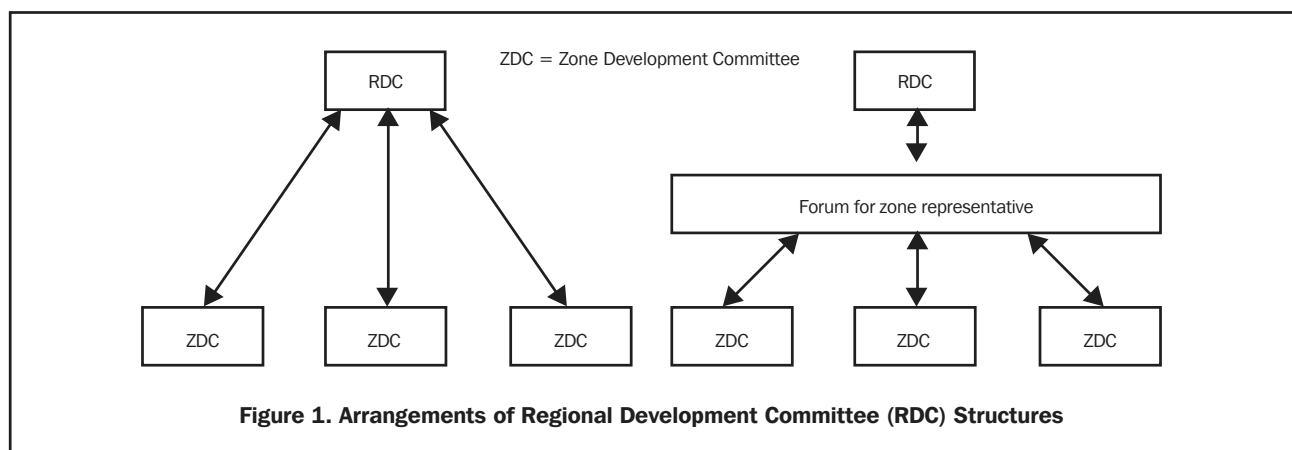
opment agents. There are different models of the RDC structures existing in different settlements. Below is an illustration of two common ones.

### RDC responsibilities

These are non political structures that however have political representation through the area councillor, who is an ex-officio. RDCs have been widely recognised in the city as channels for advocating for services and obtaining assistance. Due to the benefits accruing from this level of organisation, formally planned areas are also advocating for the same.

Initially, the roles of the RDC were to mobilise community members to participate through provision of labour, especially in water supply and solid waste disposal, construction of schools, health facilities and road construction activities. Over time the committee has become the main management unit as their responsibilities have been extended to perform the following:-

Where water systems have been installed, they are responsible for planning, mobilising resources for project implementation, mobilising community members during implementation, fee collection, operation and maintenance, and attending to all administrative requirements. Whilst that is happening they too would be engaged in other projects such as roads construction where they again become the main actors. In some instances, different models of management are used. Examples are eminent in the water sector, where the RDCs are completely responsible. In other instances there is joint management between the RDCs and a water utility. The mentioned responsibilities are performed on a voluntary basis.



## Challenges

### Institutional support

The local authority has completely abrogated its responsibilities to the community actors. There is need to re-emphasise the role of public institutions in urban areas as they engage other actors in service provision. There has been minimal to no support of communities by the local authorities. Capacities of institutions as regards community management need to be built.

### RDC as a focal point of management

Notably, failure has been recorded in activities that have been solely left to the RDCs to manage. Over time, there has been an emergence of participatory elites. RDC members have been dominating the development scenario in the settlements, hence benefiting more than other members of the community. Tangible benefits such as training have always been targeted at this group, in order to build their capacities. This creates a capacity gap when trained members are lost in different circumstance.

As entry points they have taken the advantage of being conduits to accrue the benefits of any programme that is introduced in the settlements. As an example the RDC members can belong to as many communities as they can, or cannot, handle e.g. become a community health worker, a Parent-Teacher Association chairperson, a party leader. This makes it difficult for some leaders to concentrate on specific issues.

The RDC community Institution is composed of elected members with a 2 year term of office, making it difficult for them to be continuously responsible for development activities. Most projects in communities have come to a stand still when the RDC is either dissolved or disbanded. The problem is usually compounded by the fact that local authorities are not proactive enough to manage the activities in the absence of the RDCs.

### Voluntarism

Engagement of communities in non-paying activities has had a great impact of the rate of delivery in most projects. Given the economic situation in the country, community members in urban centres cannot afford to devote time to a non-paying community service. The more time they spend on community work the more opportunities they miss for individual productivity. Experience has shown that communities can only give their time for one-off activities such as a meetings or trench digging, depending on the need. Other activities that require long-term engagement e.g. fee collection and repairs, need to be paid for. Infrastructure that is not self-sustaining such as roads, drains and street lighting are usually left to deteriorate once the service provider leaves. Urban centres are quite different from rural areas, as many of the services such as housing, water, land and food require purchasing.

### Training

Capacities of community members to take responsibilities in managing their development processes has to be enhanced all the time. In Lusaka, development actors other than the local authority undertake much of the training activities. This leads to slow delivery, as much of the time is spent on capacity building activities, which are supposed to be continuous events for the public institutions. Hence short term programmes run the risk of involving communities in fast track projects, as these are left with undeveloped managers.

### Urban development policy/guidelines

There is no policy direction as regards ownership of infrastructure provided in communities to guide development actors. This leaves agencies with an option of following their mandate of providing services and handing it over to the communities, as they deem fit.

### Options

Experiences with community management in Lusaka has led to thoughts on how communities can be engaged more effectively in resolving their development problems without impoverishing them further by utilizing their time on voluntary work.

### Community contracting

Sustainable Lusaka Programme is using the concept of community contracting in the community based solid waste management demonstration initiative. In recognition of the need to minimize environmental degradation caused by indisposed solid waste and the need to address the escalating poverty levels, the programme facilitated the formation of small-scale enterprises in three peri-urban settlements. Community members have been mobilized and trained to form small-scale, autonomous companies to engage in primary collection. They are also responsible for fee collection and employing workers who are paid by the respective companies.

The principles used in this model can be used in other activities such as water supply and road maintenance. In this case the small community companies can win contracts directly from the institutions that are responsible for providing services, such as the water utility companies, the Roads Board and the local authority.

In this model the RDC supervises their work and ensures that the tariffs set are not exploitative. The companies sign a memorandum with the RDC. The RDC as a community structure then retains its role of advocating for services in their settlements and monitoring, whilst actual implementation of specific activities can be sub-contracted to community enterprises. The RDC members can also belong to these enterprises, if they are interested, in order for them to be self-sustaining.

**Conclusions**

The local authorities and institutions involved in service provision should be actively involved in monitoring development activities in the communities and provide necessary backstopping. They too have a responsibility of providing specialized training to the emerging enterprises in the settlements.

Communities should be engaged to fully manage activities that are self-sustaining. Alternatively they should combine self-sustaining activities with non self-sustaining activities. It is more sustainable for communities to be involved in employment generation activities and to be paid by resources that are generated within the settlements.

Alternatively, the local authority should reinvest a percentage of funds that have been generated from each respective settlement. These funds can be used to pay contracted community members.

There is need for a forum where urban development approaches are discussed openly, in order for action to develop and approaches to be refined. As models evolve, these should be documented and continuously reviewed, to avoid lapses in the development processes.

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