Support to Decentralization

In the recent past in Zambia Decentralization has been both, a heated debate and at times a dormant process. Since the decentralization policy was launched in August 2004, development discussions in Zambia have begun increasingly to acknowledge and support the essence of the decentralization policy: This recognizes that Local Government, specifically the district councils, have to be the focal point for development management if significant changes are to be made in terms of poverty alleviation. This is based on the rationale that only when the processes of identifying development needs and orchestrating development programs are brought closer to people, that the quality of programs and the relevance and quality of services can increase significantly.

There is a common concern, however, that necessary capacity for organizing horizontal and vertical planning and monitoring mechanisms at local government bodies is still, at best, limited. It is also of particular concern that the general rural population is not yet integrated in the process of formulating development needs nor into the implementation of the resulting programmes.

The implementation of the decentralization policy has started, and the long expected implementation strategy was finally developed, published and shared with all concerned development players in Zambia. Though the author of this strategy is the Decentralization Secretariat, which is part of the Ministry of Local Government and Housing, the owners and managers of the implementation processes will have to be all those institutions, which are directly or indirectly participating and affected. This includes Sector Line Ministries at national, provincial and district level, civil society organisations, private sector, and most importantly the 72 district, city and municipal councils of Zambia.

It is expected that with these interventions local government will have more decision making powers and in the long run will be able to coordinate development programs on district level and steer service delivery from private sector and government for local economic development.

It is against this background that the combined efforts of the four organisations of German Development Cooperation (KfW, GTZ. DED, and CIM) operate in the Priority Area “Decentralized Rural Development”. The Priority Area is almost entirely housed in the Ministry of Local Government and Housing, except for one intervention of KfW, which partners with the Ministry of Works and Supply. The coordination of the Priority Area rests with GTZ.

This Priority Area of Zambian-German Economic Cooperation follows a joint approach between all four involved organizations and the Zambian Government to ensure the successful implementation of the decentralization policy based on agreed and harmonized strategies. This support is guided and harmonized by the policy statements of the “5th National Development Plan” of the Government of the Republic of Zambia as outlined in the chapters “Decentralization” and “Local Government and Decentralization”.
German Development Cooperation basically provides assistance in two ways:

1. Inputs, such as concepts, tools, best-practice examples and funding, to national level policy formulation and refinement processes, and policy implementation based on lessons learnt from local experiences and a harmonized strategy, which is aligned with all other cooperating partners in the sector. This is intended to help government and its partners clarify roles and processes for the decentralization process and build capacity for it.

2. Capacitating sub-national institutions and their partners to fulfil their new roles in the decentralized system of governance, and to implement national policies and strategies on the ground. With this intervention, better and more effective coordination, planning and monitoring procedures are addressed, and the management capacity of district councils (administration, financial management, revenue management, etc) is being strengthened. An additional essential part of the package is the development of institutional arrangements and development of processes, which support local economic development.

With the establishment of national forums for sector coordination, policy guidance and monitoring of sector performance (Sector Advisory Group) for the Ministry of Local Government and Housing the Government of Zambia has created a potentially effective mechanisms for making better use of lessons learned from operations on the ground. The Sector Advisory Group and associated Working Groups can be employed to make sure that demands for process support in decentralization implementation voiced at national level are being worked-on. These can address interventions at national, provincial and district levels including research, piloting, development of guidelines, financing certain strategies and updating legal documents.

Here German Development Cooperation, through the joint efforts of its instruments (KfW, GTZ, DED, CIM), has the strength to combine its long term presence in the sector with technical expertise and reputation for flexibility, to ensure its intervention can be adapted to upcoming needs and changing environments.

The German Development Cooperation and the Government of the Republic of Zambia have chosen Southern Province for the implementation of the program parts mentioned previously. The rationale for the choice is based in part on history and the long term presence of German Development Cooperation in that part of Zambia. In fact, a number of preceding projects of Zambian-German Technical Cooperation operated in Southern Province, addressing issues of Land Use Planning, District Development, Agriculture, HIV-AIDS and Reproductive Health.

A further reason for the selection of Southern Province, with its 85,000 km² and 1.3 million people, is that it is one of the provinces in Zambia prone to dramatic climate changes with regular droughts, but largely depends on agriculture. Commercialization of the agriculture sector holds to date an untapped potential for support to private sector institutions in the context of the value chain approach, which in turn will stimulate local economic development.
KfW, with their upcoming Rural Transport for Poverty Reduction (RTPR) Program in Southern Province, will provide essential complementary services to the long established Decentralized Rural Development Program (SDRD), which is jointly built by GTZ and DED, and complemented by CIM with integrated experts. SDRD works in all 11 districts of Southern Province with about 15 national, regional and international experts. In addition, KfW will soon start a complementary program on national level, which will be titled “Rural Development Fund Zambia” and aims at strengthening the Local Development Fund (formerly known as ZAMSIF) of the Ministry of Local Government and Housing with finances and capacity building mainly in the development of concepts for decentralized district financing.

The Priority Area „Decentralized Rural Development“ provides significant interventions at all levels ranging from sub-district to the national level. Contrary to the past, when more isolated projects operated in a wider range of technical areas, it is envisaged that the concentrated and better focused efforts of the German implementing organisations, together with their Zambian counterparts.

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