

THE ZAMBIAN LOCAL GOVERNMENT MODEL

Historical structure

Prior to colonialism, chiefs and headmen exercised the powers of Government. Nationally, chiefs were responsible for the Government of wide areas while locally, headmen were responsible for the villagers within a given chief's jurisdiction. The more powerful a chief was, the larger the area on which he/she exercised power. The chief had executive as well as judicial powers and had advisers and councillors who advised him or her on various issues concerning the tribe. At village level, headmen communicated the chief's wishes and carried out the administration of specific issues. During the period, major services were provided for through the co-operation of the whole village.

In 1889, the British South African Company was granted a charter on condition that the rail line progressed northwards over the Zambezi (Cape-Cairo). Small communities developed along the rail line as it progressed northwards which in turn grew into small townships marking the birth of municipal administration in what was then called Northern Rhodesia, now Zambia. The charter among other things required the B.S. A. Company good Government. Through proclamation No 1 of 1901, the company established a village management board to administer various regulations pertaining to issues such as environmental health as well as streets and buildings.

In 1924, the British Government took over Northern Rhodesia and established it as a protectorate with a governor, legislative and executive councils. As a response to the growth of urban communities, two ordinances were passed in 1927 and 1928 to enhance local administration. These were the municipal co-operations ordinance and the townships ordinance respectively.

The 1927 and 1928 ordinances gave councils wide ranging discretionary powers which included the establishment of markets, parks, slaughter houses, refuse disposal services and the maintenance of law and order.

In 1923, the mine township ordinance was passed in response to the rapid development of the mining industry. Under this ordinance, mine township boards were established as local authorities. One major difference though was that these boards were not responsible for raising revenue or

collection of rates and personal levy. They depended on the grants given to them by the mining co-operations.

Colonial Government Structure Before 1964

There was a colonial secretary based at the centre (England) represented in Zambia, then Northern Rhodesia by a Governor. At the provincial and district levels, there was a Provincial Commissioner (PC) and a District Commissioner (DC). (M. Mitchell – Basic information on the structure of local Government in Northern Rhodesia as of December 31, 1962.JS17649). Below the District Commissioner were the chiefs and their headmen. The powers of chiefs were considerably reduced since. They were made to depend on the colonial administrative officers. Native authorities were established in each senior chief's area to assist the maintenance of Law and order.

Executive powers at the district level were exercised by the District Commissioners while legislative powers were exercised by the native authorities. It is important to note however, that participation in local affairs was extended by and large to whites only who were in accordance with the law qualified to vote and could be appointed to various positions by the Governor. It was not until the passing of 1962 local Government elections ordinance that more positive measures to enhance greater African representation on local councils were instituted.

Local Government in Zambia

At independence, Zambia inherited a fragmented administrative structure consisting a collection of departments which enjoyed a great deal of autonomy from the centre. The civil service which was developed during the colonial period considered itself politically neutral and therefore not responsive to political control. In other words, the new Zambian Government inherited an administrative structure that was considered unsuitable to the aspiration of the new nation. Consequently the old provincial and district Government was abolished and a new reduced provincial and district Government was produced in August 1964. This new Government was to coordinate and implement Government services and provide co-operation between Government and political parties. This, however, marked the beginning of the institutionalisation of political control of the the civil service.

Following the rapid Zambianisation programme by the new Government, the average education levels of both provincial and district staff including that of the district secretary got compromised. The situation was worsened by the fact that appointments were not usually based on merit. The existence of a new political authority in the name of UNIP regional secretary further weakened the DC's position/authority.