



Integrating Zimbabwe's Local Authorities into the 2021 to 2027 European Cooperation Agreement

Analytical REPORT prepared for ZILGA and
UCLG Africa

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

LED:	Local Economic Development;
MICS:	Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey;
SDGs:	Sustainable Development Goals;
TSP:	Transitional Stabilisation Program;
UCLGA:	United Cities and Local Governments-Africa;
UN:	United Nations;
ZANU PF:	Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front;
ZILGA:	Zimbabwe Local Government Association;
ZUNDAF:	Zimbabwe United Nations Development Assistance Program;

1.0 Introduction

When Zimbabwe got its independence in 1980 from British colonial rule there was a lot of expectation that it would become a socio-economically successful country with strong democratic institutions. Based on the long and bitter struggle for independence against colonial oppression developing a well-governed and non-racial state appeared straight-forward. The war had been fought around clear political objectives of universal suffrage and participatory democracy. Early adoption of decentralisation, removal of race-defined local governance dualities, pronouncement of reconciliation and provision of basic services for previously disadvantaged populations all send the right signals. However, not all spheres of reform and state development progressed in a transparent, accountable and democratic manner. Political intolerance, corruption, violence and partisanship have been recurrent plagues weighing down Zimbabwean society and economy.

This analysis tracks the enduring relevance of decentralisation as a model for organising and administering the Zimbabwean state. It evaluates the prospects for or feasibility of implementing deeper decentralisation generally and in the context of the 2013 Constitution specifically. This is done through looking at the political economy factors relevant to the subject of decentralisation, discussing the presenting anchors and some good practices for the model, engaging with how territorial authority is defined and applied, the strengths and weaknesses of key local government institutions before identifying some priorities for implementing decentralisation. The analysis is framed to inform a process of deeper decentralisation implementation as envisaged by the Constitution of Zimbabwe 2013. It is a co-execution with the Zimbabwe Local Government Association, itself engaged in a process of engaging national government around a Devolution implementation Matrix (DIM) consolidated through national consultations of its members and stakeholders. The DIM was submitted to the Head of State in late 2019 and additional analyses have been to aid operationalization of its principal asks, which relate to more devolved competence sharing between national and local government.

As will be elaborated on in the paper, devolved governance is framed as a basis for delivering services and good governance to Zimbabwe's 13.1 million¹ people who reside in ten (10) administrative provinces and ninety-two (92) local government areas. The provinces are divided into thirty-two (32) urban local governments and sixty (60) are rural local governments, which are further divided into 1958 Wards each represented by a Councillor elected based on universal adult suffrage. The debate on devolution and its implementation in Zimbabwe principally focuses on the extent to which the local governments can be further empowered to govern the territories for which they are responsible more effectively.

Invariably, the debate has tended to focus only on the Executive arm of the state ignoring the reality that the other arms are equally critical. Zimbabwe has a two chamber Parliament with a 210-member Lower House and 80-member Upper House (Senate). Members of Parliament are elected on a constituency basis. Senators include 60 (6 per province) elected via proportional representation from party (zebra) lists that have a woman at the top and alternating male and female representatives. 18 Chiefs and 2 representatives of people with disabilities complete the Senate. Parliament's contribution to decentralisation is through the legislative, representational and oversight roles, collective performance of the body, through Parliamentary Committees, particularly the one with local government oversight functions and also individual Parliamentarians.

The Executive arm functions through the Cabinet, individual Ministries and the agencies administered by each Ministry (departments, state-owned enterprises etc.). These perform functions open to decentralised performance and thus are critical to the competence sharing, which if sufficiently decentralised results in empowered local governments. Two other arms of the state critical in the analysis of decentralisation implementation are Judiciary and Independent Commissions² that support democracy. The authority that each of the arms of state exercises in Zimbabwe executive derives from the people. Clearly, a discussion on

¹ ZIMSTAT (2012) National Population Census. Other estimates are 14.9 million (<https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/zimbabwe-population/>), 16.2 million (<https://www.who.int/countries/zwe/en/>), 14.6 million (<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL?locations=ZW>)

² These are the Zimbabwe Electoral, Human Rights, Gender, National Peace and Reconciliation and Media Commissions

decentralisation ought to explain whether such authority is exercised in a manner that benefits the people. Alternatively, the question becomes about how the state can be better designed for that to happen. Zimbabwe has three tiers of government. These are defined in Section 5 of the Constitution (2013) as i) National Government, ii) Provincial and Metropolitan Councils and iii) Local Authorities (urban and rural). Government is tasked with facilitating rapid and equitable development in a manner that i) involves the people in formulating and implementing development plans and programs, ii) protects and promotes people's rights particularly women, and iii) ensuring that people benefit from resources in their areas (Section 13 of the Constitution). The next section discusses the political economy factors that define how these values are lived.

2.0 Political Economy (PE) of Decentralisation in Zimbabwe: An Analysis

2.1 Zimbabwe's key political economy factors: racial and partisan politics

The political economy of decentralisation in Zimbabwe can be understood with reference to the publicly pronounced motivations for this policy choice while simultaneously contrasting these with evidence of implementation of the pronouncements. This paper draws out the specific pronouncements to illuminate their impact on relations between national and local governments. The relations have at best been parent-child and at worst mired in deep political mistrust. Relations of mistrust have been particularly evident between urban local governments and national government post-2000. The manifestations of the uneven relations vary with i) local authority location, type and size, ii) the complexion of local politics as well as the relations of these with national politics, iii) presence/absence of strategic resources like minerals and the nature of those extracting the resources, iv) level of citizen organisation and attachment with/to the local authority, and v) development interventions in place as well as the architecture of the institutions delivering the interventions.

The above factors are often obscured in analyses that only look at formal powers assigned to local authorities under existing laws. However, because the full realisation of formal powers is subject to the political economy factors listed above it is important to understand variability in relation to the following:

1. Power relating to revenue raising and application;
2. Ability to make local/by laws, the turnaround in their national approval and successful local implementation;
3. Execution of the policy making function and sustainability of the transitions from policies to service delivery-governance actions including the necessary local feedback loops;
4. The election and retention of local political leaders, their political and social clout as well as the sustenance of their leadership roles; and
5. Making and follow through of spatial planning decisions including the extent of development control

Before 1980 race framed the political economy of local governance with clear territorial variations, which were dictated by whether the spaces were European or African. The depth and breadth of necessary planning and development was equally dictated by race. Local revenue autonomy and the extent of resource disbursement from national government was also race-based. European area local governments had more self-governing scope than African area local governments. Urban areas also reflected this administrative and governance dualism. After 1980 and for most of the first two decades a concern with removing race-based dualities informed the socio-economic transformation including the reforms in local government. These reforms were generally framed as decentralisation. Progress was made except that in Zimbabwe's western regions civil and political disturbances seriously undermined local governance development with negative consequences for socio-economic development. As a consequence, Matabeleland North for instance has remained Zimbabwe's least developed province. It lags behind in most socio-economic indicators.

2.2 Second to third decade governance struggles

The 1990s started on the back of 'unity' heralded by the end of the civil and political disturbances in Zimbabwe's western regions. Since the late 1990s two key factors have shaped the political economy of local governance with a bearing on relations between national government and local authorities. These are i) political party

affiliation, and ii) the absence of consensus on unresolved national questions like land (and associated agrarian reforms). The latter has made for a divisive policy-making environment characterised by mistrust. This is a result of a general degeneration of i) national economic levers, ii) international relations, and iii) the domestic governance environment.

Given that ZANU PF has been Zimbabwe's governing party since independence in 1980 it is associated with this mismanagement. The party has not responded creatively and openly enough to this governance burden. A perception that the party nurtured an unaccountable political and economic elite grew overtime costing the party electoral success in urban areas and culminating in the national election loss of 2008, the contestation that followed and a Government of National Unity from 2009 to 2013. The political contestations seriously affected local governments. Polarization and economic decline resulted with local government finances almost but collapsing. The ZANU PF-led national government is thus associated with this significantly below-par performance of policies and of programs that were designed but inadequately implemented. The period was also associated with recentralisation of some functions that had been decentralised in the early to mid-1990s. Zimbabwe's teetering on fragility was only partially reversed by the November 2017 political transition.

Unfortunately, the legacy of degenerated i) national economic levers, ii) international relations, and iii) the domestic governance environment remains. National government's image generally and with respect to its relations with local governments had foundationally drifted away from cooperative governance. Constitutionalising local government was seen as the only panacea to the challenge. In all this it is fair to suggest that ZANU PF party's strategic degeneration over time as seen in factionalism at all levels weighed down its performance. It is therefore not surprising that under ZANU PF's watch Zimbabwe has struggled to address corruption within the public, civil society and private sectors. Further, natural resource transparency has lagged other comparable jurisdictions while citizen participation has not flourished.

Local authority residents in mineral-rich territories (e.g. granite, diamond, timber, coal and other) complain about marginalisation for which the Shona have an apt description of *'being thirsty while one's legs are immersed in water'*. Based on the desire to address this challenge (both before and after independence) Zimbabweans fought a liberation struggle and sponsored reforms. The most significant of the latter in recent memory is the 2013 Constitution. The paper presents an assessment anchored on relevant provisions for purposes of defining the decentralisation ambition before evaluating the feasibility of more empowered local authorities in Zimbabwe.

2.3 Impact of the PE factors on Zimbabwe's decentralisation ambition

The downward trends in governance indicators discussed above have been noted in many national policy documents including Vision 2030 and TSP (see Compendium). A general response to the governance challenges has been recentralisation despite a 2013 Constitution of Zimbabwe that has devolution as one of its founding principles (Section 3:21). As such, racial and partisan politics led to governance centralisation. Fortunately, the ambition for decentralisation remained resilient. This is seen in a Constitution that defines three tiers of government with local authorities as a third tier (Section 5).

Further to defining a three-tier system of government, the Constitution provides elaborate rights for citizens citing specific groups for whom associational powers are guaranteed (Chapter 4). The constitution also has national development as a key objective whose attainment requires involvement of the people adding that the state must ensure that local communities benefit from resources in their areas (Section 13:2 and 3). Additionally, it devotes Chapters 14, 15 and 17 (especially Section 301 of Chapter 17) to laying out devolved structures and processes including funding arrangements.

These constitutional provisions clearly flow from a recognition that despite having local authorities run by directly elected political officials they remained subjugated by national government. This relationship was thus suboptimal, and the constitution-making process sponsored clear provisions for decentralisation by devolution. To be fair, constitutionalising local government built on an established local democratic tradition. This is

because by the time this occurred the country already had a consolidated experience with democratic local government that other African countries had drawn inspiration from in the early post-independence years.

The decentralisation ambition is thus built on lived (albeit progressively frustrated) institutional experiences on the back of formal laws. As such, the relevant constitutional provisions on decentralisation are within a context of recentralisation. In this framework, local governments are generally referred to as providers of basic services more than co-governors of the state. National policy making and implementation does not sufficiently recognise local governments as critical development actors by national government. There is some mistrust between these two levels of government. The section below engages with the feasibility of decentralisation implementation considering that the key PE factors remain.

3.0 Feasibility of decentralisation in Zimbabwe

First, as noted above the country is already formally divided into democratic local government areas within provinces. One of the provinces is co-terminus with a province (Bulawayo City) while (Harare City) makes up nearly 90% of the second Urban/Metropolitan province in Zimbabwe. The local governments have established local government associations with the urban one nearly a century old. This starting point is critical considering that local government foundations have generally remained firm even at the height of the national political crisis. This section discusses feasibility of furthering decentralisation.

3.1 Autonomy regarding revenue raising and spending

All of Zimbabwe's local governments have revenue raising powers in the form of service charges, unit or land taxes, rates or property taxes, levies and can borrow (subject to approval), enter into partnerships and/or receive donations to deploy to programs they set and execute. Budgets are prepared and adopted by the Councils through resolutions before being submitted for 'approval' at national level. From independence through the mid-1990s urban local governments generally funded their budgets in full while rural local governments were more dependent on national fiscal transfers and sector funding. Decentralisation implementation is thus feasible from the perspective of existing revenue raising and expenditure capacity. The intergovernmental fiscal transfer provision (Section 301) further provides a predictable revenue sharing framework between local governments and the other two tiers of government.

Areas for refinement include the i) 'national government approval and monitoring of budgets', ii) full implementation of Section 301 transfers, iii) degree of autonomy in entering into partnerships at a local level, and iv) the administration of state land including the clarity of revenue raising powers associated with such administration. In urban areas land administration overlaps between national and local governments was recently exposed by a Commission of Inquiry into the sale of urban and peri-urban state land since 2005. The Commission found how national government had mismanaged key processes of planning, allocation, valuation and development control processes leaving informal settlements that are not fully within the control of urban areas in which they grew. In rural areas fast track land reforms dislodged an established unit tax system when commercial farmland was transferred from farmers to the state. The revenue previously accruing to local governments was affected and the relations between land reform beneficiaries and the local governments for the areas where they farm are yet to be fully established. Most farmers owe loyalty to national government.

Over the last two decades most rural local governments have not been able to re-establish this revenue stream and the land reform beneficiaries are neither fully connected to nor committed to contributing to local development financing through Councils. This is partly because of tenure security issues but also variable citizen valuation of local government. The latter is also a legacy of the politically polarised manner in which land was redistributed. Councils were inadequately involved to establish their authority.

As such, while the legislative framework is clear, and the pre-crisis traditions are known local government financing is at its lowest. The disruptions cited above require attention. Further, though known to national government (technical and political actors) the disrupted financial architecture is rarely acknowledged as a

cause for ineffective local governments. Often, within the context of political point-scoring local governments are blamed for non-delivery, which has curiously been used for decentralisation policy reversals. The main ones relate to the takeover of urban water, sanitation and hygiene in the mid 2000s, vehicle licensing, and weak involvement of local governments in sector programs in agriculture, health and other sectors.

3.2 Local law making and enforcement

Zimbabwe's Councils are empowered to make and enforce local laws. Bigger Councils employ Municipal Police to police their areas based on both local and national laws in collaboration with the national policing institutions. Like with budgets Councils resolve on local laws before submitting them for 'approval' at national level where the Ministries responsible for local government and for justice help ensure consistency with other national laws and the constitution. A number of Councils have experienced 'approval' delays running into years constraining the policing of their areas. As a consequence, some have old by laws on their statute books, some as old as pre-independence. The quality of some laws has been found to be inadequate as well as the philosophy, which is considered inappropriate as it is more of prohibiting than enabling/facilitating.

Two additional gaps exist. One relates to prosecuting Municipal cases while the other is an overload of enforcement agencies at local level. Because there are no Municipal Courts by-law infractions are not always treated with the importance attached to infractions of national laws. This weakens local government policing or enforcement of the policies and laws they enact. Institutional overload and at times contradiction arise from national government organisations exercising functions of policy and law making as well as enforcement in areas that are the province of local governments. Areas like natural resource management, transport and traffic, street trading and local economic development (LED) are replete with national government involvement in ways that often contradict local governments retarding the entrenchment of their authority locally.

Economic management in Zimbabwe is generally centralised. Council roles remain unclear with the perception that they provide serviced land, oversee infrastructure and superstructure development and then provide services (waste management, water and sanitation etc.) and charge property rates. In both urban and rural areas economic development and management are not sufficiently territorialised.

3.3 Policy making and transitions to programs and services

Councils in Zimbabwe use a Committee system to debate issues and make recommendations that are then resolved on by Full Council. These Resolutions or Council Policies are arrived at with technical contributions from staff as well as Councilors' own research. Policies form the bases for preparing and adopting budgets which in turn allow Council staff to implement programs and deliver services.

The quality of Policies/Resolutions has occasionally been an area of concern. The Ministry responsible for local government has intervened at times asking local authorities to rescind Policies/Resolutions considered to be at variance with national policies or good governance principles. Incidences of this nature have often been seen as interference. In some instances, Ministry-inspired investigations have resulted in suspension of Councilors (including Mayors) particularly in urban areas. Because most urban areas have had opposition party representatives while the Minister has always been a ruling party member in a politically polarised environment interventions have generally been considered to be interference or usurping Council powers. Fortunately, the constitutional protection against unprocedural dismissal of Councilors is set to improve their security of tenure.

Policy making in a context of depressed financial performance has also resultantly been poor. At the same time, the technical skills local political leaders possess immediately after being elected have not been sufficient. Given limited capacity to finance ongoing capacity development the entry-level competences are rarely bettered. Local authority research is underfunded at the level of individual Councils as well as at association level because of funding but also polarization, which reduce the appetite to seek and use evidence for/in decision making. Citizen participation or engagement has also not always been consistent and cooperative.

3.4 National perspectives on policy and program localization or territorialisation

The three points above (finance, by-laws and policy transitions) speak to Council-focused realities relevant to development territorialisation. This sub-section looks at the national perspectives. From the onset, it is important to highlight that there has been progressive adjustment to national and local government relations. Some previously decentralised service delivery structures have been being recentralised starting from the late 1990s. Key factors determining this recentralisation include fiscal space shrinkage, a growing orientation towards control by national government and declining development planning and management capacity in the public sector overall. The resultant approach mix currently favors centralisation not decentralisation. This can be summed up as projectised development where national plans and projects are developed and local authorities are selected places where 'the projects will be implemented'. Government, UN and civil society organisations make choices based on national studies like MICS. Some of these projects are set up as pilots often with an expectation of national roll-out, which in the majority of cases does not take place.

In essence, local authorities become recipients of projects and programs developed with limited to no direct participation. For some civil society organizations Councils are not even involved when they prepare proposals in response to Calls for Proposals or when the organisations negotiate memoranda of understanding. Often these start at national level cascading to province and local authority through national government agencies. Critically, with local authority development planning having slowed down to a halt by the mid 1990s and Master Plans for most urban local authorities being out of date Councils lack appropriate frameworks for guiding not only Council-steered development but the work of external agencies including national government.

Councils thus deliver basic services in education, health, water and sanitation in an inadequately territorialised development framework. National government leads the architecture for the SDGs as well as ZUNDAF. Local authorities are currently not directly involved in discussing development cooperation agreements. These are also coordinated by national government with the Ministry responsible for finance. Pronouncements made by national government formally suggest the importance of local governments in development. In some respect this is contradicted by an emphasis made on the provincial and metropolitan tier, which is considered as 'the eyes and ears' of the Office of the national President more than one of three co-governing tiers.

3.5 Summary on the prospects and areas of focus for development territorialisation

Zimbabwe has critical aspects of a devolved system. It has 92 democratically elected Councils that prepare and approve their budgets, raise resources locally and finance most of their activities. Some key decentralisation and devolution implementation questions have been answered. This enhances the prospects for development territorialisation. However, the country still faces challenges in its inter-governmental relations despite having (since colonial times) a relatively devolved system. This reality has to be factored into key discussions from appropriate perspectives.

There are also new questions arising from the mechanisms established to sustain local or decentralised governance. Discontinuance of health grants has affected decentralised health service delivery. The depreciated national fiscal space and national government's reliance on donor funding for most of the social sectors has also presented a weak starting point for discussing decentralisation. Some of the sector funding administered through UN agencies is disbursed to civil society organisations that are directly implementing activities in local government areas. At these levels provincial and local arms of national government directly coordinate development more than Councils. As such, effective state coordination of development planning, implementation and evaluation are lacking at both national and local level. Development Plans are instruments that are critical for territorialisation.

The above gaps are clearly areas with considerable scope for support. Development partners can support a decentralisation program in Zimbabwe, which is yet to be articulated. Local participation is also an area needing adequate funding and capacity development in any decentralisation process. Implementation of constitutional provisions on revenue sharing between national government and other tiers as well as the development of

policy guidelines on decentralisation also provide a basis for optimism regarding territorialisation of development in Zimbabwe.

There are critical reforms that need support in Zimbabwe for the implementation of reforms envisioned under the 2013 Constitution. Regarding local law development these areas include on i) intergovernmental fiscal transfers, ii) citizen participation, and iii) intergovernmental relations (functions and structures). At the same time, a comprehensive framework for assessing local government capacities and developing human resources is currently lacking. For urban governments a combination of i) de-industrialisation, ii) de-urbanisation, and iii) informalisation of urban development and socio-economic activities needs to be attended as many settlements have suffered from service deficits, rising unemployment and stressed Municipal finances. These challenges need resolution in a context of decentralisation so that the urban areas are resilient, inclusive and sustainable.

4.0 Intergovernmental relations

4.1 Central government recognition of local authorities as a “development actor”

The political economy factors discussed in this paper particularly i) partisan politics, ii) depreciated national fiscal space, and iii) a steady recentralisation of development planning have shaped national government's recognition of local authorities as service delivery more than governance institutions. This has also been affected by the delayed alignment of local government laws meant to operationalize constitutional provisions on decentralisation. This has left existing governance relations managed by national government. For instance, the national decentralisation debate is principally led by national government with minimum engaged input from local governments and civil society.

4.2 Central government perspectives on Territorial Approaches to Local Development

The articulation of territory-based development has not been fully developed. Resources available for purposes of decentralisation implementation have been considerably limited since the turn of the century itself a reflection of Zimbabwe's position within the family of nations as well as its strained capacity to fund its development. The constitutionally defined tiers of government once fully set up may provide an institutional framework for territory-based development. What is important is for a more accountably facilitated sharing of competences followed by a well-funded capacity development process to be implemented. This is because the current emphasis by national government of a more economic than political decentralisation has an underlying risk of ongoing reforms leading to inadequate institutional arrangements. Essentially, projects that are 'national in nature' implemented in local areas with little to no input from local governments is what is considered as territory-based development. This approach is pitched as driven by an 'open for business' approach that attracts large scale investment in agriculture, mining and other economic sectors managed by national government. National government's perspective is therefore one of reasserting centralisation.

4.3 SWOT Analysis of the National Association of Local Authorities

Table 2 (below) shows the self-ratings by the national association. This was looked at in relation to supporting decentralisation implementation in Zimbabwe.

Variable	Rating (5 best & 1 least)	Comments
1. Representation	4.5	Effective representation of all 92 Councils. National government and other stakeholders recognise ZILGA as united voice of local government.
2. Lobbying & Advocacy	3	Association has worked to protect interests of Local Authorities in formulation of legislation, policy and operational frameworks including, at strategic moments engaging the National President. Association's organs need more research capacity to inform lobby and advocacy issues & strategies.
3. Research	2	Research has been very weak affecting evidence-based lobby and advocacy. Used to be one of the strongest pillars when donor funding was readily available. There is no dedicated research capacity at ZILGA.
4. Information & Communication	3.5	Knowledge Management is weak. This is attributed to lack of effective information gathering techniques. The Association relies on telephones, social media and email to gather information which has a poor response rate. There is some social media visibility and a partially viable website
5. Members Services	3	Service provision is fair as Association has been able to provide legal advisory services, knowledge and skills exchange, information dissemination, job evaluations, policy review and on demand training for Councilors and Officials
6. Capacity Building	2.5	Capacity building is project-based due to limited financial capability of both Association and members. Currently reliant on various civil society organisations through EU-funded projects where Association is co-applicant. Pursuing strategic capacity development and coordination of many initiatives are key gaps.
7. Projects & Programs	3	Association has fared fairly with national Roads Condition and Inventory Survey as well as the Service Level Benchmarking as key initiatives. However, due to financial constraints most initiatives remain unexecuted. Association is Co-Applicant on some European Union funded projects with CLGF and VNGi.
8. Employer Representative	3.5	The National Employment Council for Rural District Councils has managed to deal with welfare of workers by regularly negotiating with the Workers' Unions on conditions of service. Also oversees operations of a self-administered Pension Fund created for the membership.
9. Networking	3.5	Participates in key local networking platforms. Links with regional and international bodies is weak owing to failure to raise affiliation fees and thus unable to participate at events at that level.
10. Structure, Human Resources	3	Association has a lean structure due to financial constraints. This compromises ability of Secretariat to effectively deliver.
11. Availability of Office Space	4	ARDCZ owns a three-story building where the Offices are housed. The urban side is in rented accommodation.
12. Availability of Strategic Plan	2	No consolidated current ZILGA strategy
13. Lobbying & Advocacy Strategy in place	2	No updated strategy in place. Work in progress on decentralisation 'asks' and related reforms
14. Availability of Communication Strategy	1.5	No communication strategy
15. Democratic Governance	4	Policy makers democratically elected at all levels and same chain of accountability applies for decision making.
16. Financial Sustainability Plan	1	No financial sustainability plan in place
17. Relationship between Political and Technical Officials	3	Considerably uneven across member Councils. Some Mayors/Chairpersons and CEOs relate poorly while in other Councils cordial relations exist between policy and executive staff

Variable	Rating (5 best & 1 least)	Comments
18. Informed Executive Board	3	Board well informed of its mandate. There is need for continuous capacity building to match demands of the dynamic policy environment
19. Visibility & recognition by stakeholders	3.5	Association recognised as the representative of local government Conducting a customer satisfaction survey on member and stakeholder views.

4.3.1 ZILGA's strengths and areas for improvement

One of the relative strengths of the national association is that there is effective representation of all 92 Councils. National government and other stakeholders recognise ZILGA's constituent parts as the united voices of urban and rural local governments. Policy makers are democratically elected at all levels. The ARDCZ owns a three-story building where its offices are housed though the urban side is in rented accommodation. Further, the association participates in key local networking platforms and has some links with regional and international bodies.

Areas for improvement include strengthening research, lobbying and advocacy as well as international links. The links are weak owing to failure to raise affiliation fees making it difficult for ZILGA to participate at events at that level. Research has been very weak affecting evidence-based policy lobby and advocacy. This area used to be one of the strongest pillars when staff forums were vibrant and donor funding was readily available. At present there is no dedicated research capacity. This has seriously affected the work currently in progress on decentralisation 'asks' and related reforms. Association and member capacity building is project-based due to limited financial capability of both the association and member local authorities. There is reliance on various civil society organisations who provide ad hoc support as well as through EU-funded projects where Association is co-applicant. Pursuing strategic capacity development and coordination of many initiatives are also key gaps. There is no updated or consolidated ZILGA strategy in place currently.

4.3.2 Priority development areas

The decentralisation agenda in Zimbabwe requires *law reforms as well as the necessary capacity development*. Specific areas of law development include on i) intergovernmental fiscal transfers, ii) citizen participation, and iii) intergovernmental relations (functions and structures). The national structure steering decentralisation and devolution is currently headed by the national executive (President as Chair and Minister responsible for local government as Deputy). This is not considered to be the best framework to steer the necessary negotiations for the transfer of functions between national and local government.

Zimbabwe currently lacks a *comprehensive framework for assessing local government capacities and developing human resources*. Public Service institutions that used to develop relevant competences have lost the role (and capacity) to perform this function. This has in many ways affected the philosophy of local governance in Zimbabwe as each local authority has steered its own way based on available resources and the kind of partnerships it is able to mobilise. A National Framework and Strategy is needed

Since 2000 the country has undergone a combination of i) de-industrialisation, ii) de-urbanisation, and iii) informalisation of both urban development and socio-economic activities. Many settlements have suffered from service deficits, rising unemployment and stressed Municipal finances. These challenges need a clear policy that will guide their resolution in a context of *urban resilience, inclusion and sustainability*. *Citizen participation* broadly and the role of specific social groups like women and young people, those living with disability needs strengthening. Local and national policies, laws and good practices are needed.

5.0 Conclusion

Zimbabwe's decentralisation has a longstanding history of implementation. There are factors that have stalled effective and continuous implementation. These are not unique to Zimbabwe. However, in the country's case they have had an enduring effect as they have been associated with deep socio-economic and political challenges over an extended period. This has reduced the available financial, technical and political resources necessary for the design and implementation of decentralisation programs. Working with civil society as well as international development organizations it is however possible to design and implement decentralisation as part of supporting implementation of the country's 2013 Constitution. The paper has identified the areas that have perennially stalled decentralisation implementation while also pointing to appropriate entry points.