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Exploring the regional drivers of devolution in Matabeleland, Zimbabwe

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Abstract

The article explores the factors driving devolutionary reforms in Zimbabwe's Matabeleland region and seeks to understand why there is a high demand for devolution in this region compared to others in Zimbabwe. The research utilised a qualitative approach, employing in-depth interviews with various stakeholders in Matabeleland (local government practitioners and scholars, central government officials, Members of Parliament (MPs) and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs)). The study found that perceptions of the marginalisation of Matabeleland, a high level of centralisation of power, and the need for equitable distribution of governing powers and resources are key drivers of devolution in the region. The article suggests that, for the Government of Zimbabwe to promote national unity, stability, and good governance, the central government should devolve powers and resources to subnational governments by the principle of subsidiarity as provided by the Constitution of Zimbabwe. Additionally, the article recommends establishing an equalisation fund to drive development in marginalised provinces.

Keywords: Devolution; Matabeleland Region; Subnational Government; Zimbabwe

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1. Introduction

It is widely acknowledged that many countries worldwide have transitioned from centralised to devolved or decentralised governance systems (Marumahoko and Nhede, 2024; Nyikadzino and Shikha, 2022a; Obonyo and Muhumuza, 2023). However, the factors driving devolution vary significantly depending on political and socioeconomic contexts. Some scholars attribute the shift to the New Public Management (NPM) paradigm, which advocates for the decentralisation of government structures to enhance governance (Madhekeni, 2020; Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2012; Chigwata, 2018; Fiseha, 2024). This arose from the realisation that centralised government systems have been ineffective in addressing economic, social, and political development issues (Obonyo and Muhumuza, 2023). Dissatisfaction with the performance of centralised government systems in achieving national development goals led many African countries to reconsider their governance systems and move away from top-down approaches (Nyikadzino and Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2022a; Fiseha, 2022; Marumahoko and Nhede, 2024). Furthermore, multilateral and bilateral donor agencies pressurised African countries to revisit their governance systems and adopt devolution after realising the poor performance in developing and implementing development strategies and policies (Hyden, 2017; Diep et al., 2016). The World Bank, USAID, various UN agencies, and several other bilateral donors embraced devolution as a crucial governance reform and dedicated a considerable number of resources to devolution programmes (Nzimakwe and Pillay, 2014; Marumahoko and Nhede, 2024).

Various factors have greatly influenced the shift to devolved governance systems in Africa. While the NPM wave and multilateral and bilateral donor agencies have played a significant role, it's important not to overlook the impact of regional and ethnic pressures. According to Mbori (2021), regional pressures have compelled several African countries to share governmental powers and resources with local governments. Many African countries have had to address demands from ethnic, cultural and minority groups seeking political visibility, autonomy, and control over local resources and governance processes. For some minority and economically disenfranchised tribal groups, devolution has been seen as the only way to gain control over their local areas (Eresso, 2021). Political pressures based on ethnicity have prompted devolution reforms in countries like Ethiopia, South Africa, Mozambique, Nigeria, Uganda, Senegal, and Mali (Eresso, 2021; Obonyo and Muhumuza, 2023). Faced with regional pressures and conflicts, countries including South Africa, Kenya, Uganda, Namibia, Ethiopia, and Mozambique have adopted devolution as a strategy for conflict resolution and peace-building (Madhekeni, 2022; Mbori, 2021; Halabo, 2019).

In the context of Zimbabwe, there were visible regional pressures during the constitution-making process. The Matabeleland region has been advocating for devolution over the past three decades (Tshuma, 2021; Mhlanga, 2012). The constitution-making process provided an opportunity for the people of Matabeleland to push for the inclusion of devolution in the constitution, which they believed would give them a voice in governance and development processes (Chirisa, Muzenda, and Manyeruke, 2013). During the outreach programmes, various pressure groups and political parties (ZAPU - Zimbabwe African People's Union and MRP - Mthwakazi Republic Party) in Matabeleland mobilised and advocated for the inclusion of devolution in the constitution (Tshuma, 2021; Chirisa, Muzenda, and Manyeruke, 2013). All the provinces in the Matabeleland region voted in favour of devolution (Nyikadzino and Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2022b; Moyo and Ncube, 2014). However, there have been very few empirical studies explaining why the Matabeleland region has been advocating for devolution for decades. The few available studies based their arguments on secondary data

(Moyo and Ncube, 2014; Mhlanga, 2012; Chirisa et al., 2013). To address this gap, this study explained the drivers of devolution in the Matabeleland region based on primary data.

2. Literature reviews

2.1. Conceptualising devolution and its dimensions

This paper does not aim to delve into the various conceptions of devolution, as these are thoroughly covered in existing literature (refer to Nyikadzino and Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2022a; 2022b; Khambule, 2021; Chigwata, 2018; Nyikadzino and Madhekeni, 2022). In the context of this article, devolution is defined as the sharing and diffusion of governmental powers and resources among tiers of government, such as regions/provinces and local governments. Devolution represents the most powerful form of decentralisation that gives subnational governments the authority to govern independently. It bestows subnational governments with the autonomy to devise and execute development policies and programmes with minimal intervention from the central government. Autonomy can manifest in various ways, including fiscal, political, and administrative forms (Chigwata, 2018; Fiseha, 2024; Madhekeni, 2020). Fiscal autonomy permits subnational governments to raise and utilise funds locally and borrow money to finance capital-intensive projects (cited in Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2012; Khambule, 2021). Political autonomy empowers subnational governments to make decisions, elect their political leadership, and involve local citizens in policy processes. Finally, administrative autonomy allows lower levels of government to make staffing decisions (Madhekeni, 2020; Chigwata, 2018). Successful implementation of devolution necessitates striking a balance among the aforementioned three dimensions, as emphasising one can weaken the impact of devolutionary reforms.

2.2. Reasons for the devolutionary trend in Africa

Devolutionary reforms in Africa were necessitated by varying push-and-pull factors. This section therefore explores the factors that led to the adoption of devolutionary reforms in Africa.

2.2.1. Pressure from disenfranchised local groupings

Several African countries opted for devolution because of pressure from local groupings (Fiseha, 2022; Fiseha, 2024; Mbori, 2021). According to Fiseha (2022), most African countries were forced to devolve governmental powers by ethnic, political, cultural, and religious groupings that demanded stronger control over local resources and autonomy in decision-making. Mbori (2021) explains that calls for devolution in African countries originated from minority tribal groups and marginalised ethnic groups. The growing disgruntlement over inequitable sharing of national resources fuelled devolutionary movements in countries such as Uganda, Ethiopia, and Nigeria. Ethnic-based political conflicts-initiated devolution in Kenya, South Africa, Nigeria, Senegal, and Mali (Mbori, 2021; Halabo, 2019). The inability of national governments to deliver basic services to local peripheral areas effectively, efficiently, responsively, and equitably has ignited calls for devolution by local political and ethnic groups (Halabo, 2019).

2.2.2. *The need for state reconstruction and national stability*

In addition, many African governments pursued devolution to ensure state reconstruction and stability, given the occurrence of several civil wars and coups on the continent. Devolution was introduced in Africa in the 1990s to enhance stability and state reconstruction by giving different population groups and regions a significant stake in the economic, social, and political governance system (Jackson, 2020; Obonyo and Muhumuza, 2023). Halabo (2019) further stipulates that devolution is viewed as a reform strategy for rebuilding states afflicted by conflicts originating from ethnic diversity. As Jackson (2020) asserts, in the post-1990 period, devolution has proven to be a crucial conflict resolution mechanism. To them, it facilitated the resolution of the long conflicts in Ethiopia and South Africa.

Devolution provides an opportunity for marginalised groups and geographically dispersed ethnic groups that find it difficult to influence political dynamics at national levels to participate and exercise political authority at all levels of government (Obonyo and Muhumuza, 2023; Chigwata 2018). More so, granting different ethnic groups an opportunity to exercise self-rule reduces intergroup conflict in ethnically heterogeneous societies. Several African governments therefore adopted devolution to neutralise local ethnic groups with secessionist tendencies and to promote national stability. For example, in Uganda, as shown by Obonyo and Muhumuza (2023), devolution helped in achieving national harmony and peace among conflicting ethnic groups, particularly in light of previous tribal conflicts and political instability. Ojambo (2012) argues that in the aftermath of the civil war, Museveni adopted a bottom-up approach to state reconstruction through resistance councils.

A review of devolution achievements regarding nation-building produces contrasting results. The implementation of devolution enables previously marginalised ethnic minorities to have their own districts (Salgado and Biscaia, 2023; Eresso 2021). Notwithstanding these achievements, devolution failed to resolve the northern conflict in Uganda, which involved the Lord's Resistance Army and the central government. As illustrated by Kustenbauder (2010), the conflict lasted for more than two decades, causing the deaths of many people in Northern Uganda. Green (2008) indicates that the introduction of new local districts in Uganda resulted in increased ethnic conflicts. In Mozambique, devolution was regarded as a mechanism for reconciling historical political disputes between FRELIMO and RENAMO under the leadership of Dhlakama, and for redressing long-standing inequalities stemming from the colonial era (Salgado and Biscaia, 2023). Devolution, however, failed to resolve the political conflicts between FRELIMO and RENAMO in Mozambique. Club of Mozambique (2017) explains that the model of decentralisation marked by a strong centralising tradition and by an ideology of national unity, which views decentralisation as a threat to the unitary state, can hardly play an important role in the management of conflicts and bring political stability to the country.

2.2.3. *The democratic wave*

The present democratisation wave has also prompted several African countries to adopt devolution. According to Eresso (2021), a crucial driving force of devolutionary campaigns has been the desire to create the basis for the democratisation of state power and the advancement of participatory democracy and collective decision-making. Devolution is thus being adopted in many African countries on the assumption that the empowerment of the local people will actively foster their participation in local development processes and thus enhance sustainable local development. Diep, Archer and Guege (2016) opine that the history of most African countries demonstrates that they were under one-party systems ruled by authoritarian governments in the 1970s and

1980s. Devolution was introduced to the African continent after the Cold War in 1990 to ensure democratic transition and it fundamentally transformed governance systems. Obonyo and Muhumuza (2023) and Jackson (2020) illustrate that since the 1990s, several African countries have undergone fitful attempts to democratise power and devolve it to lower levels. In South Africa, devolution was introduced as a reform measure to deepen, reinforce, and consolidate democracy (cited in Vyas-Doorgapersad 2012:132). Mbori (2021) states that devolution can improve political accountability, increase public participation, and expedite decision-making processes. Fiseha (2024) suggested that devolution was expected to increase local community involvement in development initiatives, leading to greater ownership and sustainability. Devolution is widely acknowledged in governance as a crucial component of democracy and good governance practices.

2.2.4. The failure of centralised government systems

Khambule (2021) states that the failure of centralised traditional management approaches in the 1970s led African countries to decentralise governance structures. Obonyo and Muhumuza (2023) assert that the lack of progress in attaining national targets through centralisation has prompted several developing nations, particularly African countries, to place greater emphasis on top-down development approaches. The support for devolution can be attributed to dissatisfaction in different sectors with the capacity of centralised government systems to manage the development process (Khambule 2021; Fiseha, 2024; Marumahoko and Nhede, 2024). The shift towards devolution reflects a dissatisfaction with centralised governance, driven by the perception that it encourages high levels of corruption and a lack of accountability (Fiseha, 2024). Thus, devolution was widely adopted in African countries as a critical means of addressing the political, social, and economic issues plaguing centralised governments.

2.2.5. Donor agencies' pressure and support

According to Hyden (2017), donor agencies, bilateral and multilateral, influenced devolutionary reforms in Africa profoundly. These agencies utilised the underperformance of African states to push them into adopting devolution. Diep et al. (2016:4) highlight that, Western countries criticised centralised government models in Africa and endorsed devolution to improve local development. The devolvement of power and authority was pushed for on the basis that it reduces congestion and overload in the channels of communication in centralised governance systems (Nzimakwe and Pillay 2014; Marumahoko and Nhede, 2024). In addition, Khambule (2021) and Fiseha (2024) contend that devolution enables local governments to obtain reliable information concerning local preferences and to be in a better position to respond quickly to development problems. In the same vein, International Financial Institutions (IFIs) recommended that implementing devolution would address socioeconomic and political crises in Africa (Hyden, 2017). These IFIs, concerned with the failure of African governments, endorsed devolution, which coincided with the NPM agenda of reducing the frontiers of central governments (Marumahoko and Nhede, 2024).

3. Methodology

This study used a qualitative research approach premised on the social interpretive or hermeneutic paradigm. According to Bevir and Blakely (2018:9), the interpretive paradigm involves studying human behaviour and

argues that all social sciences should adopt a historical approach, utilising narratives as explanatory tools while acknowledging people's meanings and beliefs. Qualitative research focuses more on understanding "phenomena from the perspective of insiders" (Lapan et al., 2012). The researchers, therefore, selected a qualitative research approach because it allowed them to understand the drivers of devolution in the Matabeleland region from the perspective of participants from the area and those involved in decentralisation reforms as local government practitioners or scholars. Adopting a case study research design enabled the researchers to thoroughly investigate the devolution drivers in Matabeleland. As Yin (2009) notes, a case study design is more appropriate in contexts where researchers ask the 'why' questions.

To select participants, the researchers used purposive and snowball sampling. Initially, the researchers identified key informants in the Matabeleland regions who, after interviews, referred the researchers to some participants with the information required. The researchers purposively selected 29 information-rich participants who were strategically placed to provide useful insights into the key devolution drivers in Matabeleland. The participants comprised councillors, MPs, central government officials, academics, local government and residents' associations, local government officials and practitioners, and CSOs in the region. The sample size was determined using the principle of data saturation. According to Guest, Namey and Chen (2020), saturation refers to a stage in the research process when new incoming data adds little or no new insights. Complementary data was gathered using unobtrusive methods such as literature review and documentary search. Triangulating primary and secondary data sources enabled the researchers to comprehensively and holistically understand the devolution drivers in Matabeleland. The collected data was analysed through a combination of thematic and content analysis. Thematic and content analysis facilitated the identification of themes that provide insights into the devolution drivers in Matabeleland. For example, such drivers include the marginalisation of the Matabeleland region, the high centralisation of power, and the need for equitable distribution of resources.

Data was collected by the first author as part of the PhD thesis in the period between 2017 and 2020. The researchers decided to publish this article explaining the devolution drivers in Matabeleland to share critical insights with policymakers, local government practitioners and public policy and administration scholars. The study got ethical clearance from the Faculty Ethics Committee, University of Johannesburg (No. FoM-2016 PMG 0026). The researchers upheld ethics during the entire research process. For instance, to promote confidentiality and anonymity, the researchers used numbers in presenting data, for example, Respondent 1, Respondent 2 etc. Numbers were also used to protect the participants against harm given the political sensitivity of the subject matter. The researchers also explained to the participants the nature and scope of the study to allow them to make an informed decision to participate in the study. In addition, participants were asked to complete and sign the informed consent forms, although some preferred oral consent. Even after signing the consent forms, participants were assured of their right to withdraw from the interviews at any time if they were no longer comfortable with it.

4. Results and discussion

In this section, the researchers present the study's main findings. The study sought to explore the key devolution drivers or explain why people in the Matabeleland region are clamouring for devolution. The study found three related drivers, which include perceptions of the marginalisation of the Matabeleland region, high

centralisation of power, and the need for equitable distribution of resources. These points are explained in detail below.

4.1. The marginalisation of Matabeleland

The respondents' general perception indicated that the Matabeleland region's perpetual marginalisation largely necessitated calls for devolution. Respondent 6 stated in a focus group discussion that the Matabeleland region has been marginalised since independence. According to Mhlanga (2012:206), the marginalisation of Matabeleland represents a “northern problem” – a metaphor that depicts a discontented group claiming a history and identity different from that of the dominant ethnic group benefiting more from the state. The respondents expressed concern over the marginalisation of Matabeleland, arguing that the region lagged in terms of development and access to basic service delivery as compared to other regions. According to Mhlanga (2012:207), demands for a change of governance model in Zimbabwe are often against government policies that tend to favour Mashonaland, a region where the dominant ethnic group resides. In concurrence, the Mthwakazi Republican Party (MRP), a political party in Matabeleland, outlined in its 2018 political manifesto several grievances against the discrimination of the Matabeleland region. In the same vein, a Member of Parliament from Matabeleland interviewed in the study argued that resources were collected centrally and in the process of distribution, other provinces such as the Matabeleland were neglected and marginalised in the development process (Respondent 23). In support of the preceding argument, Respondent 20 from the Municipal Development Partner (MDP) based in Bulawayo cited several unfinished projects and some that took longer than expected; for instance, the construction of the National University of Science and Technology (NUST), Nkayi Road, the Zambezi Water Project, and the Joshua Mqabuko Nkomo Airport.

Similarly, Moyo (2013) argues that although Matabeleland has vast natural resources, the government systematically neglected and impoverished the region. In addition, Mhlanga (2012:215) explains that Matabeleland is home to three of the country's busiest border posts (Beitbridge, Plumtree, and Kazungula) that generate significant revenue for the state, as well as several tourist resort centres such as the Victoria Falls, Hwange National Park, and Matopos, which also contribute substantial foreign currency to the state. Despite these economic contributions, the province remains impoverished and underdeveloped. In addition, Moyo and Ncube (2014:297) claim that the Kariba Hydro-Electricity Power Station and the Hwange Thermal Power Station are located in Matabeleland but the majority of schools and homes in the surrounding Hwange, Kariba, and Binga districts have no electricity, yet these two major electricity generators supply electricity to the whole nation.

With regard to the state of development in Matabeleland, Respondent 7, a member of a residents' association, explained in a focus group discussion that urban roads and schools in the region were quite poor compared to rural schools and roads in other provinces. The respondent further complained that there were very few advanced-level schools, especially science schools. Respondent 18 from Matabeleland stated that some schools in the region lacked windows, textbooks, and adequate furniture. Respondents 22 and 23 were of the view that the dearth of capacity in schools negatively affected the pass rates in the region, which was reflected in the national pass rates, where provinces in Matabeleland have lower passes. Based on the previous arguments, the study concluded that the people of Matabeleland supported devolution to develop their region and benefit from its resources. They believed that implementing devolution would allow them to spearhead local economic development for the benefit of the province.

On the contrary, Respondent 12 argued that, notwithstanding the marginalisation issue, calls for devolution also tended to follow ethnic lines between the Matabeleland (Ndebele clan) and Mashonaland (Shona clan). The former is perceived as the abode of the “ruled”, while the latter is presented as the region of the “rulers” (Mhlanga 2012:207). According to Respondent 12, the Matabeleland and Mashonaland divide significantly shaped the conceptualisation of devolution in Zimbabwe. This explains why anti-devolutionists view devolution as a creature of ethnicity, with those advocating for it labelled as “tribalists”. This has been worsened by the fact that those at the forefront of purveying devolution are the people of Matabeleland. The study inferred that the marginalisation of Matabeleland triggered the drive by various organisations and groupings that reside in Bulawayo to push for devolution. Respondents 18 and 23 stated that they expected devolution to ensure equitable distribution of resources and to give them autonomy to control local resources and manage their local affairs. This supports Moyo’s (2013) observation that in Zimbabwe, provinces that voted for devolution during the outreach programmes included Matabeleland, Midlands, and Manicaland, which blame the national government for their underdeveloped infrastructure. People in the Matabeleland region are clamouring for devolution to gain control of regional development affairs.

The study, however, had conflicting findings. Respondent 19 criticised the idea that Matabeleland is marginalised, arguing that other provinces are even poorer. Respondent 15 supported this argument stating that the central government has perpetuated marginalisation across all regions. On the other hand, Respondent 12 believed that opposition political parties promoted the issue of marginalisation to gain support from the people of Matabeleland.

4.2. High centralisation of powers

The study established that centralisation of power, which resulted in some provinces lagging in development, also ignited the need for devolution of governmental powers in the Matabeleland region. Respondents 15 and 19 indicated that, in Zimbabwe, governing powers are tightly controlled by the president and the Minister of Local Government. Respondent 3 expressed concern over the centralisation of the Civil Protection Unit (CPU) at the Ministry of Local Government Public Works and National Housing (MLGPWNH) in Harare. Respondent 3 cautioned against the centralisation of the CPU, arguing:

How do you have a CPU that is responsible for dealing with disaster in 92 local authorities stationed in Harare? If there is a disaster in all local authorities, do you think the CPU at the MLGPWNH will be able to cope? It must be a function of local authorities to ensure responsiveness.

It can be inferred from the preceding quotation that important governmental functions such as disaster management should be devolved to local governments to enhance responsiveness. The central government should capacitate local governments so that they can effectively discharge devolved functions. Respondent 15 also remarked that local government statutes (the UCA and RDCA) give the Minister of Local Government excessive powers, which the minister uses to manage and mismanage subnational governments. Respondent 11 (2017), who was previously employed by the MLGPWNH, explained:

The problem we were having was that local government statutes, for example, the UCA, were very good pieces of legislation but they depended on the will of the minister to an extent that if you had

a bad minister, you ended up having bad local governance. They were directly under the control of the minister and depended on the party in power and the minister in charge.

This illustrates that local government statutes give the minister unfettered powers and, as a result, important decisions are made by the minister without any meaningful involvement of the lower tiers of government. Resultantly, the overall performance of subnational governments hinges on the capabilities of the minister in charge.

Subnational governments are treated as an appendage of and micromanaged by the centre. The centralisation of powers seriously compromised service delivery. Centralisation of power undermined innovation and creativity at lower levels. This study also probed the involvement of the central government in local budgetary processes. Overall, the study established that the MLGPWNH is heavily involved in the financial matters of subnational governments. Commenting on the local budgetary process, Respondent 18 referred to it as a guided and controlled process. This is mainly because the budget is approved by the parent ministry, which also provides guidelines on how it must be formulated. A respondent from the Bulawayo Metropolitan Province (BMP) who worked in the Department of Finance expressed concern over the involvement of the central government in routine local activities, arguing:

Even some purchases you need to do, you will be told that for you to buy certain things you need approval from the centre. If you want to buy a car for a CEO you need to get a letter of approval from the central government (Respondent 17).

The above excerpt implies that the MLGPWNH maintains a tight grip on local financial matters to the frustration of the subnational governments. The high level of central government involvement and interference in the operations of subnational governments greatly affects the autonomy of the latter. This affects the response rate to local issues and hamstring local authorities. Against this backdrop, Respondent 9 suggested that the role of the central government must be supervisory and must only provide a framework within which subnational governments operate.

Furthermore, the study highlighted the issuance of central government directives as one of the greatest challenges in the centralised local government system in Zimbabwe. Although legally provided for in both the UCA and RDCA, central government directives have had detrimental effects on local governments (Respondent 9). As illustrated by Respondent 13, central government directives have been turned into political strategies to control and frustrate opposition-dominated councils to the extent that they are blamed for poor service delivery and lose political mileage. Respondent 15 explained:

The effects of central directives come on times like this (the period towards elections) when political statements are made that discourage ratepayers from paying. In 2013, the government issued a directive to local authorities to cancel debts and now the vice president made a political statement which discouraged ratepayers from paying. But when you engage the people on socioeconomic development, people appreciate why they should pay, especially when they see that the authority is utilising funds properly.

The implication of this is that residents no longer pay their rates and expect favours from the central government, especially close to elections. This has been worsened by the fact that local governments do not receive any meaningful financial support from the central government to fund service delivery. As succinctly stated by one of the respondents, the directives and centralisation in general have failed the BMP (Respondent 20). The respondent further argued that instead of improving local governance, the directives perpetuate corruption, inefficiencies, and autocracy, and exclude citizens from governing themselves. In support of the above position, Marumahoko and Nhede (2024) note that the over-dominating central government chokes local government initiatives and development in general.

Another point of concern expressed by the respondents was the dismissal and suspension of democratically elected councillors by the parent ministry. A councillor interviewed in the study cited several accounts where successive ministers suspended mayors and councillors on allegations of improper land allocation, poor governance, and flawed tendering (Respondent 13). Respondent 10 viewed these suspensions as a ZANU-PF political tactic to decimate opposition-run councils. Despite the cited respondents' claims, Respondents 14 and 16 from the MLGPWNH defended such dismissals, citing rampant corruption by local councillors. Respondent 14 was of the view that if local governments are left to operate on their own, corruption can find a breeding ground, to the detriment of the effective functioning of local governments.

Based on the above, it is evident that calls for devolution in the BMP and Matabeleland, in general, are driven by people's dissatisfaction with one centre of power, which is seen as vulnerable to manipulation. The growing dissatisfaction of the people with an unresponsive national government paved the way for devolution in the BMP and Matabeleland at large. Respondent 12 expressed discontent with centralisation, blaming it for the rise of powerful central government officials who are protected by the very centre that does not want to voluntarily give away power.

4.3. The need for equitable distribution of resources

This study established that the need for equitable distribution of resources between the central government and the subnational governments also necessitated the constitutionalisation of devolution and local government. In Zimbabwe, the national government controls more lucrative sources of revenue, resulting in vertical fiscal imbalances. Respondent 18 remarked that the existence of fiscal imbalances caused fiscal stress on local authorities since they had more responsibilities with limited finances. According to Respondent 22, Matabeleland is quite endowed with natural resources such as wildlife, timber, and tourist resort centres such as Victoria Falls, Hwange National Park, and Matopos, among others, which generate a great deal of income but most of the money generated is rarely used in the area and there is no evidence that it is used to benefit the community. In support of the preceding argument, Respondent 18 complained that the central government tended to benefit more from remittances generated in Matabeleland. Mhlanga (2012) argues that tourist resort centres as foreign currency mobilisation points have not injected most of the revenue generated into the development of local districts or the entire region of Matabeleland. It can be deduced from the above arguments that there is a general perception among the participants that Matabeleland is not benefiting from locally generated revenue.

There was a perception that the distribution of resources in Zimbabwe reflects ethnic contours where Mashonaland benefits more at the expense of Matabeleland. Mhlanga (2012) advocates for the need to find a

way of correcting imbalances in regional resource distribution patterns. This problem is not peculiar to Zimbabwe; it is rather an African problem. In Nigeria, Halabo (2019) explains that ethnicity matters more than qualifications when it comes to the distribution of the best jobs and scholarships. Against this backdrop, the people in the BMP, as well as other provinces in Matabeleland, pushed for devolution and the constitutionalisation of local government so that there would be clearly written-down resource distribution mechanisms that ensure equitable distribution of resources (Respondent 6). Regarding the need for equitable distribution of resources, Respondent 11 stated:

In the past, there was nothing written and that is why, as local government experts, we called for devolution and the constitutionalisation of local government because we have always suffered from being given unfunded mandates, for example, health and education. So it must be clear that we will receive something to support health and education. We were given a mandate to run schools but we do not get any funding to finance that. We used to get some per capita grants but not anymore.

Essentially, it can be inferred from the above comment that local governments pushed for devolution as a way of ensuring a balance between the decentralised responsibilities and fiscal transfers from the centre. As Respondent 13 pointed out:

If there is a method where resources are pulled in the province, people can sit down and say now we have raised so much from these activities and now we are going to build a school or clinic in this area.

Devolution can therefore help provinces to address local needs since they understand their development priorities better compared to the central government. In support, Respondent 18 contended that, through devolution, provinces in Matabeleland will be able to build advanced-level science schools with laboratories clinics and roads at a particular given time and in line with the preferences of the people. In addition, the researchers argue that when there is equitable sharing of resources, people will realise the need to sustain local natural resources and will see the value of such resources. Devolution in this case will provide a mechanism to ensure that resources are shared so that people can benefit from their local resources. According to Respondents 20 and 22, the need for equitable distribution of resources explains why there is a provision in the CoZ that mandates the central government to transfer not less than 5% of the nationally raised resources to provincial governments. Regarding the transfer of resources, Respondent 20 stated:

For Bulawayo Metropolitan Province, the transfer of resources will help them to have their share of the national cake, unlike under centralisation where Harare is prioritised. They can plan for their different programmes. With their share, they can retain qualified people because they will be paid handsomely. At the moment, salaries in Harare are more attractive than those in Bulawayo.

The preceding comment shows high expectations of devolution. Devolution is seen as a useful tool for equitable distribution of the national budget. Through the equitable distribution of resources, devolution is expected to spearhead the development of previously marginalised provinces.

5. Recommendations

Based on the findings discussed above, the study proffers the following recommendations and considerations for the success of devolution in Zimbabwe:

- The central government should devolve governing powers and resources to provinces and local governments. With devolved powers and resources, subnational governments will develop policies that respond to development priorities with their respective regions and localities
- The central government should consider the devolution drivers in Matabeleland and other provinces in implementing devolution. The drivers of devolution discussed above should guide the central government in developing tailored devolution policies and programmes. Failure to address the drivers of devolution in Matabeleland would cause further disgruntlement that might trigger conflicts. As shown in the literature review section, devolution can serve as a conflict resolution strategy.
- The central government should consider establishing an equalisation fund to benefit marginalised provinces. Such a fund would enhance local economic development and horizontal equity.
- The central government through devolution funds and other funding opportunities should prioritise development gaps in Matabeleland and other provinces. The central government should promote citizen participation and prioritise stakeholders' demands in channelling devolution funds.

6. Conclusion

The articles sought to explore the devolution drivers in the Matabeleland region, an area which has been clamouring for devolution for decades. Through key informant interviews and documentary searches, the study found three main drivers of devolution in Matabeleland. These include perceptions on the marginalisation of the Matabeleland region, the high centralisation of power and the need for equitable distribution of governing powers and resources. Therefore, it can be concluded that devolution pressure in the Matabeleland region emanates from disgruntlement over underdevelopment in the region. The people of Matabeleland felt left behind in the development trajectory. They see devolution as a reform strategy that can empower them to take control over regional development issues.

Note

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