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Article

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LINKING CONSTITUENCY DEVELOPMENT FUND TO DEMOCRACY IN ZAMBIA

By John Kunda Sauti

The bulwark of decentralization is making citizens become protagonists of their own development and democracy agenda. Even though Zambia is a representative democracy, the Constituency Development Fund (CDF) in principle creates a platform for ordinary citizens to directly influence the kind and quality of their democracy through being protagonists of their development destinies; this is the bulwark of decentralization and subsidiarity. Succinctly, CDF is an avenue for direct democracy in Zambia- people must directly manage their own development at the lowest levels. The democracy summit held in Zambia on 29th and 30th March 2023 presented a candid opportunity for the national, regional, continent and global reflection and discernment on our democracies. A postmortem of the democracy summit catalyzed a critical argument that democracy is not end in itself, but a mere means to achieving public participation in governance, quality social and economic service delivery, good governance, transparency and accountability, common good, enlarging the civic space and constitutionalism.

From the above postmortem, it becomes vivid to connect Constituency Development Fund (CDF) to democracy in Zambia. It is justifiable to that argue that CDF significantly contributes to enhancement of democracy, that is, improved quality service provision, poverty alleviation and financing community development. Therefore, the current Constituency Development Fund project (increased allocation and increase ambit of CDF), is critical to the realization of democracy in Zambia. The ultimate realization of democracy culminates in quality access to service provisions like health, food, education, affordable cost of living, decent housing etc. In any democracy and democratic society, there are necessary conditions like community and civic participation, social service delivery, respect for human rights, legitimate rule, transparency, accountability.

In 1995, the National Assembly established the Constituency Development Fund (CDF) with the objective of supporting micro-community projects as part of the wider decentralization and local development policy. The CDF strategic intervention came four (4) years after the 1991 general elections. In 1991, Zambia opened a novel political development paradigm shift from the one-party state to the multi-party political system. Since the re-introduction of the multi-party system, Zambia has successfully held seven (7) general elections and three (3) peaceful transfer of power or handing over of the instruments of power. However, the quality of democracy is not only

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measured by the success of elections and transfer of power. Rather, through the conditions available for people to live a fullness of life.

The quality of democracy in any democratic society must transcend the fallacy of electoralism. The fallacy of electoralism reduces democracy to only elections, electoral processes and management of election outcomes. On the contrary, the quality of democracy anchor on indices like election harmony, quality of vote and election efficacy. These indices manifest through quality of the social and economic services, levels of corruption, confidence in government institutions and management of public resources. Therefore, the Constituency Development Fund (CDF) project in Zambia must deliberately be tailored to achieve the end of democracy; the achievement of quality social delivery and other Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The critical challenge of effectively managing CDF in Zambia from the perspective of democracy, is the heavy influence of elected political leaders. This continues to expose CDF to political vulnerabilities like politicization and reducing CDF to an election campaign agenda.

How can CDF aid in achieving the end of democracy in Zambia? Firstly, CDF must be depoliticized. CDF is a development agenda and not an election agenda. Hence, the CDF depoliticization agenda must start by reducing the political influence of elected leaders on CDF to prevent politicians from high-jacking the CDF development agenda for their political mileage. In so far as Zambia is a representative democracy, CDF must create a platform for ordinary citizens to directly influence the kind and quality of their democracy through being protagonists of their development destinies. This must be done through the people at constituency level managing the CDF programmes with support from the local authorities. There may be many challenges being faced in the implementation of CDF, but politicization of CDF emerges as a key impediment to effective enhancement of democracy whose objective is ensure quality service delivery for the citizens of this country. Effective implementation of CDF, being a key component of decentralization, will make citizens become protagonists of their own development agenda.

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