

Report



Identifying and Analysing Challenges in Accessibility of the Constituency Development Fund (CDF) Loans and Grants Among Women and Youths in Rural Communities: *A Case of Mansa and Samfya Districts.*

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ACRONYMS

CDF	Constituency Development Fund
CDFC	Constituency Development Fund Committee
FSD Zambia	Zambian Financial Sector Deepening Limited
JCTR	Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection
LA	Local Authorities
MLGRD	Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development
MoFNP	Ministry of Finance and National Planning
NAZ	National Assembly of Zambia
WDC	Ward Development Committee

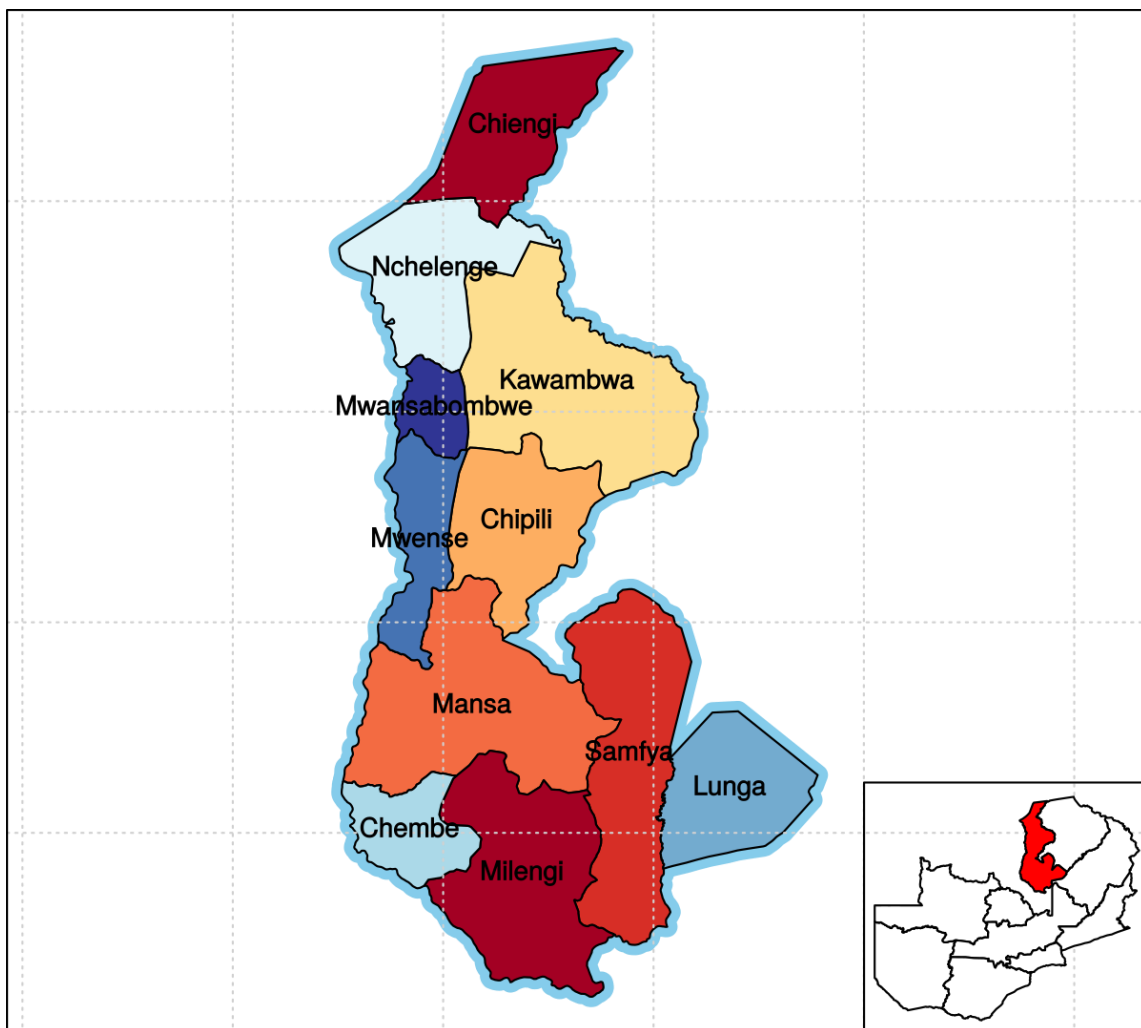


Figure 1: Map of Luapula Province, Zambia. Credit - Wikipedia

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection with support from the Zambian Financial Sector Deepening Limited (FSD Zambia) conducted a study on challenges encountered by women and youths in accessing Constituency Development Fund (CDF) in Mansa and Samfya districts. The study established that there was low accessibility of CDF loans and grants among women and youths in rural communities due to some causes like:

- ∇ The low financial literacy levels among community members in rural areas
- ∇ Low awareness levels on CDF loans and grants procedures
- ∇ Low literacy levels (Financial, reading and writing) among women and youths
- ∇ Shortage of CDF loans and grants application forms
- ∇ Lack of adequate and frequent sensitization activities on CDF loans and grants
- ∇ Limited project proposal development and project management capacities among women and youths
- ∇ Limited administrative support (transport and stationery) to the WDCs
- ∇ The application forms being too complicated for the youths and women

One of the outstanding challenge from the study was the poor quality of project proposals developed and submitted by women and youths in rural communities. This was being exacerbated by the complexity of the CDF loans and grants application forms, low literacy levels, limited skills in proposal development and project management, low knowledge on CDF loans and grants application procedures etc. Such challenges are inhibiting the achievement of the objectives of the CDF loans and grants, which is, to contribute towards the reduction of poverty and vulnerabilities as well as improving the livelihoods of the community.

Noting the numerous challenges, JCTR and FSD Zambia recommends the simplification (structure, format and language) of the CDF application forms (loans and grants) as well as the State and Non-State actors investing in project proposal development capacities as key activities. These interventions will increase the capacity of women and youths in rural communities to easily develop and submit quality CDF project proposals, which in turn, will increase the accessibility of CDF loans and grants among women and youths in rural communities.

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

This report was produced by the Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection (JCTR) with support from the Zambian Financial Sector Deepening Limited (FSD Zambia). The study focused on identifying and analysing challenges impeding accessibility of Constituency Development Fund (CDF) loans and grants among women and youths in rural areas (case of Mansa and Samfya districts). Constituency Development Fund is a fund that is constitutionally established under article 162 of the Constitution of Zambia.¹ Furthermore, article 162 which establishes CDF is operationalised through the Constituency Development Fund No 11 of 2018. Section 25 (b) of part IV of the CDF Act provide for the Ministry responsible for Local Government to develop CDF guidelines. In 2022, the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development (MLGRD) developed the 2022 CDF guidelines on the management, utilisation, disbursement and accountability of CDF. The 2022 CDF guidelines categorised CDF into three components which included community projects, empowerment and skills development. Even though, presently, CDF has three components, the Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection (JCTR) and Zambian Financial Sector Deepening Limited (FSD Zambia) survey focused only on the empowerment component.

Since the establishment of CDF in 1995, the fund has undergone numerous developments. However, in 2022, CDF became “*enhanced CDF*” through the increased budgetary allocation and the scope to include skills development and bursaries as well as empowerment.² During the 2022 national budget speech presentation, the Minister of Finance and National Planning (MoFNP) under the section on decentralization mentioned that:

“...the New Dawn Administration is taking resources closer to the people. To this end, we have significantly increased the Constituency Development Fund or CDF to K25.7 million per constituency (156...Madam Speaker, given this increased allocation for constituencies, we have widened the scope for utilisation of the Constituency Development Fund (158)...Madam, in addition to the traditional community based projects, empowerment schemes that were previously funded through relevant ministries such as youth and gender will now be funded under CDF”³(Dr. Musokotwane)

Furthermore, the 2022 CDF guidelines provided procedures on how to access the loans and grants. The empowerment was subdivided into two categories which included loans and grants respectively. From the 2022 CDF guidelines, the empowerment component was designed to utilize an inclusive approach where youth, women, people living with disabilities and other vulnerable community members could be considered. For instance, the 2022 CDF guidelines states that:

¹ Constitution of Zambia (2016 Amendment)

² 2022 CDF guidelines. Page 2

³ Dr. Situmbeko Msokotwane. 2022 National Budget presentation speech.

“Implementation of the empowerment component of the CDF shall adopt an inclusive approach. The empowerment Fund shall prioritise the youths, women, people living with disability and other vulnerable persons in the community. Empowerment beneficiaries shall be equipped with seed money in form of grants given to Organised Groups, Clubs and Cooperatives. Additionally, empowerment loans shall be given to cooperatives and individuals with established small and medium scale businesses wishing to grow their businesses within the Constituency”⁴

The 2022 CDF guidelines recognised numerous challenges that women, youth, people living with disabilities and other vulnerable community members encounter when it comes to accessing finances. The lack of access to finance manifested in the major challenge of limited access to means and factors of production like employment, empowerment opportunities and other needed skills. The main aim of the CDF empowerment is to contribute towards the reduction of poverty and vulnerabilities as well as improving the livelihoods of the community. The 2022 CDF guidelines recognised the need to address challenges facing women and youth by stating the following:

“The youths alone constitute a large proportion of the Country’s productive age group and this empowerment will target programs that address youth related challenges such as limited access to education and skills development, limited access to factors of production including finance, limited employment and empowerment opportunities. Empowerment of the women and other vulnerable persons will contribute towards the reduction of vulnerability and improving livelihoods of the community”⁵ (2022 CDF Guidelines)

Even though the Government enhanced the Constituency Development fund both by budgetary allocation and scope, the fund faced numerous challenges. In 2022 during the 2023 national budget presentation, the Minister of Finance and National Planning noted some challenges with CDF utilization. Some of the challenges included approval processes, cumbersome procurement procedures and others as cited below:

“(172) So far K3 billion, representing 75 percent of the allocation, has been released. However, utilisation has been unsatisfactory as less than 10 percent of the released amount has been utilised. The underutilisation has been due to administrative challenges such as highly centralised approval processes required under the law; cumbersome procurement procedures; and limited capacity in project preparation, among others”⁶

⁴ 2022 CDF guidelines. Page. 6

⁵ 2022 CDF guidelines. Page 6

⁶ Dr. Situmbeko Msokotwane. 2023 National budget presentation Address.



Figure 2: Community Members in Chief Chisunka area populating a CDF Empowerment Application form

CDF anchoring on the decentralization agenda entails that community members must actively participate in CDF processes. According to Chrine et al, community participation can be understood as a strategy for involving society in matters which concern them and it is very vital in decision-making and sustainable rural development and it must be at all levels from project identification to project implementation, monitoring and evaluation.⁷ Even though this is the ideal thought about community participation in CDF, in practice, community participation in the implementation of CDF remains with numerous notable challenges like vulnerable community members being hindered, especially by socio-economic variables like education levels, culture, gender, age, income level, poverty etc. Furthermore, other scholars like Chrine et al have alluded poor local participation to multiple factors like limited awareness on CDF processes, lack of disseminating information about CDF and decisions on available media platforms like radio, meetings, and drama pamphlets.⁸ The dissemination of information and decisions about CDF to community members can ignite their interest in CDF, thereby enhancing their participation. Other scholars like Chibomba connect low community participation in CDF to insufficient dissemination of CDF materials and low literacy levels among community members.⁹ Many communities, especially rural communities struggle with accessing information, education and communication materials on CDF.

Equally, according to a report by JCTR, it was noted that transparency and accountability in the implementation CDF remained a challenge. Citing the report, the causes impeding transparency and accountability in the implementation of CDF were alluded to challenges like lack of

⁷ Chrine C. Hapompwe, Mabvuto Naniyas Tembo, Elizabeth Zyambo, 2020. An Assessment of the Impact of Constituency Development Fund on Rural Development in Education and Health Sectors in Rufunsa Constituency, Zambia p. 892

⁸ Chrine C. Hapompwe, Mabvuto Naniyas Tembo, Elizabeth Zyambo, 2020. An Assessment of the Impact of Constituency Development Fund on Rural Development in Education and Health Sectors in Rufunsa Constituency, Zambia p. 892

⁹ Chibombo, 2013. The Constituency Development Fund as a tool for Community Development: A case study of Katuba Constituency in Zambia. p.74

information about the CDF particularly in terms of the calendar of disbursement, financial decisions, priority setting and project selection, the overall management and administration of the CDF, the lack of community consultation and involvement and the late, inadequacies and inconsistencies in the release of the CDF allocation.¹⁰ Also, a research by Alex Money et al shows a nexus between monitoring and evaluation to transparency and accountability in the implementation of CDF in Zambia. In order to enhance the efficacy of CDF mechanism, the report argues that there is need for data on project identification, selection and implementation.¹¹

The above brief background indicates that Non-State Actor/actresses and academician have researched on challenges pertaining to transparency, accountability and community participation in CDF. However, little research has been conducted on CDF empowerment loans and grants. Therefore, this research report contributes to the body of knowledge and advocacy content for non-state actor/actresses and academicians.

ORGANISATIONAL PROFILE

The Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection (JCTR) is a Faith-Based Organisation that came into existence in 1988. The Centre is a social ministry of the Society of Jesus (commonly known as Jesuit Fathers) in the Catholic Church. The overall mandate of JCTR is to create a just Zambian society where everyone enjoys the fullness of life. In the line of promoting fullness of life, JCTR is immensely involved in the promotion social and economic justice. This is done through advocating for pro-poor policies, educating and informing community members, lobbying Government to respond to the needs of community members, especially the vulnerable, marginalised and the poor, engaging duty bearers and policy makers to ensure improved living standards and conditions. JCTR is guided by values such as common good, human dignity, preferential option for the poor, solidarity, subsidiarity, transparency, accountability and discernment.

With support from Zambian Financial Sector Deepening Limited (FSD Zambia), the Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection (JCTR) was implementing a project aimed at increasing accessibility of CDF loans and grants among women and youths in rural communities of Mansa and Samfya districts in Zambia. Specific communities in these districts were selected for the implementation of the project on the basis of FSD intervention and surveys in line with financial accessibility. These communities were Chief Chisunka area and Kasoma Bangweulu area. The project was running up to the end of February 2024. This study, focused on identifying and analysing challenges in accessibility of CDF loans and grants among women and youth in rural communities.

¹⁰ Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection, 2019. *Understanding the Usage of Constituency Development Fund (CDF) in Zambia: The Case of Education, Health, Water and Sanitation Projects in Chishipula, Kapulanga, Chamboli and Simoonga Communities*, Lusaka. P.43

¹¹ Alex Money et Al, 2023. *Mobilizing Investment for Climate-Compatible Growth Through Zambia's Constituency Development Fund*. P.33

SYNOPSIS OF THE GUIDELINES ON CDF GRANTS AND LOANS

The 2022 CDF guidelines provide for procedures and processes on accessing loans and grants. The guidelines in part IV make provisions for identification and management of the groups benefiting from CDF loans and grants. Below is the procedure for identifying CDF loans and beneficiaries:

“The CDFC, in conjunction with the Local Authority, shall invite applications from the community by the end of February of each year for implementation in the following year. This shall be done by way of advertisements, public awareness, meetings and fixing of posters in public places (Schools, Markets, Clinics, Churches, Constituency Parliamentary Office etc.). Where available public address systems, Local Authority websites and social media platforms shall be used”¹²

The CDF managing officers select CDF loans and grants beneficiaries based on the criterion as provided by the 2022 CDF guidelines. The following are the conditions that beneficiaries of grants and loans must meet:

- ∇ Cooperatives, Clubs, Associations and Organised Groups shall apply for grants to the Ward Development Committees (WDCs) to be used as seed money to establish a revolving fund to support their Members; and
- ∇ The Constituency Development Fund Committees (CDFCs) receiving, reviewing applications submitted by the WDC and submit the consolidated list for approval
- ∇ The CDFC, working with the Local Authority inviting Financial Institutions to apply for consideration to manage the CDF Revolving Fund and disburse loans to qualifying applicants in the Constituency;
- ∇ The CDFC shall receive and review applications and recommend eligible Financial Institutions for approval
- ∇ Small and Medium Scale Enterprises, Cooperatives, Associations, Clubs and Individuals shall apply for loans to the approved Financial Institutions.¹³

Besides the parameters guiding the qualities that CDF loans and grants must meet, there is also the application process. The following is the application process:

- ∇ Obtain project application forms at not-cost (*free of charge from the Local Authority, Parliamentary Constituency Office, any Public Institution in the Constituency or identified financial institution as well as the Local Authority Website*)
- ∇ Application forms shall be typed or filled in a clear handwriting

¹²2022 CDF guidelines page. 23

¹³ See 2022 CDF guidelines on page 25

In order to successfully submit a complete CDF grant form, the applicant must ensure that signed Minutes of the Ward Development Executive Committee Meeting are attached by the WDC Chairperson, the WDC vice chairperson or nominated member by the committee.¹⁴ In the case of CDF loans, the guidelines stipulate that the application must be accompanied by a signed recommendation from the Chairperson of the WDC confirming the residency of the applicant in the Constituency, after which, the WDC would submit a consolidated list of applicants for empowerment loans to the CDFC for information.¹⁵

According to the 2022 CDF guidelines, for a Cooperative, Club, Association or Organised groups to access the CDF grants, they must meet the following:

- ∇ Must have a minimum of ten (10) Members;
- ∇ Proof of a bank account or mobile wallet registered for the group;
- ∇ Proposals for empowerment shall provide employment opportunities;
- ∇ The proposed project is being undertaken within the Constituency;
- ∇ Applicants must have been residents in the Constituency for over 6 months
- ∇ Cooperatives, Clubs, Associations and Organised Groups may qualify for a maximum of K40, 000 as a one-off grant.

In the case of CDF loans, the criterion is different from the CDF grants. The criterion for accessing the CDF loans include:

- ∇ Applicants must present a viable business/project proposal
- ∇ Proof of a bank account or mobile wallet
- ∇ Proposals for empowerment shall provide employment opportunities
- ∇ The proposed project is being undertaken within the Constituency
- ∇ Applicants must have been residents in the Constituency for over 6 months
- ∇ A legally registered business, organization, company, group, cooperative, enterprise or club fully owned by Zambian Youth (registered with PACRA, Registrar of NGOs, Zambia Agency for Persons with Disabilities, Registrar of Cooperatives, Local Authorities, National Council for Construction (NCC), National Youth Development Council (NYDC) and other registration bodies)

According to the 2022 CDF guidelines, an application for a loan or grant must be accompanied by:

- ∇ Green National Registration Card (Where applicable for all project members);

¹⁴ See 2022 CDF guidelines

¹⁵ See 2022 CDF guidelines. Furthermore, only applications signed by the WDC Chairperson, the WDC vice chairperson or nominated member by the committee will be considered

- ∇ A letter of recommendation from a Civic Leader, Religious Leader, Traditional Leader, a Commissioner of Oaths or a Bank Manager
- ∇ Proof of a bank account or mobile wallet registered for the group
- ∇ A copy of a valid certificate of company, organization, group, cooperative, enterprise or club registered with PACRA, Registrar of NGOs, Zambia Agency for Persons with Disabilities, Registrar of Cooperatives, Local Authority, National Construction Council (NCC), National Youth Development Council (NYDC) and other Registration Bodies.

The table below shows the thresholds and the repayment period for the loans.

	CAPITAL THRESHOLD	REPAYMENT PERIOD
1	K5,000 – K10,000	12 Months (1 year)
2	10,001 – K25,000	18 months (1 year 6 months)
3	K25,001 – K50,000	24months (2 years)
4	K50,001 – K100,000	36 months (3 years)
5	K100,001 – K200,000	48 months (4 years)

In the event that a loan or grant’s application is approved, the applicant shall sign a grant or loan agreement made between the Local Authority or an identified Financial Institution and the applicant as may be applicable¹⁶

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The main objective of the research was to identify the challenges women and youth encounter in accessing CDF empowerment funds, while the specific objectives included:

- ∇ To establish the awareness levels among community members on accessing CDF loans and grants processes
- ∇ To determine the challenges women and youth face in accessing CDF loans and grants
- ∇ To identify the challenges WDCs encounter in facilitating the CDF loans and grants applications

¹⁶ See 2022 CDF guidelines.

- ∇ To develop recommendations that would enhance women and youth (especially in rural communities) accessibility of CDF loans and grants

STUDY METHODOLOGY

The study was purely qualitative. The qualitative data was collected and analysed using Focus Group Discussions and the Atlast.ti software respectively, where the collected data was coded and grouped into themes. As a research design, the study adopted a case study design, because JCTR and FSD Zambia needed an in-depth understanding of the causes of the low accessibility of CDF loans and grants among women and youths in rural communities.

The study was conducted in Mansa district (focusing on Chief Chisunka area) and Samfya district (Chief Kasoma Bangweulu area) focusing on the challenges women and youth face in accessing CDF empowerment funds. To select study participants, the study used a purposive sampling technique where the researchers focused on community members who had participated in FSD Zambia's interventions. The sample included 40 participants (20 in Mansa and 20 in Samfya) who included 19 females and 21 males (16 youth, 15 women and 9 men). When conducting the study, the researchers guaranteed practiced virtues like confidentiality, respect, protection of privacy and no harm. Lastly, the study objectives and the purpose for gathering the information were fully shared with the study participants.

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The findings based on the collected and analysed data are presented below and are arranged in such a way as to align with the key research objectives of the study. However, given the small number of respondents interviewed, the results should be treated as a case study of two districts. Additionally, given the small sample size, Local Authorities and CDFCs were not represented in the sample. Therefore, all experiences are from community members and WDCs. Notwithstanding, the results remain valid enough to highlight some of the challenges women and youth (in rural communities) encounter in accessing CDF loans and grants.

KEY FINDINGS

Finding 1: Insufficient knowledge among community members on CDF loans and grants

From the study, it was observed that all the study participants knew CDF as a Government project and programme. However, it was observed that there was limited knowledge among women and youth on the CDF loans and grants processes and procedures. Firstly, many community members could not differentiate between a CDF loan and CDF grant. Additionally, many participants in the

study, could not itemise the conditionalities for the CDF loans and the conditionalities for the CDF grants. During the study, some participants shared that:

“CDF is a good thing and it’s nice. But we need to know the difference between a loan and grant. Some of us did applications for grants, only to be told that you can’t be given the money you applied for, because you applied on the amount in the category of loan, yet we wanted a grant” (FGD Participant 19)

In the case of knowledge on CDF, some participants shared sentiments such as:

“...what we know is that CDF empowerment is the money given to people who have formed groups. Now, we don’t know where to find forms and even how they just apply. To us it seems those people are chosen from elsewhere or they are connected” (FGD participant 7)

A similar sentiment was shared emphasising that:

“we don’t hear about CDF from those managing it. So, when we have applied that is when we are being told that some papers are missing. So, what we need to see is those in charge coming to explain to us on the processes before we waste our money on papers and transport” (FGD participant 9)

On the contrary, another participant shared a different opinion on the CDF loans and grants stating that:

“To be honest, we know where to get the forms and how to apply. The biggest problem we have is someone to help us write the correct things. Normally, we just go round asking WDCs to guide us. Also, our challenge is not getting feedback on how our proposals performed” (FGD participant 18)

The above finding shows that there is information gap on community members understanding the CDF loans and grants processes. To close the gap, community members needed to know where to find the application forms, the application dates, the required appendices and other necessary documents needed to make a full application. Equally, the Local Authorities needed to sensitize and educate the community on CDF loans and grants processes. Furthermore, the Local Authorities needed to ensure that adequate feedback to the applicants (especially the rejected proposals) was given. This would have enhanced the knowledge levels among community members on CDF grants and loans processes.

Finding 2: Lack of sufficient and frequent sensitisation activities on CDF loans and grants

Many participants in the study indicated that they learnt or heard about CDF from fellow community members. It was established that the information they were getting from fellow community members at times had information gaps or missing information.

Some participants in the focus group discussions shared that:

“We hear about CDF. Today there is no one who can say I have not heard about CDF. Even little ones know CDF. Our challenge is that no one comes to us to hold meeting and properly explain to us how the process is done. Some of us we could apply for CDF money not knowing that those applying beyond 40,000 must apply for loans. Meanwhile, us we were busy applying for a grant. So, if we had someone to properly explain the process to us, we could not have made that mistake. So, what we need are people from the offices or even our WDCs must be explaining these things to us” (FGD participant 4)

On the other end, some participants in the study shared that they did not attend any CDF sensitization activity or meeting. While others shared that at times they could hear CDF being discussed on radio, however, they did not keenly follow the radio programmes on CDF. Those who had heard about CDF on any media platform shared the following:

“Me I have heard about CDF on radio. That day I just came from the field and CDF was being discussed. The gentleman on the radio was encouraging people to apply for CDF bursaries and people to form cooperatives. But it’s difficult to know when the programme will hold, we just chance them” (FGD Participant 33)

A different experience from those who had heard about CDF on media platforms shared the following sentiment:

“...to know about CDF, we just hear from people around. Sometimes you find people at the market moving with papers, sometimes you just see people making groups. When you inquire, then you hear that it is CDF. So, we mainly know about CDF from our fellow community members who sometimes do not give full information because they think you will compete” (FGD participant 27)

From the finding, it was evident that one of the main causes of the low knowledge levels among community members on CDF process was the lack of adequate and frequent sensitization activities on CDF processes, especially on loans and grants. In this case, there was need for the Local Authorities and non-state actors like Community Based Organisations (CBOs), Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), media and many others to intensify the sensitization and knowledge raising activities (especially in rural communities) on CDF processes, especially on loans and grants

application processes and requirements. This would aid the community members in having more knowledge about CDF, thereby, increasing the accessibility of loans and grants among women and youths in rural communities.

Finding 3: Limited project proposal development capacities among women and youths (in rural communities) to develop quality CDF project proposals.

From the study, it was established that the women and youths who participated in the study had limited capacities to develop quality proposals to merit the successful access of CDF loans and grants. Many participants did not know how to develop viable project proposals, especially designing project goal, project budget, monitoring and evaluation mechanism, project management and record keeping (especially with finances).

Some participants shared that:

“...we need to write project proposals, but to tell you the truth, this is new to us. We don't know what to write and where to start from. What we just did was coming together and say we want to keep chickens. We went to the WDC and told him we wanted to start keeping chickens, but we don't know what to write. We asked him to write for us” (FGD participant 8)

“...there is a challenge when it comes to the quality of proposals we receive. Most community members come to us so that we write proposals for them. All they want is money. Once they say we want to keep chickens, next thing is to mention the amount, even without properly calculating what is needed. Many community members do not know many things about managing projects. For most of the cooperatives, they start from the money and then along the way they want to have a goal. No wonder many cooperatives are failing to do what they proposed” (FGD participant 40)

From the above finding, there was need to build capacities of community members in rural communities on project proposal development. This would capacitate the community members on developing quality proposals as well as effectively managing their projects. As a result, this would increase the chances of women and youths in accessing CDF loans and grants.

Finding 4: The application forms are complicated for rural community members to successfully populate



Figure 3: Community Members in Chief Chisunka area populating a CDF Empowerment Application form

The community members shared that they had challenges with populating the CDF application forms (for those who had an opportunity to fill in the application forms). They stated that they did not fully understand what to put in some sections, because they did not comprehend what was required. Additionally, the literacy levels were low, hence they were sometimes asking the pupils, WDCs or other community members with higher literacy levels to write proposals on their behalf (e.g. teachers, nurses etc.).

Some of the participants shared that:

“To us these forms are not easy. Sometimes we have to write sentences, like the project proposal. Meanwhile, most of us in here did not complete schools, but we are expected to write good English. If the forms can be made simpler, I think many of us can manage, otherwise the current forms are loaded” (FGD participant 24)

On a similar note, another participant shared that:

“...us the youths we may know how to write. But most of the time we don't know how to respond to the questions in the forms. I remember I first saw the forms when my neighbours came to me so that write for them. This year I also wanted to try. In fact I even started, but I didn't have enough time to complete the forms, so I stopped” (FDG participant 16)

Adding to the same conversation, another participant shared that:

“... we really want this money because it will boost our small businesses and also improve our lives. So, since some of us can't write, we ask those going to school to write for us. Sometimes we just ask the WDC to write for us. My encouragement to everyone here is that don't fear WDCs. If you can't write, go to the WDCs to write for you” (FGD participant 29)

Away from the forms for grant application, a participant shared a new opinion on the loans form. The following was the sentiment of the participant:

“I have seen both the loans and grants forms. Honestly speaking, the form for the loans is very complicated for our calibre. The form has so many components such that by the time you are finishing, you yourself you are confused and you don't even clearly know what you are writing. Also, many of us here do not have capacities to qualify for loans because we don't have big businesses” (FGD participant 15)

From the findings, it was evident that many community members in rural communities had challenges populating the CDF loans and grants application forms. This was mainly as a result of low literacy levels among women and youths in rural communities. To mitigate this challenge, the ministry responsible may consider simplifying the application forms without changing the content. Also, the ministry should also consider translating the simplified guidelines into local languages. This will ensure accessibility and understanding among all community members, especially those who may be illiterate in the official language but proficient in their native languages.

Finding 5: shortage of CDF loans and grants application forms.

From the 2022 CDF guidelines, it is stated that:

- a. Project application forms (Appendix D) shall be obtained free of charge from the Local Authority, Parliamentary Constituency Office, any Public Institution in the Constituency or identified financial institution as well as the Local Authority Website;
- b. Application forms shall be typed or filled in a clear handwriting¹⁷

In the two districts, the study participants shared that they struggled accessing the CDF loans and grants forms. This was being caused by the WDCs receiving a limited number of application forms from the Local Authorities, where they were expected to photocopy more copies, while they did not have funds to make more copies. Additionally, the participants shared that the distance from

¹⁷ See the 2022 CDF Guidelines 5.2.3, page 24

their communities to the Local Authority offices was long, hence, they could not frequent the Local Authority offices to collect forms. In the same manner, a sentiment was shared that:

“...you see, sometimes we are given few forms, maybe even less than 10 copies. We need to photocopy for those who want forms. And sometimes we don't have the forms. Other times, we ask the group to make copies and if we are lucky someone is going to town, people put money together so that the person makes many copies. I think these copies must always be available, not only during the time of applications” (FGD participants 37)

“...sometimes we go the WDCs or the Councillor to ask for CDF forms. But we are told there are no forms, we must wait for someone to go to town. It's not only for the grants or money, sometimes even for those who want to take children to school on CDF support struggle to access the forms. Like my colleague has said, these forms must be readily available all the time” (FGD participant 26)

Accessing forms for CDF loans and grants in rural communities continued to negatively affect the accessibility of CDF loans and grants among women and youths in rural communities. There was need for the CDF implementers to ensure that the CDF loans and grants application forms were readily available in communities.

Finding 5: low literacy levels among women and youths to coherently populate the forms

In the two rural communities, it was established that there were low literacy levels (especially reading, writing and speaking in English as the official language) among many community members. The Ward Development Committee members who participated in the study shared that the literacy levels of their community members were low and it was affecting the quality of project proposals they submitted. Also, this doubled the work of the WDCs as the community members expected the WDCs to populate proposals for the community members.

In one of the areas when asked about their challenges as WDCs pertaining to CDF loans and grants, it was shared that:

“...the proposals we receive from our community members have serious grammatical issues. But also it is understandable that most of our members here can't read or write. So, it's a challenge because everyone is coming to WDCs so that we write the application forms for them. The literacy levels are really low” (FGD participant 40)

“The people here can talk. But the challenge comes when you ask them to write what they are saying, a problem begins. Again, it's like the WDC has to do all the work for them. This is a challenge we are facing” (Participant 19)

From the above finding, it was vivid that literacy levels had a bearing on the accessibility of CDF loans and grants. Noting that raising literacy levels may be difficult, probably implementers of CDF needed to consider simplifying the applications and training community members on populating the forms. This would enhance accessibility of CDF loans and grants and loans among women and youths in rural communities.

Finding 6: Weak mechanism to manage and coordinate the CDF empowered groups

Following the 2022 CDF guidelines on monitoring and evaluation responsibilities, at the ward level, it is stipulated that:

The WDEC shall constitute a team to monitor the implementation of projects at the Ward level. The monitoring team to conduct specific monitoring assignments shall consist of:

- a. Members of the WDC;*
- b. 4 Community members;*
- c. A representative of the Traditional Leadership in the Ward if any;*
- d. A representative of the Private Sector/Business Community; and*
- e. A representative of Civil Society in the Ward.*

The WDEC shall prepare and submit monitoring reports to the WDC for subsequent submission to the CDFC.¹⁸

During the study, it was established that the WDCs were facing a challenge to monitor the empowered groups, as many would disband or change the project after receiving the funds. This was being caused by low project management skills among cooperatives or clubs, inexperience to manage projects by cooperatives, receiving less money than they had applied for, poor monitoring and evaluation.

“Some members don’t have experience of managing projects. In fact, someone will write a proposal that I want to keep pigs, when the person has never kept pigs. What do you expect from that person? It’s a fail. Others will come together because they have heard there is money, thinking CDF money is free money. They will write a proposal, get money, share and that will be the end of the group” (Participant 25)

On the contrary, a different view was shared on the management of empowered groups. The sentiment shared was that:

¹⁸ See 2022 CDF guidelines 8.1.4, page 47

“...we want to be truthful with the money we are given. But now our challenge is that when you apply for 20,000, the council gives you 10,000. This changes the project. Also, sometimes when we budget for things, by the time you are being given money, prices would have increased. If you had planned to keep 300 chickens, you discover that you can only manage 250 Or 200 chickens”
(Participant 14)

Another study participant shared that:

“...we need to improve our systems. The WDCs find it difficult to monitor the empowered groups, because the groups are in contact with the Council. The WDC is not involved. So how do you monitor where you are not involved? And we think because there is no one to guide the empowered groups in wards, that is why some groups just eat the money” **(FGD participant 40)**

The findings showed that the mechanism to manage and coordinate the empowered group was weak as evidenced by little support given to empowered groups on project management. The empowered groups did not receive any oversight support as they implemented their projects. Additionally, there was need to enhance communication between the CDF loans or grants beneficiaries and the Local Authorities. This need arose because some beneficiaries changed the project, while others disbanded the cooperative after receiving the CDF resources. Furthermore, the Government and non-state actors needed to invest in building capacities of community members on project management and financial literacy. This would enhance the management of the empowered groups in line with meeting the CDF objectives.

Finding 7: Inadequate logistical support impeding the WDCs to reach the wider community members

The study showed that Ward Development Committee members in rural communities had vast areas to cover hence not reaching the wider community. This was being caused by lack of transport, financial support, stationery and other means for the WDCs to cover the whole ward. In the areas where the study was conducted, the WDCs need to cover over 15km.

Some of the participants in the study shared that:

“... You see; our ward is big. I can't manage going round every day. And when I reach the farthest end, I will be tired. If we ward some transport means like motorbikes, bicycles, I think this would help us to reach many community members. How do I go to the whole community if I don't have transport? And how do I go to monitor groups if I can't easily reach their zones” **(participant 40)**

Clearly, from the findings it was evident that the WDCs need some administrative and logistical support from the Local Authorities (e.g. a bicycle or motor bike – not meant to be a personal property, but for the office of WDC). This would aid the WDCs to reach the wider community as well as being able to effectively monitor the empowered groups as well as distributing CDF forms to those who would need them. This would enhance accessibility of CDF loans and grants among women and youths in rural communities.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The study aimed at identifying and analysing the challenges that were hindering the accessibility of the Constituency Development Fund (CDF) loans and grants among women and youth in rural communities. The study covered two communities namely Chief Chisunka area and Kasoma Bangweulu area in Mansa and Samfya districts respectively. In spite of the small sample size of the study participants, the findings are sufficient to give a broad picture of experiences on CDF loans and grants, given that rural communities in Zambia are homogeneous in nature.

The general impression from the study is that there is low accessibility of the CDF loans and grants among youths and women in rural communities. The causes of the low accessibility included:

- ∇ The low financial literacy levels among community members in rural areas was negatively impacting on the accessibility of CDF empowerment among women and youth in rural areas.
- ∇ Low awareness levels on CDF loans and grants procedures (application processes) among women and youth was negatively affecting accessibility of CDF loans and grants among women and youth.
- ∇ Low literacy levels (reading and writing) among women and youth in rural communities was negatively affecting accessibility of CDF loans and grants
- ∇ Limited availability of CDF loans and grants application forms was negatively affecting the accessibility of CDF loans and grants
- ∇ Lack of adequate and frequent sensitization activities on CDF loans and grants in the targeted communities
- ∇ Limited project proposal development capacities among women and youth in rural communities which leading to development of low quality project proposal development was negatively impacting on accessibility of CDF loans and grants.
- ∇ Inadequate administrative support (transport and stationery) to the WDCs was leading to the WDCs not reaching the wider community, thereby, negatively impacting on accessibility of CDF loans and grants among women and youth in rural communities.
- ∇ The application forms being complicated for the youth and women in rural communities to effectively and coherently populate

- ∇ Inadequate capacity among women and youths in rural communities to qualify for CDF loans, because many of them could not meet the criterion for accessing loans.

In the light of the foregoing, the following are the recommendations aimed at ensuring enhanced accessibility of CDF loans and grants among women and youth rural communities:

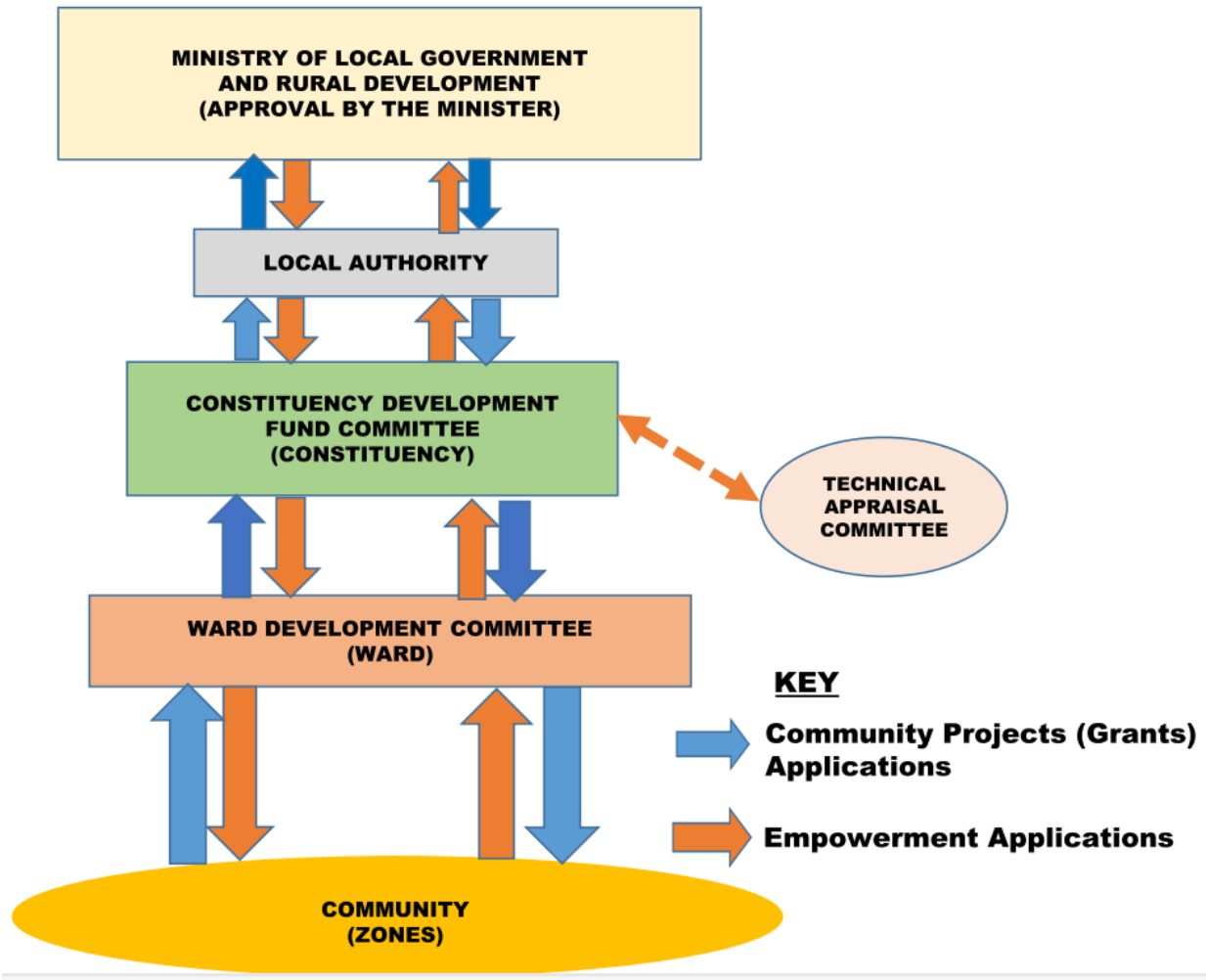
- ∇ Government and non-state actors must invest in building capacities of women and youth's rural communities in financial literacy and project proposal development skills. This will enhance accessibility to CDF loans and grants among women and youths in rural communities as well as effective management of the projects funded under loans and grants.
- ∇ Government and non-state actors must facilitate capacity building activities for women and youths in rural communities on project proposal development and project management skills. This will enhance the quality of project proposals as well as the management of projects funded under CDF loans and grants.
- ∇ Government and non-state actors must hold timely and frequent sensitizations activities on CDF processes, especially the empowerment component. This is will build capacities of women and youths in rural communities to correctly populate the loans and grants application forms and to submit full application forms (all documents attached)
- ∇ The Government through the Ministry of Local and Rural Development must ensure that the WDC administrative cost (transport and stationery) is budgeted for under the 5% CDF administrative costs at the Local Authority level. This will enable WDCs to reach wider community members, which in turn will increase accessibility of CDF loans and grants among women and youths in rural communities.
- ∇ Government in partnership with stakeholders like CSOs, CBOs, community members, banks, private sector must consider simplifying the CDF loans and grants application form, without losing the content. This will enhance women and youths in rural communities to access CDF loans and grants.
- ∇ Government should consider translating the simplified guidelines into local languages. This is crucial for ensuring accessibility and understanding among all community members, especially those who may be illiterate in the official language but proficient in their native languages.
- ∇ Government and non-state actors must consider investing in building capacities of WDCs in basic monitoring and evaluation as well as report writing. This will enhance the capacities of WDCs to effectively manage beneficiaries of CDF loans and grants. Furthermore, it will enhance the WDCs in documenting the successes, challenges and lessons learnt.
- ∇ The Government must reinforce the oversight role of WDCs and Local Authorities on the groups empowered by CDF resources.



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Vision Statement

"A Just Zambian Society Guided by Faith, Where Everyone Enjoys the Fullness of Life."

Mission Statement

"To Promote Justice and Equality for all, Especially the Poor and Marginalised, Through Christian Values, Education, Care for the Environment and Influencing Policy Formulation."

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