

**EXPLORING THE EXPERIENCES OF DISTRICT OFFICERS ON
DECENTRALIZATION AND ITS IMPACT ON CHILD WELFARE IN
LILONGWE AND NTCHISI DISTRICTS OF MALAWI.**

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my wife, Avima; my late father (Francis) and mother (Evelyn); Ndazona, Chembe, Memory and Aleta; and all the children in Malawi.



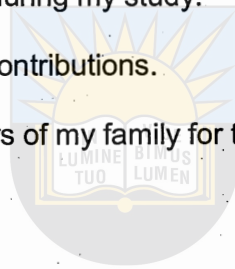
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Abstract

In line with the Malawi Government Decentralisation policy adopted in 1998, the Ministry of Gender, Children and Community Development also devolved its core functions in 2005. This research explores the experiences of district officers on decentralisation and its impact on child welfare in Ntchisi and Lilongwe districts of Malawi.

Using an exploratory design and qualitative research methods, the study explores the phenomena of decentralisation from the experiences of district officers who are at the centre of implementation of decentralised core functions of child welfare. In this regard, the study goes in-depth to understand whether decentralisation has had positive impact on the implementation of child welfare. The study utilises the functionalist perspective in which decentralisation is seen as a system that should lead to the functioning of the social whole.

The study concludes that although core functions of child welfare were decentralized, in practice the districts have not fully experienced it owing to the inter-play of various factors and challenges. The fiscal forms of decentralization have been implemented fully with the exception of few sectors that have not devolved their functions. The Administrative form of decentralization has been implemented partially. Officers are thus more accountable to their central line ministries than to their district council. In the absence of local elected councilors since their term expired in 2005, it is tricky to conclude that the districts are devolved politically.

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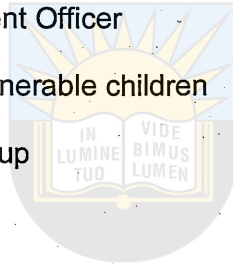
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List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

ADC	Areal Development Committee
AEC	Area Executive Committee
AIDS	Acquired Immunal Deficiency Syndrome
CDO	Community Development Officer
OVC	Orphans and Other Vulnerable children
IEG	Internal Evaluation Group
DC	District Commissioner
DCDO	District Community Development Officer
DDC	District Development Committee
DEC	District Executive Committee
DEM	District Education Officer
DHO	District Health Officer
DLO	District Labour Officer
DPD	Director of Planning and Development
DSWO	District Social Welfare Officer
DYO	District Youth Officer



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HIV	Human Immuno Deficiency Virus
LDF	Local Development Fund
MK	Malawi Kwacha
MOGCCD	Ministry of Gender, Children and Community Development
MOWCD	Ministry of Women and Child Development
NGO	Non Governmental Organisation
SWO	Social Welfare Officer
TA	Traditional Authority
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
VAC	Village Action Plans
VDC	Village Development Committees
VSU	Victim Support Unit
ZAR	South African Rand



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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1. Background to the study

Malawi adopted its decentralization policy in 1998. The form of decentralization that the government adopted was devolution which entails transfer of political and administrative authority to district level as a means for consolidating democracy and achieving poverty reduction (Samuels, Sibale and Selvester, 2009). Decentralization in Malawi was heralded by the coming of multi-party politics in 1993 which brought to an end 31 years of one party system of government. The shift to this system of government created the need to bring government closer to the people. Reforms leading to local governance have been considered as avenues towards creating an opportunity structure for the local communities to “fight against poverty at close range” (Samuels, Sibale and Selvester, 2009: 90).

Previously, the central government held much of the control over all governance issues relating to the districts. This was the case because it was consistent with the one party system of government that prevailed at the time. Before the current form of decentralization, districts were immediately reporting to regional (provincial) structures which had supervisory powers of the programme delivery arrangements at district level. In effect, most sectors such as health social welfare, education and agriculture among others had provincial offices overseeing the district offices. Largely, the form of

decentralization that existed was merely deconcentration aimed at serving the interests of the central ministries, as they lacked any political mandate.

In 2005, as part of the process of living up to the government policy of devolving some of its functions, the Department of Child Development Affairs in the Ministry of Women and Child Development devolved its core functions to the district level. This translated into district social welfare offices assuming exclusive powers to administer the provision of child welfare programmes in a manner appropriate to the needs and aspirations of the districts. The implications for devolving the functions are three fold. First, in terms of general administration, the district council led by the district commissioner has become the main authority to which district social welfare offices are primarily answerable. Nevertheless, the district offices are allowed to maintain a reporting link to the parent department at the central level through provision of policy, guidelines and support supervision. Second, Fiscal wise, the districts now get direct funding from various sources, a departure from initial arrangements where the central department had to control management of resources at the district offices. The Third implication is political. Elected local councilors now hold the overall responsibility of directing the provision of child welfare services in respective districts in Malawi.

The major aspect of decentralizing child welfare has been the administrative dimension. Previously, like many other sectors, social welfare provision maintained a structure at provincial level in the name of regional social welfare offices. There were three of them representing the three provinces that are in Malawi. Devolving the core functions of social welfare to the districts, effectively brought to an end the existence of the three

provincial offices. Any oversight administrative functions are thus shared between the central Ministry of Women and Child Development and the office of the district commissioner at district level.

The district social welfare offices' role is to serve as a focal point for coordination of child welfare functions. According to *The Strategic Plan for the Ministry of Women and Child Development, 2006 to 2011* (2006), the functions of social welfare office are outlined as being provision of child protection, early childhood development, probation and after-care for children in conflict with the law, administration of social protection including cash transfer schemes targeting children, provision of care and support interventions for orphans and other vulnerable children (OVC), and coordinating activities of stakeholders involved in addressing child welfare interventions. However, it is not clear as to whether decentralization brought about any changes in execution of child welfare activities at district assembly. It is also not clear as to how decentralization in child welfare is contributing to the very objectives of decentralization of alleviating poverty and in particular enhancing child wellbeing.

1.2. Problem Statement and Rationale

A problem statement is defined as a concise and precise description of the nature, scope, causes, severity and the effect or impact of a problem. It serves as an initial step around which research is undertaken. This section therefore discusses problem statement and the rationale for pursuing it.

1.2.1. Statement of Problem

This research pursues the problem that despite devolving child welfare programmes in Malawi, the provision of child welfare services still remains a challenge. Malawi is one of the countries whose socio-economic indicators are one of the worst in the world. Despite the fact that Malawi is one of the countries experiencing rapid socio-economic changes in Africa, most of its people are poor (about 52 percent), using the standards of living on one United States dollar per day as a measure (UNICEF, 2007:4). UNICEF further points out that although there have been improvements since 1998, Malawi still has one of the highest infant and child mortality rates estimated at 69 per 1000 live births and 118 per 1000 live births respectively. HIV and AIDS prevalence is at 12 percent causing further panic on a country that is already struggling in poverty; and with one million children being orphaned, the traditional family and community coping mechanisms for the care of children are being threatened. UNICEF (2007:4) also noted that Malawi is experiencing increased cases of child abuse in form of sexual abuse, physical violence, trafficking, domestic violence and harmful cultural practices, a situation that further complicates service delivery for children at the community level.

1.2.2. Rationale

Since adopting the new decentralization policy in 1998 and devolving child welfare functions, research to explore in detail, the impact of decentralization on child welfare in Malawi has not been adequately undertaken. Few attempts have however been made to unearth the impact and challenges facing child welfare provision in the districts. For instance, *Ministry of Women and Child Development: Human Resource Building Plan*

and Gap Analysis (2007:7) noted limited funding for districts to implement activities in the face of decentralization policy. In the same light, the Ministry' of Women and Child Development Strategic Plan (2006:20) also highlighted that human resource in the Malawi Civil Service is challenged by non-productive attitudes, lack of commitment to work programmes, poor resource utilisation, irregular attendance and lack of focus. The "capacity of social workers is vastly inadequate resulting in poor services delivery especially those related to protection of children" (The Republic of Malawi: National Plan of Action for Orphans and other Vulnerable Children, 2005:22).

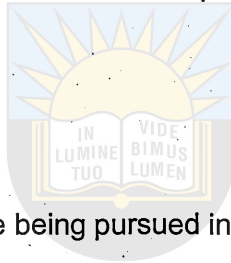
This research therefore attempts to get an in-depth understanding as to whether decentralization has had significant impact on the provision of child welfare programmes. This is done through an exploration of the experiences of the district officers themselves who happen to be at the centre of coordinating and implementing child welfare in the selected districts of Lilongwe and Ntchisi. In the process, the study will be contributing to the [Ministry of Women and child development] desire to... "overcome the obstacles to the process of devolution and capacity building and enlist support for implementation both within the Ministry and District institutions" (Ministry' of Women and Child Development Strategic Plan, 2006: 20).

1.3. Objectives

The main objective of this study is to explore the experiences of district officers with respect to the impact of decentralization on child welfare in Lilongwe and Ntchisi districts of Malawi. The specific objectives of the research are therefore as follows:

1. To explore how decentralization is conceived by district officers.

2. To explore the experiences of the district officers towards the impact of decentralization policy on child welfare.
3. To explore the nature and extent of preparedness of district officers in meeting the demands created by decentralization in service provision.
4. To establish changes that devolution of child welfare functions has brought to the district.
5. To explore challenges associated with the provision of child welfare services under decentralization



1.4. Research Questions

The main research questions that are being pursued in this study are as follows:

1. What perceptions do district officers hold on decentralization?
2. What are the experiences of district officers on the impact of implementing the decentralization policy in the provision of child welfare in Malawi.
3. What is the district level of preparedness in meeting the demands created by decentralization in service provision?
4. What changes in execution of core social welfare functions has decentralization brought?
5. What are the challenges facing the provision of child welfare under decentralization policy?

1.4. Significance of the study

Apart from contributing new knowledge to the academic area of social welfare and decentralization, this study will contribute to improving social policy in Malawi by bringing to surface practical issues that underlie decentralization and child welfare in Malawi. The study will come up with recommendations that can support the improvement of child welfare in Malawi, if adopted by government.

1.6. Definition of key concepts

1.6.1. Decentralization

This study will use the term decentralization as encompassing the process of divesting power to the districts so that they are able to operate as autonomous units in executing the welfare functions in the district.



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1.6.2. Child Welfare

Child welfare in the context of this study refers to the process or state of achieving the well being of the child.

1.6.3. District Officers.

District officers refer to the people that are employed by government and other organizations to work at the district level in different departments and sections in Malawi. They include, for purposes of this study, the District Commissioners, heads of various government departments, Non-governmental organizations, private sector and statutory corporations working at district level.

1.6.4. Ministry of Women and Child Development

This refers to a government of Malawi sector responsible for coordination of children, gender, and community development. In this study, it is also being referred to as Ministry of Gender, Children and Community development.

1.7. Chapter outline

Chapter one provides a background to the study. It also covers problem statement, objectives and research questions for the study. An outline of the chapters is also provided under chapter one.

Chapter two is literature review. It focuses on discussion of concepts and trends related to both decentralization and child welfare. A theoretical framework for the study is also discussed in the same chapter.

Chapter three is research methodology. It discusses the research design, methodology, sampling, data collection methods and analysis framework for the study. The chapter further highlights ethical considerations and limitations of the study.

Chapter four is about research findings. The chapter therefore presents findings collected through a qualitative research methodology.

Chapter five covers discussion of findings, conclusions and recommendations. The Discussion attempts to relate the findings with relevant scholarly work and data from a

document search of policy and programme documents on decentralization and child welfare. The conclusions are drawn from both literature review and the findings. In line with the conclusions, recommendations are generated and areas for further research are proposed.

1.8. Conclusion

This chapter has provided the context in which this research was conducted. In particular it has outlined background details that are at the root of the study. An attempt has also been made to discuss decentralization, child welfare and district officers which are key concepts and terms in this study. The chapter has also endeavored to outline the problem statement and rationale; significance; the research questions; and the objectives that guided the study. An outline of the chapters for the study has also been provided.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

2.1. Introduction

Literature review is an evaluation of documented works around the area of research. In the case of this study, it is a part of the process aimed at a critical examination of previous research and related materials on decentralization and child welfare. This literature review covers an over view of decentralization and child welfare in Malawi. The review also highlights the theoretical framework that informs this research.

2.2. Decentralization

This section explores the concept of decentralization, and historical trends in decentralization. It also focuses on the history of decentralization as it emerged from the colonial era through the one party era to multi-party democracy in Malawi. The discussion thus achieves to bring out a broader understanding of decentralization.

2.2.1. The concept of decentralization

The concept of decentralization has generated its own debate so much so that there is no precise agreement as to what constitutes it. Scheneider (2003:33) argues that there are multiple approaches to defining decentralization. For instance, it is observed that geographers and planners discussing spatial decentralisation would focus on reducing concentration in urban areas by promoting regional growth poles; political scientists would focus on bringing decision making to low levels of aggregation; economists would focus on smallest units that can efficiently produce goods and services that can meet the revealed preferences of individuals; and lawyers and public administration

professionals would focus on decreasing hierarchy and bureaucracy of central government units. In this light, definitions would vary from one discipline to another.

However, there are common features that underline the conceptualization of decentralization even when looked at across disciplines. Samuels, Sibale and Selvester, (2009) have defined decentralization as the transfer of political power, decision making, and resources from the centre to sub-national levels of government or from the core to the periphery. The definition connotes two things. The first is the divesting of certain responsibilities; and the second is the devolving to other authorities. On a related note, Coudeouel and Paternostro (2006:17) observe that decentralization harbours three principle concepts: deconcentration which is about granting increased responsibilities to a lower agency; delegation which connotes the assignment of particular functions to another entity; and devolution which is considered as the assignment of a degree of political autonomy, resource control and administrative powers to sub-national governments.

The analysis of the concept of decentralisation is also revealing in other elements. According to Wittenberg (2003:5), Decentralisation takes three dimensions, namely fiscal, administrative and political. Fiscal decentralization deals with granting autonomy to the lower levels to generate their own revenue, and authority to spend and allocate resources without having to seek approval from central government. Administrative decentralization relates to independence to recruit and manage staff. It also entails holding the staff accountable to the stakeholders at the sub-national levels. In terms of political decentralisation, the main feature is the passing of actual power and political

accountability from the centre to the sub-national levels. As noted by Hussein (2004), the major forms of decentralisation that have been adopted by Malawi are the political and administrative decentralization.

2.2.2 Historical trends in Decentralization

Over the last two decades, most of the countries in the world have been witnessing the wave of democratic reforms in the form of decentralization. Chinsinga (2007:90) argues that since the 1990s countries have been adopting decentralization as a vehicle for good governance, development and poverty reduction. The available literature reflects the scale to which decentralization has been implemented by both developed and developing countries over the period. The attention given to this subject also reflects its importance in the development and poverty debate.

Much of the recent decentralization developments can be attributed to the World Bank that have provided support to various countries. An evaluation done for the 1990 to 2007 financial period showed that 47 percent accounted for all the support that went towards decentralization efforts to 20 of its 89 client countries (World Bank IEG, 2008). Nevertheless, as early as 1960, Tanzania and Nepal implemented decentralization aimed at improving service delivery. By the 1980's many countries in Latin America, Africa, South Asia, and East Asia had embraced various forms of decentralization. The 1990's saw Eastern Europe also embarking on decentralization.

Various reasons have been cited as contributing to countries to decentralize. World Bank IEG (2008) noted that for East Europe political and economic transformation were the precipitating factors. In other countries such as Chile, Uganda, and Cote di voire

among others, decentralization was influenced by the desire to enhance people's access to essential services and development in general. For countries such as South Africa, Sri Lanka and Indonesia decentralization was adopted as a strategy to address ethnic and regional discontent and conflicts.

2.2.3. Decentralization in Malawi

The current decentralization efforts in Malawi are not the first to have been implemented. Chinsinga (2007:90) observes that decentralisation in Malawi is not new. Decentralization was evident in the colonial period and has continued (albeit in different ways) during the post independence era of one party rule and the multiparty era.

2.2.3.1. Colonial Era

The current decentralization efforts in Malawi are not the first to have been implemented. Chinsinga (2007:90) observes that decentralisation in Malawi is not new and efforts in that regard can be traced to the colonial period when Malawi was just a British Protectorate. The 1912 District Administration (Native) Ordinance was the first provision of rural administration under British Colonial rule. Vosloo, Kotze, and Jeppe, (1974:245) report that this ordinance provided for nomination of tribal heads in districts to assist the district commissioners in administration of the same. Districts were hence demarcated into administrative sections controlled by principal headmen. Despite that Malawi was already divided along tribal lines, the demarcations were not in any way designed to coincide with tribal areas or other accepted traditional boundaries (Vosloo, Kotze, and Jeppe, 1974: 245).

While, it can be concluded that the system gave an opportunity for the local communities to participate in the affairs of the colonial government, the system as Vosloo, Kotze, and Jeppe, (1974) further put it, served as a direct administration controlled by district officials. Principal headmen were nominated by the district officials and in most cases, preference was given to men of higher standing in the society. This can not be taken as constituting devolution because it only served as a form of indirect rule by the colonial government.

In 1933, the 1912 ordinance was repealed and it paved way for Native Authority Ordinance (No. 13 of 1933) and Native courts Ordinance (No. 14 of 1933). The two ordinances created the establishment of native authority based on tribes or a group of tribes collectively plus a chief (tribal head) appointed as a native authority. The native authority was hence defined as any chief (tribal head) or other native or native council or group of natives declared to be native authority by the governor (Vosloo, Kotze, and Jeppe, 1974: 245). Additionally, the ordinances gave powers to native authorities to issue minor legislation providing for order and welfare of communities. They also provided for the native authority to mobilise and manage funds through levies and fees necessary for the community.

The system of tribal based native authority is merited for its efficacy in attempting to bring communities towards their own governance at the grassroots level. It is reported that the native authorities served to bring about law and order in the communities; served as councilors to the district officials; and were helpful in collection of taxes on behalf of the central government. However, the system failed to bring about a functional

financial administration. Vosloo, Kotze, and Jeppe (1974) argued that the native authorities rendered no important local services, nor carried out any important development projects.

The need to create and recognise tribal councils was implemented in 1955 with another Native Ordinance, in effect, repealing that of 1933. While the latter did not provide for native councils, the former provided for tribal councils to manage the affairs of the communities based on tribes. The tribal head had to serve as chair and an ex officio member of the councils. This was a deviation from mere nomination of individuals as native authority. A critical look at this system indicates that it officially made management of local communities much more representative and participatory. However, there is no record to suggest that the councils comprised elected representatives. What can be inferred is that since they were tribal in nature, membership to the councils was also based on tribal nominations, which, judging from the current ethnic set up in Malawi, transcended from hereditary attachments as opposed to democratic elections.

In 1962, through a Local Court Ordinance, the native courts of 1933 headed by tribal heads were phased out. This was replaced by local courts which were legally established and whose chair was nominated by the Minister of Justice. As Vosloo, Kotze, and Jeppe (1974: 246) commented, local judicial functions were completely divorced from native authorities as native heads were either deprived of their judicial functions or made responsible to the Ministry of Justice in their personal capacity. This

was hence an attempt to make judicial functions separate from the district executive functions.

2.2.3.2. Post-Independence Era

After attaining independence, the need for active citizenship participation in the socio-economic development and nation building was recognised (Hussein 2004: 114). The creation of District Development Committees (DDC) in 1965 and other local institutions was regarded as key steps in bringing government closer to the people. This was also complemented in 1967 by the repealing of the Native Ordinance of 1955 and the passing of the Chiefs Act (Chapter 22:03). The process saw Malawi reverting to the designation of tribal heads as traditional local person in authority. As Vosloo, Kotze, and Jeppe (1974: 247) further argue, the act provided for the offices of paramount chief, chief and sub-chief with the head of state holding exclusive powers to appoint and determine areas of authority of traditional heads. Power to elect group village head, village head and honorary village councils (that would serve without any remuneration) was vested in the traditional heads.

It should be mentioned that the re-orientation towards the establishment of District Councils and District Development Committees (DDC) rendered the native councils redundant as the former were now responsible for rendering services to the local people. The rationale given for maintaining the position of tribal headship was for local control and as a means of political control by the central government over the rural population. Owing to this and other related factors characterizing the one party rule in independent Malawi, the form of decentralisation of this era failed to accord the local

people the opportunity to actively take charge in the development of their own districts and communities. According to Hussein (2004:115), strategies for citizen participation in the affairs of the district were highly politicised and centrally manipulated. The DDCs which were tasked to champion district focused development initiatives hardly held any serious forums; met irregularly; and merely produced wish-lists for development projects (Chinsinga, 2007:92).

2.2.3.3. Multi-party era

The foundation of the current decentralization framework in Malawi was laid in the 1987-1996 Statement of Development policies. The ineffectiveness of DDCs and general absence of effective structures at the lower levels of government were reviewed and found to be a hindrance to the process of development and poverty alleviation efforts (Chinsinga, 2007: 92; MDDPM 1995: 10; as quoted by Hussein 2004: 115). By 1993 there was now a general recognition that poverty reduction and development required strong district focused approaches that placed the participation of the grassroots communities at the centre. No wonder, the coming of multi-party democracy in 1994 and subsequent change of government in 1994 provided further impetus to revise the way DDCs operated and this gave rise to initiatives that advocated participatory planning at district level. Moving from a decentralization strategy, Malawi finally adopted the decentralization policy in 1998 whose main objective was to “decentralize political and administrative authority to the district level as a means to consolidating democracy and achieving poverty reduction” (*Malawi National Decentralisation Policy, 2008*).

The process of developing the policy was sanctioned by a cabinet directive of 1994 to review all the decentralization initiatives that had been undertaken in Malawi (Chinsinga 2007:95). Apart from culminating into a policy, the process also led to the enactment of the Local Government Act in December 1998. The Act came into effect on 18 March 1999 (Chinsinga, 2007: 95).

It is worthy noting that the decentralisation policy advocated for implementation of devolution as a form of decentralization. As reflected in the objectives, the policy seeks to institutionalize real decision making powers and authority in the local jurisdictions with clear geographical boundaries, legal status and autonomous personnel to such an extent that a great bulk of their activities lie substantially outside the direct control of the central government. In living up to this, local government elections were held in 2000; and the district councils and DDCs were merged. Initially, the two existed as distinct structures for almost three decades.

2.2.4. Decentralisation and child welfare in Malawi

In a bid to implement programmes consistently with the decentralization policy and the Local Government Act, the Ministry of Women and Child Development devolved its core function in child welfare to the districts in 2005 (*Ministry of Women and Child Development Strategic Plan, 2006*). The devolution of the child welfare functions has been in terms of both fiscal and administrative decentralization. Although maintaining a link with the parent ministry, in principle, district social welfare offices have to administer child welfare functions under the direct control of the District Commissioner. District Officers have to make their own decisions over funding of child welfare functions; and

structures for coordinating child welfare programmes are made much more integrated and multi-sectoral in nature to reflect the spirit of decentralization. Additionally, child welfare interventions have taken a more community based approach and this means a more emphasis on developmental social work than social case work in advancing child welfare programmes.

2.3. Child Welfare

The understanding of child welfare cannot be divorced from the overall discipline of Social welfare. Therefore, to contextualize the notion of child welfare, a discussion social welfare is fundamental in this research. Further more, the historical aspects shaping social welfare are not different from child welfare. Therefore child welfare origins are explored through narrating social welfare.

2.3.1. The Concept of Social Welfare

The definitions of social welfare have been dominated by a number of perspectives. One perspective is known as residual where social welfare is a service provided to individuals that fall into a state of deprivation. The perspective holds that social welfare should come into play when the normal structures for support (namely the family and the market) break down (Colby, 1989:1). The underlying assumptions of this perspective is that Social welfare is regarded as a temporal and emergency measure. The definition places the responsibility for welfare on individuals and families. Its focus is therefore on individuals and groups. Mather and Lager (2000:2) note that personal rehabilitation and medical model and treatment of individuals and their disorders remain a guiding feature of this perspective. According to Midgley (1995), social casework and

social group work are the strategies followed when this perspective is to guide social welfare provision. The strength of this definition is that the target of welfare is clearly spelt out, and hence easy to implement.

However, this perspective is ideal when employed to address unique and extreme cases of vulnerability in situations where very few individuals require social welfare support. It is worth noting that for apparent situations, such as in Africa and other third world countries, it would not be feasible to pursue this type of perspective alone because, levels of vulnerability due to poverty, HIV and AIDS, hunger, and unemployment among others are just too high. To focus on individual cases of vulnerability would require spreading resources (human and material) thinly, and this would benefit few at the expense of many more cases. It leaves out more people in need of social welfare and it is at worst reactionary.

To this end, the other perspective that is broader than the residual approach is institutional. It holds that social welfare is the "organised system of social services and institutions designed to aid individuals and groups to attain satisfying standards of life and health" (Colby: 1989:8). This perspective entails a comprehensive coverage of people's welfare and emphasises that social welfare is a right for every individual in society. As such, the state and other key duty bearers hold primary responsibility to provide for the needs of everyone. Midgley 1995: 15) points out this is also known as social administration approach where government promotes peoples' welfare through wide range of social services and programmes targeting individuals, groups and

communities. According to Colby (1989:8), this perspective in defining social welfare “implies no stigma, no emergency nor abnormality”. It attempts to locate social problems not in the individual, but in the environment in which the individual lives (Mather and Lager, 2000:2). Accordingly, it views institutions within society as crucial in addressing social needs and change. It is hence a definition that has a liberal orientation to the conceptualisation of social problems (Mather and Lager, 2000:2).

However, it is too ideal to implement especially in third world countries where they are already struggling with the provision of social services to the people. Colby (1989) notes that the definition implies that everyone is and should be on welfare, a factor that makes the definition vague, and more utopian than practical to implement. It thus makes welfare implementation a complex process that requires a network of services and stakeholders to work at harmony.

The two perspectives outlined above conceive of social welfare as merely means towards desired particular end. Midgley (1995: 13) however offers a perspective that looks at social welfare as a condition. In this regard, Social Welfare is a state of human wellbeing comprising “...the degree to which social problems are managed, the extent to which needs are met and degree to which opportunities for advancement are provided”. For Midgley, residual and institutional approaches are merely some of the means towards achieving social welfare. It can therefore be concluded that social welfare can be conceived of as both a process and means towards human well-being.

Transcending the institutional and residual conceptions of social welfare is the developmental social welfare perspective. It is holistic, rights based, and focusing on structural change at macro-level. It thus defines social welfare as a means towards social equality (Bernstein and Gray: 1997: 43). For Midgley, this is what has come to be social development.

Midgley (1995: 25) defines social development as a “process of planned social change designed to promote the well-being of the population as a whole in conjunction with a dynamic process of economic development”.

For the World Bank (2005) social development is,

... the process of increasing the assets and capabilities of individuals to improve their wellbeing; the capacity of social groups to exercise agency, transform their relationships with other groups, and participate in development processes; and the ability of society to reconcile the interests of its constituent elements, govern itself peacefully, and manage change.

The definitions attempt to suggest the broad based nature of social development. This is both an opportunity in that broader needs of human well-being are embraced by marrying the social and the economic goals of the development process. Social development, therefore, is a contrast of earlier conceptions that tended to link development with economic growth regardless of changes in the social aspects of people. On the other hand, it also departs from social welfare conceptions that understood development only in terms of social dimensions of development.

Social development became popular in the 1950's (Beinstern and Gray 1997: 43). It was first used by the British Colonial administration in its attempt to promote social welfare through mass literacy and community development. In the 1960's, the United Nations adopted the social development approach in its effort to address poverty in the developing world. Midgley (1995) points out that the concept was introduced in the west , but was never as popular as in the developing world, let alone in academics.

The profile of social development was raised in 1995, when the United Nations convened the first ever Social Development Summit In Copenhagen Denmark, in 1995. Attended by two thirds of the World Heads of State, the summit was significant in recognizing social development and human well-being for all in the new millennium and therefore it revolved around three thematic issues namely unemployment, poverty and social disintegration. The summit came against a background of failures of previous approaches in addressing poverty especially in Africa.

2.3.2. The Concept of Child Welfare

The concept of child welfare can best be understood in the context of defining child and social welfare as distinct concepts in their own right. This is so because the surface structure of the phrase "child welfare" denote a compound noun of two separate words. The two words also happen to be well developed separate disciplines of study in spite of their overlaps and any perceived interrelatedness. However, welfare appears to commonly be linked with social welfare in its use.

The conception of child comes with its own controversies in both theory and practice. The Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) defines a child as any person below the age of 18. The definition adopted by many countries helps to identify children by statistically categorizing and associating persons with similar characteristics within a particular framework of age. However, laws in some countries have tended to offer varying definitions of the concept, child. For instance, in Malawi, different laws provide for various definitions of the child. Section 23 of the constitution of Malawi defines a child as a person up to the age of sixteen for purposes of labour. For marriage, it is set at fifteen. Needless to comment, the various definitions based on age create confusion in implementing child welfare programmes much as at times they offer flexibility in focusing specific groups of children.

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As for child welfare, Laird and Hartman (1985:12) define it in two ways. First, child welfare is defined as "conditions of living in which children develop spontaneously through all stages of maturation". These may include but not limited to laws on child protection, essential services such as health and education, governance institutions, and community structures. Although broad, the definition thus assumes that child welfare is an end in itself hence it is about all factors considered essential to serve the best interest of children (Johnson and Schwartz, 1997:165).

While the definition succeeds in looking at all children and their needs in a holistic manner, it fails to delineate the boundaries of what child welfare ought to be, a factor that might make the definition difficult to translate into policy and practice. It is worth

noting that what constitutes well-being is relative and not value free. By implication, what constitutes Child Welfare in one country such as America might not be the same in another country such as Malawi. Furthermore, in the context of this broad understanding, all institutions, legal and policy frameworks, programmes and structures that enable children meet their needs can be child welfare. Yet, this might not be the case in practice. For instance, provision of some essential services such as road infrastructure cannot be child welfare despite having a profound impact on children's needs. As a result, the whole concept becomes vague and ambiguous.

Second, child welfare tends to refer to a range of services and programmes dealing with children that are vulnerable and/or in a state of deprivation. In this regard, child welfare is a more specific concept referring to systems and services provided for children "in need" within the society (Anglin, 2002:236). The system and services may focus on the social, special education, developmental, health, alcohol and drug abuse issues of and protecting children from harm. In the same breadth, Rice (1985:6), sees child welfare as a discipline of social work practice that refers to a "set of activities usually provided under the auspices of private corporation, or through government bureaucracies" and therefore it "...represents the division of labour and specialisation established in bureaucratic form." Unlike the previous definition, this definition can be merited for setting a target for child welfare, namely children "in need". This offers clarity of purpose if the concept is used as a basis for informing policy and programmes around children. However, the definition narrows the concept of child welfare to merely child protection. As Parton (2009:715) notes, focus on child protection is not adequate to

cover all critical issues around children; and as such, wider issues of child well-being tend to be over-looked. Additionally, the concept is reminiscent of the residual approach to conceptualising social welfare. Therefore, the demerits characterizing the residual thinking hold if child welfare is defined in this way.

2.3.3. Trends in the development of child welfare

Mather and Lager (2000:2) observes that child welfare has been a subject of focus in social work since the mid-nineteenth century. Just as the case is with social welfare, the history of child welfare can be traced from the pre-industrial era, during which the family and the community took care of the needs for the aged, sick and the vulnerable groups in society (Mather and Lager, 2000:2). Accordingly, the traditional community and family coping mechanisms served as a life line for the care of individuals that faced challenges of adjustment in their lives. This approach in the history of social welfare was informal in nature and rested on the fact that communities were operating at mechanical level, living communally and their ways of living were not as complex as it is the case today (Collins, Kim, Clay and Perlstein, 2009:78).

According to Bernstein and Gray (1997:41), in Europe and America, increasing industrialization and urbanization in the 16th century disturbed the family and community systems for the care of vulnerable groups including children in society. People now moved to live in cities and towns and they no longer had to live in communal basis as before. It is in this light that organised social welfare to meet the needs of the vulnerable

begun. Initially, concerned groups of people with the passion to help the poor, private foundations and the church emerged in an organised way to provide charity to those that were poor and vulnerable (Anucha, 2008:232).

In 1869, the settlement movement and charity organisation emerged to provide some form of organized social welfare. The former worked with communities to address poverty and emphasis was placed upon captivating community and social responsibility in addressing individual and social issues (Bernstein and Gray, 1997: 41). The latter, comprising of wealthy individuals, concerned themselves with addressing the needs of individuals. To this group, the responsibility towards addressing social problems rested with the individual poor. Accordingly, charity organization movement has shaped the development of what came to be the earliest model of social work training (Bernstein and Gray, 1997: 41).

In Africa, the history of social welfare is well documented by several scholars. Anucha (2008:232) observes that the historical context of social welfare in Africa is important in understanding how the current social welfare systems work. It is argued that the current social welfare systems have been shaped by exogenous forces of pre and post colonization. Anucha further points out the factors influencing social work practices in Africa as including “early missionary activities, voluntary organizations, tribal societies, traditional customs and practices, pre-and post-colonial economic, political and social realities including policies social welfare policies implemented during colonial periods”.

Social welfare can thus be traced through three phases of history namely pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial. In the pre-colonial, the needs of the vulnerable or the poor were being taken care of by the traditional family and communities' mechanisms. Kreitzer, Abukari, Antonio, Mensah and Kwaku (2009:146) note that all cultures have had a social support system that addressed the basic needs of the more vulnerable people including children. They further observe that the traditional system was based on norms, moral values and an established economic system. A religious system revolving around belief in ancestors provided a framework for guidance and punishment through out life.



The coming of the missionaries to Africa also heralded further provision of social welfare in form of charities to indigenous families and communities. Yiman (1990:32) reports that "the starting point of the idea of social welfare as understood in the west is in the late eighteenth century when the missionaries made their first ever attempt to educate Africans in...the British colony of Sierra Leone." At that time, Sierra Leone was being created as a place for re-settling freed slaves from America. Such being the case, education was considered essential for the progress of the people. In other parts of Africa controlled by Britain, wives of colonial civil servants took part in developing social welfare services albeit on a scale that required minimum financial support (Yiman,1990:32).

Although Missionaries and the traditional care system continued to provide social welfare services, colonial Administrations through out Africa came to recognize that

government too is responsible for provision of social welfare. This stemmed from the realization that industrialization and growth of the African urban bourgeoisies eventually led to the decline of the traditional care system (Kreitzer et al, 2009:146). Additionally, like the case with South Africa in the 1920s and 1930s (Sewpaul and Lombard, 2004:539), a need arose to address poverty among the settler white population, which acted as starting point for efforts into government providing social work services. As Kreitzer et al (2009:146) note, European Social welfare systems were thus introduced into non-western countries including Africa. For instance, as observed by Yiman (1990: 37), the British Colonial Administration developed Colonial Development Act in 1929 to set up funding mechanism for supporting colonies focusing on health and education. The act was later broadened in 1940, to encompass more issues around welfare services.



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Yiman (1990) concludes that despite these legislative efforts, serious formal organization of social welfare services by the colonial administrations was seen after the Second World War. For this reason, scholars writing on the origins of professional social work agree that it was only in the 1950s that formal social welfare systems were introduced in Africa. These systems, however, did not have regard for the traditional systems since they were simply a replication of the western based social welfare focusing on individualized, case work methods. It is not surprising therefore that social welfare services under colonialism failed to deal with mass poverty and oppression that the African people experienced (Kreitzer et al, 2009).

In the post colonial Africa, social welfare systems did not depart in model from what was implemented in the colonial era. At the dawn of independence, most African countries emerged with social welfare systems that resembled those that are in their former colonizers (Anucha, 2008:231; Kreitzer et al, 2009). In the sub-Saharan Africa, the social welfare institutions and frameworks were set up in all countries formerly under the French and the British. African states sent their people to the west to attain social welfare education so that they could take up responsibility of social welfare systems left by the colonizers. As Anucha relates, " social workers sent to the west studied social work theories, methods and administration of western social welfare systems. Ironically, as Laird (2004:695) explains, what they (African Social workers) learnt and acquired was irrelevant to the socio-economic realities of the African people which included effects of colonialism itself, mass poverty, illiteracy and poor health among others.

In Malawi, the genesis of organized social welfare systems emanates from the work of the voluntary service organizations and some public spirited individuals during the colonial era. *Development of Human Resources* (1971:160) outlines that the social welfare systems were developed along the British pattern; and upon attaining independence, however, Malawi is reported to have modeled their social welfare to reflect the socio-economic realities of the rural way of life of most Malawians.

One of the prominent developments of the independence Malawi has been (like other African independent states) the establishment of the department of social welfare whose role has been to address social issues such as destitution, repatriation, family

and matrimonial disputes, re-integration of retired migrant workers returning from the neighboring countries, special education for people with disabilities and rehabilitation and after-care services. Apart from general community development activities, key services around child welfare that appear to have been established include early childhood development services, reformatory services and public assistance which were being offered through voluntary organizations and/or the missionaries (*Development of Human Resources*, 1971:160) .

2.3.4. Functions and systems of Child welfare.

In America, major functions of child welfare have revolved around protective services, family support services, foster care, adoption and residential care. These functions operate through a system that is “contracted out to private agencies in some jurisdiction with oversight by the state or country system” (Collins, Kim, Clay and Perlstein, 2009: 78). However, mention ought to be made that the functions of child welfare in America have tended to locate the social problems as a problem of the individual and it is therefore residual in approach (Parton, 2009).

In other western countries similar arrangements also exist. In developing countries, for instance, some child welfare functions are delivered through informal mechanisms. Because of financial constraints, religious and Non-governmental organizations provide child welfare services to complement what the state is able to provide. Collins, Kim, Clay and Perlstein (2009: 78) observe that although developing countries have little or

no formal child welfare systems, government authorities assume broader oversight role in children's issues, often placing more attention on health and education.

In the former, socialist states such as Romania, institutions have been more proactive in providing for children in need because the state was hostile towards the family as a traditional mechanism for care and support of children. In the liberal democracies such as the USA, financial capacity exists to support policies for children. However, reliance on the market economy to solve social problems means that matters of children are susceptible to compromise. On the other hand, social democracies such as Sweden have both the financial means and political will to support children, but they might face political and financial constraints (Collins, Kim, Clay and Perlstein, 2009: 78).

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2.4. Overview of social and child welfare functions devolved to districts

Malawi devolved core functions of child welfare in 2005. According to the *Guidelines and Standards for Devolved Functions to Assemblies* (2003) the devolved functions included public assistance, hospital social work, prison social work, children services, family, community and child welfare, probation and after care services and social protection. According to Ministry of Women and Child Development Strategic Plan 2006-2011 (2006), the devolved functions are provided within the framework of three main methods of social work, namely, social case work, social group work and community work.

2.4.1 Public Assistance

This is an approach aimed at addressing both the social and economic needs of persons. Public assistance in Malawi is provided in three ways. First, it is provided to Malawians that become destitute within Malawi. For instance, if a person loses money through theft while travelling and he/she is stranded to a point that he/she can not proceed home, the social welfare department provides assistance to enable the destitute client return home.

The other form of public assistance is repatriation. This is provided to Malawians living in other countries in need of assistance to return home. For instance, with the declining socio-economic condition in Zimbabwe, most Malawians that went to work in farms in Zimbabwe found themselves in destitute circumstances. They have hence been returning home with government facilitating the process. In 2008, for instance, repatriation was done to Malawians that were affected by xenophobia that hit South Africa.

The third form of public assistance is related to provision of relief services during humanitarian crises such as floods, and famine. Malawi usually faces pockets of hunger in some of the districts in the months of January and February of every year. During these months, the Department of Poverty and Disaster Preparedness works with other sectors (including the Department of Child Welfare) and other partners to provide relief services to affected communities. The other major intervention of relief worth mentioning was witnessed during the civil war in Mozambique. During that time, Malawi

hosted over one million refugees. Relief services to refugees continue in a small scale to pockets of refugees from war torn countries such as Somalia and Democratic Republic of Congo.

2.4.2. Hospital social work

This is a service that is provided to patients that are receiving medical attention. The assistance is in most cases in form of counselling of the patient or patient's relatives; provision of transport for patients without a means of returning home upon discharge from hospital; and tracing guardians of patients that are admitted to hospital without a guardian.

Mention ought also to be made that in the major hospitals in Malawi, the department of Child Development allocates a social welfare officer that handles matters of destitute clients. The social welfare officer also works hand in hand with the children's ward to provide services related to early childhood development.

2.4.3. Prison social work

In Malawi prison social work takes the form of monitoring conditions and presences of juveniles in police cells and prisons. It also includes screening of juveniles in liaison with the police and paralegals, facilitating speedy trials and tracing relations or guardians of juveniles in police cells, or prisons.

The Government is also implementing a juvenile justice programme focusing on diversion. Under this, social workers serve to facilitate the diversion of children in

conflict with the law from the formal justice system. This is particularly done for minor offences.

2.4.4. Children services

Malawi government also provides generic services that promote holistic survival, growth and development of children through integrated management of childhood illnesses. One of the notable developments in this regard is the implementation of the Accelerated Child Survival and Development Programme which seeks to enhance service provision through improved health system for under five children; and mobilisation of communities to adopt a prescribed package of key family and community care practice. The services under this are holistic and integrated and range from health facility based interventions to community based services such as water and sanitation, protection of children from abuse and early childhood development among others.

The other notable development in children services is child rights protection programme. This aims at addressing child rights abuses through prevention, protection and rehabilitation and reintegration services. In this regard, social workers in Malawi undertake awareness activities in communities on prevention and reporting of abuse; work with law enforcement agents to investigate and prosecute cases of abuse; and link children to services for recovery such as psychosocial support and medical attention.

Child participation has also been a key activity in child rights programme focusing on creating and strengthening mechanisms for increased participation of children in matters that affect their own development. To this end, facilitating annual sitting

children's parliament and promotion of child rights clubs are some of the key strategies being pursued by government.

Early Childhood Development (ECD) is another service that seeks to promote early stimulation and best start in life. Coordinated through the Ministry of Women and Child Development, ECD is implemented through pre-schools and Community Based Child Care Centres (CBCC). The former is urban-based and the latter is rural-based.

The current activity in Malawi is an attempt to improve access to ECD from 30 percent to 80 percent. Therefore as strategy to achieve this, social workers in partnership with others facilitate establishment of Community Based Child Care Centres, training of Care givers and inspection of the centres to enhance compliance to minimum standards as a quality assurance mechanism.



2.4.5. Family, community and child welfare

School social work is one service that is provided under this. It is done in two ways. First, it is done through provision of education support to school going children. Social workers participate in identification, and assessment of needy children and facilitate payment of school fees for those deservingly in need. The other form of school social work is counselling of school children with problems of adjustment. This is done in liaison with teachers.

Care for Orphans and other Vulnerable Children (OVC) is one programme area that is preoccupying the work of social workers in Malawi. Malawi has approximately one million OVCs, half of which are due to HIV and AIDS (Malawi National Policy for OVC:

2003). This has had implications on provision of social welfare. As reported elsewhere in this research, the burden of care for OVCs has strained the traditional community and family community mechanisms such that deliberate efforts by the government have to be pursued to support family and community in the care and support for OVC. Social workers are therefore playing the role of coordinating activities with other stakeholders such as Community Based Organisations, Faith Based Organisations, District Assemblies and Non Governmental Organisations.

Closely related to the issue of OVC is the role of social workers in facilitating alternative care options for OVCs. In this respect, the social welfare officers undertake assessments of the situation of individual OVCs and recommend them for foster care, adoption or placement into an orphanage.

Additionally, matrimonial counselling is one of the services provided by social welfare in Malawi. Marital problems especially in urban areas are referred to social welfare offices for counseling and/or mediation as one of the resorts before the intervention of the courts.

2.4.6. Probation and after care services

Probation and after care are about supervising children in conflict with the law. Social workers serving under the tag of probation officers prepare court social report and present it before the court as part of the process of handling cases of children in conflict with the law. Probation officers also serve to supervise children (on discretion of the courts) with behavioural problems. There are two reformatory schools in Malawi where rehabilitative services for children in conflict with the law are provided.

2.4.7. Social protection

Malawi is implementing a social protection programme. Social protection is being defined as interventions that serve to enhance the well being of vulnerable groups with problems of actively taking part in and/or benefitting from normal socio-economic activities (Malawi Growth and Development Strategy: 2006). In Malawi, social protection is taking the form of public works programmes, food for work, agricultural subsidies, pension schemes for retired civil servants and direct cash transfers to ultra-poor and labour constrained households. Currently, a policy on social protection is being developed; The Ministry of Economic Planning and Development is a policy holder for all social protection issues, while different sectors serve as implementing agents for specific social protection interventions.

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2.5. Theoretical framework

Theoretical framework is an important factor in any research. It links existing knowledge with what is taking place in reality. This research adopts functionalism as a theoretical approach to explore decentralization and child welfare. Scholars agree that functionalist theories are one of the oldest sociological theoretical perspectives. For example, Turner (2006:6) says that functionalism is sociology's first theoretical orientation. It is based on the work of Emile Durkheim (1858-1917). The theory posits that society is like a biological organism composed of many parts. Each part has specific function that it performs in relation to the whole organism. Just as an organism is composed of many parts, society too comprises many parts that function to keep the society working.

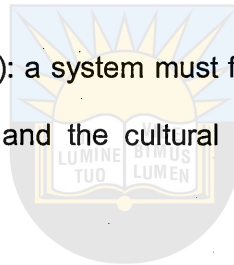
According to Haralambos and Holborn (2000), functionalists regard parts of the society to be institutions which are organized patterns of behavior relating to the essential areas of life such as health, education, politics, religion and the economy. It is therefore assumed that societies are structured in a way that members or parts of it are supposed to relate in an organized and orderly manner, according to norms and expected patterns of behavior. The theory also assumes that society tends to be stable and orderly because there are parts that function to maintain it, for example the police.

The functionalists further argue that change is a gradual process. However, the functionalists are pre-occupied with large scale social structures and institutions at macro-level of society (Ritzer,2008:98). In the case of this research, decentralization systems are one of such large scale structures

Functionalists also argue that society will always strive to eliminate the patterns of behavior that do not function for the good of the society. Behaviours that are harmful to society are described as dysfunctional. Society will thus always seek to restore equilibrium-an evenly balanced order in which parts are in harmony (Haralambos and Holborn 2000).

As discussed by Ritzer (2008: 101) Talcott Parsons, one of the renowned proponents in the functionalist theorizing, expounded functionalism perspectives with his ideas of "action systems". In his theory of structural functionalism, he sees a function as a complex of activities directed towards meeting a need or needs of the system (Ritzer 2008:101). Through a framework called AGIL scheme, he argues that a society's survival is dependent upon a system performing the four functions as follows:

- *Adaptation*: a system must cope with external situational exigencies. It must adapt to its environment and the environment to its needs.
- *Goal attainment*: a system must define and achieve its primary goals
- *Integration*: a system must regulate the interrelationship of its component parts. It also must manage the relationship among the other three functional imperatives (A,G,L).
- *Latency (pattern maintenance)*: a system must furnish, maintain and renew both the motivation of individuals and the cultural pattern that create and sustain motivation



In this scheme, social structures are placed at the center of analysis. In the assumption of this study, the scheme can thus be used to explore what various developed functions of welfare perform with regard to the decentralized system as a whole.

On a related note, Burson (2006), attempts to relate functionalist perspective to child welfare reforms in two ways. He argues that that governments provide and expand social welfare services on the basis that the requisite capacity to do so exists. Therefore, it considers "state support of social welfare as a Matter of practicality and not as an ideological position for social control" (Burson, 2006:81).

Other proponents of functionalist theory base their argument on what is called 'policy feedback'. They argue that policies are changed according to their political efficacy. "If policy is politically feasible, and appears to be effective, it will be continued. If state receives negative feedback, it will alter the policy or approach" (Burson, 2006:81).

This study also attempts to make a link that decentralization is a public sector reform approach that is consistent with the social development approach to the provision of child welfare services and social welfare in general. The approach looks at social welfare as a “process of planned social change designed to promote the well-being of the population as a whole in conjunction with a dynamic process of economic development (Midgley, 1995: 25). As alluded to in the discussion of the concept of social development, the approach is rights based and holistic. It is being chosen for this study because it is consistent with the very ideals of decentralisation in that it also sees development as a right for the people at grassroots, including children.

2.6. Conclusion

This chapter has examined decentralization as it emerged under the influence and support of the World Bank. A significant part of the review has also been dedicated to outlining the trends leading to current decentralization in Malawi. Notably, it has been demonstrated that the current decentralization initiatives are not necessarily new in the history of Malawi. Such being the case, it is possible to trace decentralization in three political phases namely, colonial period, post independence one party era, and the current multi-party dispensation. The review has also attempted to focus on the overview of child welfare. The discussion paid particular attention to child welfare as a sub-division of social welfare in general. Additionally, the theoretical framework for this study has also been discussed. Apart from adopting social development approach to social welfare in this study, the review has further attempted to outline functionalism as theory underpinning this study.

It should be mentioned that the literature review highlights some gaps. First, in terms of conception of both decentralization and child welfare, no consensus exists among scholars on decentralization and child welfare. The lack of consensus therefore partly explains why even policies and implementation have varied from one country to another. Like wise, different eras reflect shifts in understanding of both decentralization of child welfare. Second, the history of both decentralization and child welfare does not reflect any attempt towards exploring any trends in decentralization of child welfare, more particularly with Malawi as a case in point. For instance, not much appears to have been written about the way child welfare has evolved with the different phases (colonial, post independent and multi-party) of decentralization efforts in Malawi.

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Academic research on decentralization has further tended to reflect decentralization in a general context of exploring reforms emanating from World Bank influence. Very little effort is paid to issues of child welfare in the light of decentralization in Malawi. For instance, Chinsinga and Kayuni (2008), Hussein (2004) and World Bank (2005) among others have written widely about decentralisation, but none covers decentralization in relation to child welfare. This study is hence an attempt at filling such gaps.

Chapter 3

The Research Design and Methodology

3.1. Introduction

This part discusses the research design and methodology that was adopted by this study. It will examine the research design, methodology, population and sampling, data collection and analysis techniques, risks and benefits and ethical considerations.

3.2. Research Design

Research into decentralization and child welfare in Malawi is relatively new. As discussed in the introduction of this proposal, it was only in 2005 that decentralization through functional devolution was implemented in the Ministry of Women and Child Development. Therefore, this research was exploratory. Babbie (2007:87) maintains that exploratory research is ideal for examining new research interests; and when the subject of research is relatively new. The exploratory design was significant in bringing about a better understanding of decentralization, and its impact on child welfare from the perceptions of the district officers that are at the core of its implementation in Malawi.

In an attempt to be consistent with the principles underlying exploratory design, the research used a qualitative methodology. This methodology is not only suited for finding out what happens but also ..."how it happens...and why it happens the way it does" (Henning, 2004:3). In this research, the qualitative methodology attempted to provide an

in-depth understanding of how district officers conceive of and perceive decentralization, and its impact on child welfare in Malawi. The methodology can therefore be contrasted with quantitative methodology which quantifies a particular phenomena through strict control of the objects and instruments (Henning, 2004:3)

3.3. Population, Sample, and Sampling Strategy

3.3.1. Population

The population of this study were all the district officers in Malawi. Administratively, Malawi has 28 districts with 13 in the southern, 9 in the central and 6 in the northern provinces. However, the research took place in the two District Assemblies of Lilongwe, and Ntchisi, both of which are in the central province of Malawi. Lilongwe was chosen for its rich experiences in implementing decentralization. It is one of the first few districts where decentralization was first piloted by the Malawi Government. Ntchisi has been chosen as a comparative case study, a factor that will enable the researcher to make insightful comparisons.

3.3.2. Sample

The sample for this study comprised three categories of district officers. One group of respondents included all social welfare officers, and community development officers working at the district headquarters. These are officers in the lower grades of the social welfare and community development ranks and they are engaged in the actual implementation of activities related to child welfare and development in general while at

the same time they have practical exposure to the processes of district administration processes. These factors are important in enriching the findings of this study.

The other group of respondents was composed of heads of departments who play a key role in provision of child welfare services. They also form part of the District Executive Committee (DEC) which is a leadership structure of the districts. These included District social welfare officers (DSWO) heading the department of social welfare at district level, District Commissioners (DC) or district Directors of Planning and Development (DPDs) and/or District Development Officers (DCDOs). District social welfare officers are responsible for managing the provision of child welfare services; the DCDOs coordinate community level development programmes that are general in nature; and the DC is the chief executive of the district and the DPDs is a coordinator of all development programmes at the district level. The DC and the DPD are therefore two focal officers under whose charge all sectors within the decentralization policy are supposed to report to. Since there is only one establishment for the officers under this population group, all of them were targeted with individual interviews.

The third group comprised heads of other departments in the district management rank but from key sectors implementing other child welfare related functions in health, education, youth programmes, and child protection. This group was thus composed of the District Labour Officer, the Victim support unit Coordinator and the District Youth officer (DYO). The purposive selection of this third group of respondents was based on the fact that child welfare provision at district level and within the decentralization framework is integrated and multi-sectoral in nature. As such they possess rich

experiences in implementing decentralization and child welfare programmes. Like in previous case, all officers under this group participated through individual interviews.

This research recognized that apart from the social welfare officers being the focal point for coordinating child welfare, other sectors also equally play a critical role in advancing child well-being. On a general note, choice of diverse group of respondents helped the research benefit from special insights and experiences that the district officers have about decentralization and child welfare provision.

Table 1. Summary of Sample groups in the selected districts

Population group	Sample			Data collection method
	Total	Number of participants in Lilongwe	Number of participants in Ntchisi	
Group 1: Social Welfare Officers (SWOs)	15	8	7	Focus Group discussions
Community Development Officers (CDOs)	23	17	6	Focus Group discussions
Group 2: District social Welfare Officers (DSWO),	2	1	1	Individual Interviews
District Commissioners (DC),	1	0	1	Individual interviews

Directors of Planning and Development (DPDs)	2	1	1	Individual interviews
District Development Officers (DCDOs)	2	1	1	Individual interviews
Group 3; District Health Officer (DHO),	0	0	0	Individual interviews
District Labour Officer (DLO)	2	0	2	Individual interviews
Victim support unit (VSU) Coordinator	3	0	3	Individual interviews
District Youth officer (DYO).	2	1	1	Individual interviews

3.3.2. Sampling strategy

The research employed a purposeful sampling because it was predominantly qualitative. As Oliver (2004:128) notes, the nature of qualitative research to generate detailed data require that respondents be identified purposefully to provide information that directly answers to the research questions.

Purposeful sampling was utilized to select all the three sample groups discussed in the preceding section. Respondents were those that had been in the service since the current decentralization was adopted in the districts. As argued by Oliver (2004: 29), this enabled the research to benefit from the district officers' comparison of experiences before and after decentralization.

3.4. Methods of Data Collection and Administration

Data was collected in three ways. First, focus group discussions were employed for the majority of social welfare officers and community development officers in the lower grade. De Vos et al (2005:287) notes that in cases where the research purports to explore thoughts and feelings (just as the case is in this proposed study), focus groups interviews are ideal because they generate detailed information as participants are motivated to talk on the basis of the group dynamics factor.

Some of the predominant questions in the focus group discussions were: what do they understand about decentralization in relation to child welfare; what are the aims of decentralization; how do they implement their programmes in the face of decentralization; how is the scope of their work under decentralization; what competencies do they have to ably execute their responsibilities under decentralization; what training do they have in relation to child welfare and/or decentralization; how do they relate with other sectors implementing aspects of child welfare; what are the changes that have been effected in their duties and responsibilities as result of decentralization; and what are the benefits and challenges of decentralizing child welfare. Responses to these questions were recorded by way of a voice recorder. This gave an opportunity to the researcher to fully concentrate on asking questions.

Second, a semi-structured interview was administered to a group of officers in the management ranks of the district which included, District Social Welfare Officers, the District Commissioner, the Director of Planning and Development, the District Community Development Officers, Victim support Unit officers, District Youth Officer,

and District Labour Officers. This provided an opportunity to gain a detailed picture of their conceptual understanding and experiences of the decentralization and its impact on child welfare in Malawi. Meurer et al (2007: 1067) observes that "...semi-structured interviews allow for focused exploration on individual perceptions with regard to their experiences and the process is more intimate than in focus group discussions". Owing to their seniority at district level, it would have been out of order of government protocol to engage them into focus group discussion alongside the other district officers in the lower ranks. Additionally, they would not feel free to answer some critical questions in an environment where senior officers are mixed with a junior officers.

Key questions in the semi-structured interviews included: how do they understand decentralization in terms of its aims and objectives; how does decentralizing child welfare improve access to services for children; what changes has decentralizing child welfare brought; how do they coordinate child welfare in the context of decentralization; in what way are children issues prioritized in the district; what is the capacity of the district to implement child welfare functions under decentralization; and what mechanisms are in place to support child welfare functions; how does the district management team support child welfare functions; how do they relate with other sectors implementing components of child welfare; and what are the benefits of decentralizing child welfare and the challenges that the district has been facing. For the reasons cited in the preceding paragraph, responses were recorded using a voice recorder.

The third way of collecting data was through document search. Documents are records that organizations keep as a way of preserving records on important issues and for

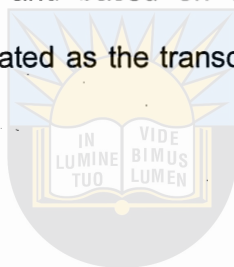
reference and practical use (McMillan and Schumacher, 2006: 428). This study also benefited from official reports, policies, programme documents and related documents written about decentralization on Malawi and in the selected districts in particular.

3.5. Data Analysis

According to De Vos et al (2005:333) data analysis is the process of bringing order, structure and meaning to the mass of collected data. It is one of the critical processes inherent in research. Henning (2004: 101) argued that data analysis "is a process that requires analytical craftsmanship and the ability to capture understanding of the data in writing". As in quantitative research, the purpose of data analysis is to transform data into findings. In this research, thematic analysis was utilized. This started with preliminary analysis right during data collection. The advantage of this according to De Vos, et al, (2001:335) is that it provides an opportunity during field work to capture analytical insights, alternative explanations and patterns emerging in the course of data collection

After completing data collection, the analysis proceeded with transcriptions of interviews and notes. As De Vos et al (2005) point out, this is the initial step away from the field aimed at organizing and managing data. Apart from typing and organizing the data, there was also reading and writing of memos as a way of getting general impression of the database. According to Creswell (1998: 143), memos are short phrases, ideas or key concepts that the reader sifts from the data and they serve to strengthen an understanding of issues emerging during analysis.

The process of analysis climaxed into generating codes, categories, themes and patterns from the data. The rationale for this stems from the fact that the research utilized individual and group interviews to collect data. Although, “the focus group and in-depth interviews typically do not produce thick descriptions...analysts use collected transcribed textual data to develop themes, categories and relationships between variables” (California State University: 2009). In the case of this research, major categories were predetermined by and based on the objectives of the research. However sub-categories were generated as the transcripts were being reviewed using codes.



3.6. Ethical Considerations

3.6.1. Risks and Benefits

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There was no envisaged risk for this study. However, the study worked on the assumption that the issue of decentralization in Malawi is politically sensitive. The districts have been operating without elected counselors since the expiry of their term in 2005. The current government has been reluctant to hold local government elections on the pretext of lack of resources. Any debate around counselors would likely be perceived as civil servant interference in politics, thereby putting the participants' jobs at risk. Therefore, it was feared that respondents would withhold some vital though sensitive information that the research wished to explore. However, assuring the respondents about confidentiality was made before interviews could be commenced. This cleared fears and participants were able to respond to questions with ease.

On the other hand, the benefit of the research will be that it will bring to light salient issues surrounding decentralization and its efficacy in child development. A research report shall be disseminated to stakeholders in child welfare so that they too can use the findings to develop programmes seeking to strengthen child welfare provision through the decentralization policy.

3.6.2. Permission

It should also be mentioned that the University of Fort Hare provided a letter of introduction specifying the purpose of the research and requesting those concerned to assist in undertaking the study. Based on this, permission to conduct the study was granted by the Ministry of Gender and Children and Community Development and the District Commissioners in the two study districts. The former is the mandate holder for child welfare while the latter (District Commissioners) are the Administrative Head of the Districts with the authority to grant permission to do research in their respective districts. A separate letter from the Ministry of Gender Children and Community development was also presented to the District Commissioners. The letter was also about requesting consent to proceed with the research in the two districts.

In keeping with ethical standards for doing research, during data collection, informed consent was also obtained from participants before commencing interviews and focus group discussions. They were also allowed to withdraw from the process at any stage of the interview process.

3.6.3. Other Ethical Issues

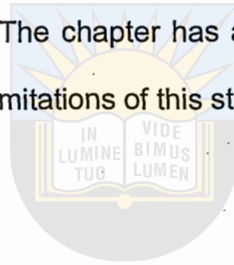
Confidentiality was considered in this research. It is understood that decentralization is a sensitive topic in Malawi politics. Respondents were therefore assured of confidentiality regarding the data that was collected. For instance, the research assured to protect participants by anonymously identifying them in the findings of this study. As Henning (2004:73) posits, participants need to know that their privacy and sensitivity will be protected.

3.7. Limitations

The under taking of this study had its own limitations. The first include limited resources necessary to do the study. Funding for the study was sourced from Malawi government which only committed ZAR 3700. This implied that the research had to rely on personal funding or/and other sources. The other limitation relates to time. The study was supposed to be undertaken in Malawi using a methodology that required face to face interviews among others. This required a lot of time travelling from South Africa to Malawi, a factor that also had its own resource implications. Appropriate planning helped to minimize these limitations. Among other things, the researcher utilized his holiday in Malawi to also do the research. Further more, some support (in form of internet access, fuel for travelling to study sites and stationery) came from the Ministry of Gender, Children and Community Development, where the researcher works as Child Development Officer.

3.8. Conclusion

This chapter has detailed the research methodology that was employed in this study. In this regard, the study was exploratory nature and qualitative in design because the issue of decentralization with regard to child welfare is still new. District officers from Malawi were part of the population group of this study. It has also been demonstrated that purposeful sampling was necessary in achieving the objectives of this study. In terms of data collection, the chapter highlighted the use of interviews as data collection techniques necessary in this study. The chapter has also described the data analysis process; ethical considerations and limitations of this study.



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Chapter 4

Presentation of findings

4.1. Introduction

This chapter is dedicated to presentation of findings and discussion. The chapter is based on in-depth interviews, and focus group discussions with district officers in Ntchisi and Lilongwe Districts in Malawi. The research participants included District Commissioners, Directors of Planning and Development, District Youth Officers, District Labour Officers, District Social Welfare Officers, Community Development Officers and Police Victim Support Unit Officers. Their experiences on decentralization and child welfare were thus explored using a common interview guide.

In addition, this chapter is also supported by findings from various policy and programme documents that were available on decentralization and child welfare. Notably, the chapter benefits from such documents as the district social economic profile for Lilongwe, Ntchisi District Service Charter, and situational analysis reports among others.

The chapter starts with an indication of response rate. It proceeds to present a profile of study respondents before presenting the actual findings based on themes and categories that are generally premised on the objectives and research questions of this study.

4.2. Response Rate

The study planned to hold ten interviews with District Commissioners, District Health Officers, District Directors of Planning and Development, District Social Welfare Officers, District Labour Officers, District Youth Officers, and District Community Development Officers in both districts. Except for District Commissioner for Lilongwe, District Labour Officer for Lilongwe, and District Health Officers in both districts, all the other respondents were interviewed. The respondents that were not interviewed were found to be busy with their official engagements despite booking at least three appointments.

In addition, the study planned for four focus group discussions in both districts with Social welfare officers, and Community Development Officers other than their heads. All focus group discussions were undertaken. In Ntchisi only six Community Development Officers were present for focus group discussion. Those present lived near the community development office. Those living far could not make it because of resource constraints. Ntchisi district had only three staff social workers including the District Social Welfare Officer. All of them were at once with a group discussion.

4.3. Profile of study respondents

The respondents for this study comprised District Officers whose role is closely linked to the functioning of child welfare services. One group of respondents was made up of District Officers at Managerial level and heads of departments at district level. This group included District Commissioner for Ntchisi, District Directors of Planning and Development, District Social Welfare Officers, District Labour Officers, District Youth Officers, and Community Development Officers, District Community Development

Officers. These respondents were mostly targeted with face to face interviews as it was difficult to engage them through focus groups.

In terms of their sex, five respondents out of ten under this group were male and included District Commissioner for Ntchisi, District Directors of Planning and Development for Ntchisi and Lilongwe, and also District Social Welfare Officers for both Ntchisi and Lilongwe. The other five female respondents included District Labour Officer for Ntchisi, District Youth Officers, and District Community Development Officer for Ntchisi, and for Lilongwe

The other group of district officers comprised officers who are actually involved in the day-to-day implementation of child welfare issues. In Lilongwe all 8 social welfare officers in the focus group were female while the focus group discussion of Community Development Officers had a mixture of 12 female and 5 male members. In Ntchisi, the three Social Welfare Officers and the six Community Development Officers were all male while all the Malawi Police Victim Support Unit Officers were female.

4.4. Research question one: the understanding of the concept of decentralization and child welfare by District Officers

4.3.1. Child Welfare

The respondents understand child welfare to mean all activities related to children. For district social welfare officers, child welfare covers early childhood development, health, education, child protection, psychosocial support to children and support to families and communities at risk of deprivation. For most district social welfare officers, case work

interventions are the main pre-occupation of their work. This is even echoed in the outline of functions devolved to the districts. Yet, as they further reported, the need to tackle issues of children in holistic and integrated manner seems to explain the rationale behind the fact that case work interventions (as social welfare officers noted) towards children in need of special protection is no longer getting much attention in favour of developmental social work.

On his part, one of the respondents (who happens to be a senior officer) in Lilongwe noted that Child welfare “involves the wellbeing of any child. It involves responsibility over people especially children.” The same was also echoed by officers in Ntchisi. One senior officer for instance concurred that “any thing that concerns improving the condition of children is child welfare”. What is coming out clear in this understanding of the officers of child welfare corresponds with the institutional view of looking at welfare. As alluded to in chapter 3, welfare from an institutional view point, entails all programmes that ensure the well-being of society.

Community development officers also viewed child welfare as all activities that seek to promote development of children. They expressed that child welfare can thus be achieved by the various community development activities that they implement in the communities. They cited economic empowerment programmes, community capacity building, and functional adult literacy programmes as equally pivotal in child welfare. No wonder, when asked to explain what has changed under decentralization, one of the social workers said that “under decentralization, social work activities with and for children have taken on community based approaches, which are hence forth

developmental.” This view tallies with the social development thinking. According to Midgley (1995), social development is about linking the social goals of the development process with economic empowerment issues.

4.3.2. Decentralization

The understanding of the concept decentralisation was generally described by district officers as “mphanvu ku anthu” meaning power to the people. This understanding implies full decentralization in which the ordinary people take charge of the affairs and decision making processes regarding services in their districts. Such an understanding therefore best denotes devolution.

However, in practice officers noted that in the absence of councilors who form a policy and legislative making body for the districts, the districts are running without the guidance of the elected representatives of the people at the local level. The next local government elections is expected to take place in late 2010 or early 2011. This demonstrates that the districts are only empowered to execute the administrative functions of the districts, as the political autonomy rests with the councilors whose term of office expired in 2005.

Other officers attempted to define decentralization as a state of affairs in which all public sectors are under one administrative authority at district level and are able to control their own resources (fiscal, human or material). One respondent, for instance, described it as a situation in which all public officers report to the District Commissioner. This thinking concurs with what the decentralization policy and legal frame work espouses. It is dominated by the concept of decentralization as encompassing fiscal devolution.

However, as indicated by the respondents themselves, not all public sectors have devolved functions. For instance, the Malawi Police Service is still under the direct control of the central government; the Ministry of Youth Development and Sports is still controlled by its central line ministry in terms of all operations; and the Ministry of Labour only devolved some of its functions in 2010.

4.5. Research question two: Impact of Decentralization

Decentralization has brought many benefits to the districts and to child welfare provision in particular. Officers interviewed cited many benefits discussed below.

4.4.1. Working in collaboration

District officers reported that decentralization has helped in pulling together human resources that were initially working in isolation. They are coordinated by the leadership of the District Commissioner, who happens to be head of the secretarial arm of the District Council. Additionally, sectors including child welfare are expanding the number of staff working at the district level in a move aimed at increasing the capacity of districts. Just at the time of doing the research, the Ministry of Gender, Children and Community Development had been sending more senior staff to serve as heads of social welfare and community development at district level.

4.4.2. Planning is decentralised

Respondents revealed that unlike before, districts do their own planning, budgeting and implementation of activities based on the needs of the communities. During a focus group discussion with Community Development officers, one officer said that

“community development section is able to plan for itself. Initially before the current decentralization, all planning was done through provincial offices and central government”. As result, it was further reported that there is a sense of community ownership of projects at community level; and that communities are pro-active on their own to benefit from development. In the words of one senior officer interviewed in Lilongwe, “development is demand driven, where communities have to demand what they want from the district council.

Officers also reported of planning being integrated and multi-sectoral in nature. Planning of child welfare activities now takes into consideration the multi-sectoral nature of issues that affect children. As noted by one district officer, “there exists some synergy in child welfare activities; and that programmes are modeled in a holistic view of approaching a child.”

Further more, officers reported that planning for development has been made simple under decentralization. Technocrats no longer have to generate plans on behalf of communities. Rather, communities through generating the Village Action Plans and district development plans put forward their priorities which district technocrats simply consolidate and support. Promoting grassroots participation and/or community driven socio-economic development is one of the objectives of decentralisation. The findings demonstrate that since adopting decentralisation, the districts implement programmes based on village action plans generated by the communities themselves. They reported that this is also particularly the case with programmes in child welfare.

4.4.3. Increased and decentralized funding

On a related note, officers in both districts indicated that under decentralization District Councils have now a pool funding arrangement through which all sectors (child welfare inclusive) get and process their funding. They also reported that, there are more financial resources going to the Districts than before, although the resources are still not enough to meet the needs of the district.

In both social welfare office and community development, funding for the government financial year 2010/2011 was reportedly to have increased, a situation which is hoped to gradually keep improving. District Officers further pointed out in terms of advancing fiscal decentralisation, the districts are now controlling their own funding obtained through government subventions, local revenues and donor funding.

4.4.4. Prioritization of child welfare issues.

The research findings revealed that the districts' visions and aspirations are expressed in the District Socio-Economic Profiles (SEP). In a bottom-up process, the SEPs are then translated into District Development Plans (DDPs) and Village Action Plans (VAC) which provide an outline of activities in terms of priority for all public agencies, reflecting the needs of the communities in the districts (Lilongwe District Socio-economic Profile, 2006). As observed by officers, these planning frameworks have resulted into creating a sense of ownership and shaking off white elephants because services and programmes are implemented according to their own wishes and aspirations. This according to the participants was initially a centralised, top-down process.

However, some officers reported that child welfare is not prioritized by the district. For them, evidence of their claims is in the way the district management allocates funds for implementation of projects. One of the district officers noted for example that “deciding on projects to benefit from Local Development Fund (LDF), public works programmes that have indirect benefit on children tend to take priority. Even construction of Early Childhood Development Centres or payment of school fees for needy children are not considered for local development Fund support.” It was also generally felt that the district development planning is biased towards hard ware projects which in essence are about infrastructure development of the district. Yet, most of the issues that matter in child welfare are soft ware in nature, essentially having to do with psychosocial development of children.

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Others however pointed out that most of the support under Local Development Fund and other related sources is currently going to constructions that have to do with improving the schools’ environment; health care provision; and roads construction among other things. Lilongwe, for instance, has 135 projects being financed by the local Development Fund. The projects are all about construction of teachers’ houses. In addition, in both Ntchisi and Lilongwe, the biggest proportion of government funding goes to the district health services, with much of it going to procurement of essential drugs. Therefore, child welfare can be regarded a priority on account of health and education getting the most from district funding.

In line with the conceptual contentions around child welfare, one can really conclude that the institutional perspective of social welfare as well as the social development

approach make child welfare in the two districts to be regarded a priority in terms of funding under the Local Development Fund. Nevertheless, looking at activities specifically performed by the social welfare in the district which are to some extent residual in nature, it is easier to conclude that no priority is accorded to child welfare.

4.6. Research question three: Preparedness of District Officers

Except for newly recruited staff, district officers reported that their formal academic and professional qualifications did not have training components on decentralisation. As such, most of what they knew of decentralization was acquired through short, non-formal training courses whilst still working. The general understanding from this is that officers have a fair knowledge of working in a decentralized system.

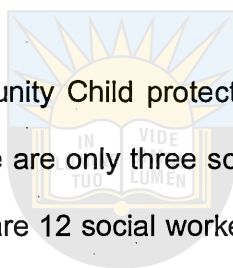
The quality of staff working in district social welfare offices has long been documented. Parry-Williams (2007) for instance notes that the child welfare department is supposed to have 395 professional staff but only 128 were filled in 2007. There were only 21 professional staff at the headquarters and this means that the rest were at district level. The table below summarises their qualifications in term of percentage:

Table 2: Qualifications of district social welfare officers.(source:Parry-Williams,2007)

level of qualification	frequency	Percentage
Junior certificate	14	11
Malawi School Leaving Certificate	92	72

Diploma	8	6
Degree	14	11
Total	128	100

Further more, there are 800 Community Child protection workers at community level across the country. For Ntchisi, there are only three social workers, all with certificates in social welfare. In Lilongwe, there are 12 social workers and only two have a diploma and degree.



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Commenting on the capacity of social welfare officers, one of the respondents in Ntchisi argued that the quality of staff in social welfare is way below what is available in other sectors such as health and education. The sector (social welfare) is one with the least graded officers at district level in terms of rank and professional training.

According to the respondents, other dimensions of preparedness of the district include the sources of support, and implementation structures available in the decentralized system. It was reported that apart from legally instituted structures such as the Assembly of Councilors, the District Executive Committee, Aerial Executive Committees, and other functional/sectoral based Committees, the districts are supported by projects committees, stakeholder networks, Non-governmental and Faith

Based organizations, and Community Based Organizations (CBOs) working in various areas around children.

4.5. Research question four: Changes brought about by devolution of child welfare

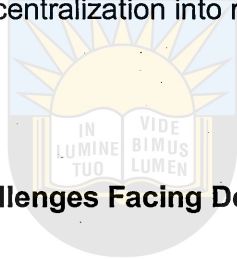
The views of officers regarding changes brought by decentralization are diverse. Participants in this research reported that there is more work as there is increased demand for child welfare services. As noted by one respondent, “decentralization has raised community expectations that the child welfare office has all the answers to their challenges”. Yet, there still remain various challenges preventing child welfare office from fulfilling and accomplishing its vital role effectively. The challenges are discussed in detail in sections that follow.

Administratively, dual reporting now exists. Social Welfare Officers report to both District Commissioner and their line ministry. However, they hold the authority to make decisions over planning and implementation of activities in line with the needs of the communities they serve. “central government control is still minimal in some respects of programme delivery of child welfare functions” observed one social worker in Ntchisi.

Apart from creating the need for deploying more staff, decentralization has compelled sectors to start upgrading their staff grades as a commitment to the process of strengthening decentralization. In child welfare and community development, new position of district community services officer has been created. The officer will serve as head of the two sections at the district level, in the process making them operate as one

entity. This is in line with changes as envisaged by decentralization, that is rationalization and absorption of human resource.

Officers also reported that decentralization has come with the flourishing of community based organizations through which devolved child welfare functions are implemented. Decentralization seeks to bring services closer to the people. In a country such as Malawi, where more people are in the rural areas, community based organizations have served as a vehicle for translating decentralization into reality.



4.6. Research question five: Challenges Facing Decentralization and Child

Welfare

Exploring the challenges facing decentralization and child welfare is one of the objectives of this study. District officers reported a range of challenges. These are described below.

4.7.1. Resistance to change

Research findings indicated that there is resistance to change for many sectors that are devolved. District officers still owe their allegiance to their line/central ministries. They do not want to accept the reality that decentralization means that they are under and answerable to the District Commissioner. One district officer noted that this is the case because "line/central ministries do not want to relinquish all their powers to the districts. They still control promotions, staff transfers, recruitment, and payment of salaries and

hence automatically exerting more influence over district officers than the district commissioner.”

4.7.2. Dual reporting

On a related note, there exists dual reporting on the part of social welfare officers and community development officers. They report to their line Ministries as well as to the District Commissioner, a situation that confuses the officers even further. This results into divided loyalty on the part of the officers.

4.7.3. Poor attitudes towards Social Welfare Sector

Research respondents revealed that many sectors and officers in the districts generally viewed social welfare office in relation to child welfare as one that is inferior. Many factors were cited as contributing to this attitude. First, activities implemented by the district social welfare office are not part of the priority list in the Malawi growth and Development Strategy, which is an over-arching government policy driving and reflecting the socio-economic development agenda of Malawi. Second, it is not only one of the least funded sectors at the district level, but it is also one of the sectors with the least ranked cadre of staff at the district level. This compounded by many other challenges “relegates social welfare office (rs) to an inferior status in the eyes of stakeholders and fellow implementing partners”, noted a social worker during group discussions in Lilongwe. In view of this, seldom does the district consider social welfare office as priority requiring special consideration when budgeting and planning for district activities.

4.7.4. Resource Constraints

During focus group discussions, it was found that in the 2010/2011 government financial year, funding from central government to the two offices increased. However, District Officers thought the funding is generally not enough to meet the operational needs of the two offices. Chinsinga and Kayuni (2006:18) note that both community and social welfare offices have been facing critical funding constraints. Yet adequate funding is critical in implementing child welfare programmes. As UNICEF (2007) points out, resource constraints to the decentralized district are likely to create a danger of relegating child welfare to secondary importance.

The table below attempts to summarize the average monthly funding for the two districts:

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Table 3: Average monthly funding for district social welfare offices in 2010/2011 financial year

District	Amount
Lilongwe Social Welfare offices	MK 100,000 (ZAR 5000)
Ntchisi Social Welfare	MK 60,000 (ZAR 3000)

4.7.5. Lack of orientation on devolution of Child welfare

Officers at district level also reported that when the Ministry of Gender, Children and Community development was devolving core functions in 2005, no orientation for district

officers was conducted. It is believed that orientation would have clarified some of the issues that officers are facing, such as reporting lines, and the role of the central/line ministry among others. The orientation would have further prepared the officers for demands of a decentralised system. In such a way, "situations where they divide their loyalty between serving the District Commissioner and their line ministry would have been minimized," reported one of the social workers in Lilongwe. However, others pointed out that the Ministry must have assumed that officers understood decentralisation through various short courses they have been attending on decentralization.

4.7.6. Limited capacity of officers

District officers in both Ntchisi and Lilongwe reported that one challenge facing child welfare services provision is the lack of capacity among the various relevant government and non-government partners. The lack is in terms of the numerical strength of social welfare officers. For instance, there are approximately 100 government social welfare workers posted in all the 28 districts in Malawi. There are 3 social workers in Ntchisi and 12 in Lilongwe. This is however not enough to provide efficient child welfare services. Even if they were to be adequate, the quality of the workers in terms of qualification is also not adequate to match the expectations of the ideal social worker. For instance, in Ntchisi, all social workers were trained up to certificate level.

In Lilongwe, only one has a graduate qualification, and conspicuously the graduate qualification is in an area other than social work. As result, the experiences of working as social workers are therefore based on the on-job training attained as a result of being

employees in the ministry. This has an implication on service delivery in that access to quality social welfare services is limited or compromised. Child welfare ought to be entrusted to professionals if it is to be effective in serving the people that is meant for.

In addition, it also transpired during interviews that most sectors (including those involved in child welfare) are sending staff that are just coming from school and have little experience. They thus require “further capacity building before they can actually become more effective”, noted one senior officer in Lilongwe.

As noted by the respondents in both districts, decentralization has also created increased demand for social welfare/child welfare services especially. In response, there are attempts at increasing the number of officers to attend to the increasing demand for services at district level. For instance, in 2007, the government recruited an additional group of about 60 social welfare officers to the districts. Since 2009, it has been also further redeploying more officers to head both child welfare and community development at senior rank. Yet, this has not correspondingly gone with substantial increase of resources, expansion of infrastructure and related material support among others. In this regard, work is compromised. One officer gave an example of lack of office space for case work interventions (such as counselling) requiring special rooms for meeting clients.

4.7.7. Fear of losing power

Findings indicated that fear of loss of power and control over vital resources by line ministries at central level has resulted into delays to effect full decentralization. In some cases, central ministries claim not have decentralized physical assets such as buildings

among others. The officers in Ntchisi, for instance, cited a scenario in which central government is still clinging to control the Community development training centre, which also houses the community development office. Yet, it is failing to maintain the centre despite generating funds through workshops and other activities within the district. In youth sector, processing of funding and control of other vital resources for implementing youth programmes still rests with the line Ministry of Youth and sports at central government level.

On a related development, Ministries/sectors control over staff of the districts mean that they can transfer them any how without consulting the District Commissioner. As a result, investments that district councils can make in the staff are lost once transfers are effected on the staff. One respondent gave an example of himself that "I was trained by donors to serve in a particular project in Ntchisi, only to be transferred to Lilongwe before the impact of my training could be realized".

4.7.8. Child welfare work left to NGO partners

The officers also reported that most of the child welfare work is being implemented by partners and/or donor partners. Chinsinga and Kayuni (2006) attribute the cause of this to funding constraints on the part of government partners to fully implement child welfare activities as creating a gap for such partners to fill. Although this is an opportunity, some officers felt that the situation compromises the leadership role of government partners in provision of child welfare. One of the officers said that "NGO and Donor partners tend to dictate the terms for implementing programmes under their support and thereby making the district council's role ceremonial."

4.7. Conclusion

This chapter has made attempts to present findings regarding the experiences of district officers on decentralization and child welfare in Lilongwe and Ntchisi in Malawi. The findings are predominantly qualitative in nature, owing to the exploratory design adopted by the study. In this breadth, findings have been presented along thematic lines drawn from and predetermined by the objectives and research questions of the study. In this regard, the chapter has outlined findings related to the district officers' understanding of the concept of child welfare and decentralization; the impact (in terms of benefits) brought about by decentralization of child welfare services; preparedness of district officers to implement child welfare under decentralization; changes brought about by decentralization; and challenges facing child welfare under decentralization. In some cases, the presentation of findings also carries information and analyses obtained through document search of programme and policy documents available on decentralization and child welfare.

Chapter 5

Discussion, Conclusions and recommendations

5.1. Introduction

The research sought to explore the experiences of district officers on decentralization and its impact on child welfare. The exploratory nature of the research was significant in bringing out an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of decentralization as it relates to child welfare in Malawi through the lenses of officers that are at the centre of implementation of child welfare services in Ntchisi and Lilongwe districts of Malawi.

This chapter covers discussion, conclusions and recommendations arising from the findings. The chapter concludes by highlighting further areas for research in child welfare in the context of decentralization.

5.2. Discussion of findings

The research findings raise insightful issues with regard to decentralization and child welfare. Much insight is drawn when the experiences are weighed against the theoretical perspective and other works. The general picture emerging from the officers' understanding of child welfare can be synthesized in line with the residual, institutional and social development view of social welfare. On one hand, a description by district social welfare officers of what constitutes child welfare corresponds with the fact that the devolved functions to district social welfare offices focus on specialized casework interventions with the vulnerable groups. This implies that child welfare is thus remedial and residual in function.

Needless to mention, District Social Workers' understanding of social welfare might be influenced by the social work education background and social work systems that are modeled on western social work. Just as Anucha, (2008:231) and Laird (2004: 695) write after independence, African countries simply adopted western social welfare systems, methods and administration which failed to address the real problems facing the African people.

On the other hand, District Officers other than social workers demonstrated that they understand child welfare from an institutional perspective. In which case, they concur with Midgley (1995:5) and Colby (1989:8) among others, who look at social welfare as promotion of people's well-being through a wide range of services, programmes targeting individuals, groups and communities. From this, it can be concluded that such understanding assumes that child welfare is a means toward desired state of affair. The means can therefore include education, health, casework interventions with vulnerable groups and water and sanitation among others.

The other picture drawn from the district officers' understanding of child welfare relates to social development as both a means and a state of social equality. Bernstein and Gray, (1997) point out that social development focuses on structural change at macro-level; the process which also integrates the dynamic process of economic growth. District Community development offices understand their work as to include community economic empowerment activities, community mobilization, community capacity building and functional adult literacy. They also understand their work as complementing the work of all other sectors in advancing the well-being and bringing

about the change at communities. Their understanding is therefore in line with the social development approach.

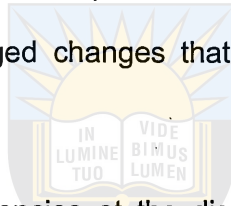
The District Officers' understanding of decentralization as "Mphamvu Ku anthu" (meaning power to the people) is in line with definitions provided by Samuels, Sibale, and Selvester (2009) and Coudeouel and Paternostro (2006) that view decentralization as the divesting of the political/decision making process, resource control and administrative authority to the sub-national governments.

In terms of impact of decentralisation, one issue that demands discussion relates to collaboration. Working in collaboration to make decentralisation a viable system fits well with the functionalist theory. Explaining how the functionalist perspective works Haralambos and Holborn (2000:10) point out that:

"A system is an entity made up of interconnected and inter-related parts. ...each part will in some way affect every other part and the system as a whole. to survive, its various parts must have a degree of fit or compatibility".

Functionalist theory also espouses the idea of goal attainment as a direct result of the functions of the various parts in the society. Rizter (2008:101), writing about Talcott Parson's work on structural functionalism, argues that a system must define and achieve its primary goals. As can be seen from the impacts and the changes brought about by decentralisation, the goal of bringing social welfare sectors and all other institutions under a single administration unit is being achieved although few sectors are yet to fully devolve their functions.

The changes brought about by decentralisation to the district can be described as large scale in that they involve the macro-level system of the two districts. They are changes that are altering the different parts of the society to make them in tandem with the decentralized system. In the functionalist perspective, large scale social structures and institutions, their relationship and their constraining effect on actors is of prime concern (Ritzer 2008:99). According to the *Guidelines and Standards for Devolved Functions to Assemblies* (2003: 1), ensuring improved public service delivery is at the centre of devolution. Accordingly, the envisaged changes that decentralization is expected to bring include:



integration of government agencies at the district and community levels into one administrative and management unit, Rationalization and absorption of human resources; composite budgeting and provision of funds for the decentralized functions and services; and relieving the central and sectoral institutions of the implementation of operational responsibilities and transferring them districts there-by promoting popular participation for the governance and development of districts. (*Guidelines and Standards for Devolved Functions to Assemblies*, 2003: 1)

The research has demonstrated that the preparedness of district officers is weak in terms of their qualifications. This weak capacity has implications on the confidence and ability to deliver results. Just as Parry-Williams (2007) writes:

arguing the department's case for resources, promoting networking and advocating on policy is made harder when you have limited educational background and capacity and as a consequence may lack the authority needed to be convincing at the district level.

In the face of decentralization, there is hence an urgent need for upgrading of such staff so that they execute their functions in a more effective way.

It is also note-worthy that the challenges facing decentralisation and child welfare can be described in the functionalist perspective as dysfunctional to the functioning of the institution of social welfare and the district at large. Societies and their institutions are supposed to behave in an orderly manner according to norms and expected patterns of behaviour implying that different parts of a society are modeled and operate in terms of rules (Haralambos and Holborn, 2000:9). In this breadth, the challenges facing child welfare could imply that the parts that are supposed to maintain the system of decentralisation are not performing their functions satisfactorily.

Much as the function of maintaining the decentralised district structure lies primarily with the various sectors and institutions at district level, the other challenges facing the district emanate from the external environment. Accordingly, the system is failing to adapt. In Talcott Parson's structural functionalism, a system survives if among other activities it is able to "cope with external situational exigencies. It must adapt to its environment and adapt the environment to its needs" (Ritzer, 2008: 101).

5.3. Conclusions

The research was being conducted with a background that decentralization of child welfare functions is relatively new in Malawi. As such, an exploration of the phenomenon of decentralization as it relates to child welfare functions was important in getting an in-depth understanding. In this breadth, the first objective was to explore how decentralization is conceived by district officers. The research has demonstrated that district officers view child welfare as a range of services and programmes aimed at

enhancing the well-being of children. Their understanding has been located in three theoretical perspectives of understanding social welfare.

In this regard, it has been established that services specifically provided by the social welfare office can best be described as residual in nature, because they are mostly in form of specialized case work interventions targeting individuals and their vulnerabilities. On the other hand, other views looked at child welfare as all services provided by the government or local council aimed at promoting survival, growth and development of children. Such an understanding takes on the institutional view of looking at social welfare. Considering that the district council is an integration of various sectors into a single unit in which sectors work towards achieving unity of purpose (ie ensuring child well-being); it can be concluded that district's understanding fits well within both the social development view of social welfare and the functionalist theory. Such thinking transcends both the residual and institutional view of looking at welfare.

The second objective explored the experiences of the district officers towards the impact of decentralization on child welfare. District officers confirmed that decentralization of child welfare has come with many positive aspects. Many of the impacts relate to administrative and fiscal forms of decentralization. It was noted that child welfare is indeed being administered under the single authority of the District Commissioner, they control their own resources generated through local revenues and subventions from donors and central government. The merits of decentralizing child welfare has led to improved collaboration among and between partners involved in child welfare work; bottom-up planning process in which child welfare follows the demand-

driven approach to development adopted by the two districts; increase in funding levels from both government and partners. In the functionalist perspective, this can be said to contribute to making the system work in harmony.

The third research objective attempted to explore the nature and extent of preparedness of district officers in meeting the demands created by decentralization in service provision. The study has also confirmed that there are more resources that are being channeled to the districts. The resources are part of the process of enhancing the capacity of district officers to implement child welfare programmes effectively. The study further reveals that there exists capacity challenges on the part of officers working at the district level. The officers are inadequate and most of them do not possess the requisite qualifications to adequately execute their duties effectively. In the functionalist perspective all parts of a system are supposed to work in harmony in order for the system to be at equilibrium. According to Burson (2006:81) who uses functionalist theory to explain child welfare reforms, social welfare services are provided and expanded because of the premise that appropriate capacity to do so is available. Yet, in the case of the two districts capacity in terms of human resources, material and financial is still inadequate, rendering decentralization into a state of disequilibrium.

To establish changes that devolution of child welfare functions has brought to the district formed the fourth objective of this study. It has been established that decentralization has brought about many changes. There is more work to do on the part of district officers in their bid to meet the demand for child welfare services. There is now integration of sectors into single administrative unit, albeit with few sectors remaining to

devolve their functions. Such an integration of all sectors inherent in decentralization is not only consistent with the functionalist perspective but also the social development approach because it helps to link specialized case work interventions of social welfare with a wide range of services such as, inter alia, health, education, food security, and economic empowerment programmes which are integral to ensuring child well-being.

Finally, the research explored challenges associated with the provision of child welfare services under decentralization. The challenges include inadequate capacity at district level both in terms of districts being understaffed and lacking proper or low qualifications for child welfare work; dual reporting scenario that compromises the loyalty of officers to the district council as some would rather choose to align themselves more with their central line ministry; fear of losing control over the districts leading to central line ministries decentralizing some of the core functions while staff salaries, transfers and control of physical assets still remain in their control; and the social welfare office at district being underfunded and resulting in compromised service delivery. In addition, engagement of donor partners in service delivery, (while being an opportunity) also compromises the leadership role of the district as the former uses the donations to dictate terms of implementing programmes.

Needless to comment further, the challenges should be looked at as a normal occurrence to every system. Although, from the functionalist perspective, such challenges can be said to be dysfunctional to the districts, they can serve as a catalyst and motivation for making the sectors think about ways and means of improving the system. In the context of structural functionalists perspective, these challenges set the

context under which the decentralised system is adapting to the environment and its needs.

In general, the study can conclude that although core functions of child welfare were decentralized, in practice the districts have not fully experienced it owing to the interplay of various factors and challenges. The fiscal forms of decentralization have been implemented fully with the exception of few sectors that have not devolved their functions. The Administrative form of decentralization has been implemented partially as central line ministry still holds the power to hire, recruit, transfer and mitigate rewards of officers at district level. The officers are thus more accountable to their central line ministries than to their District Council. In the absence of local elected councilors since their term expired in 2005, it is tricky to conclude that the districts are devolved politically.

5.4. Recommendations

In view of the findings, the study recommends that:

- Since child welfare is not only an end in itself but also a tool for social development, there is need to enhance the understanding of social welfare in a way that embraces the concept of social development. In this way, child welfare will be implemented as an institution in which the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.
- There is need for the local government ministry in Malawi to fast track the process of facilitating the completion of devolution by all sectors involved in child

welfare. This would be more in the best interest of the children and communities who are the direct beneficiaries.

- Comprehensive capacity building plan for upgrading existing social workers coupled with a major recruitment drive for well qualified staff needs to be developed. This will help address the capacity gaps that are currently being experienced at the district level.
- There is need for continued advocacy for increased resources to the social welfare offices in the districts. Increased funding is more likely to translate into improved coordination of child welfare. One way is to create a task force for engaging with donor partners and Malawi Government's Ministry of Finance to improve funding levels to the social welfare sector in general.

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5.5. Chapter Conclusion

This study only concentrated on getting an in-depth understanding of decentralization and its impact on child welfare from the perspectives of the district officers. The research thus did not get alternate views from other people (district stakeholders, communities and children) that are equally important in child welfare provision. Such being the case, it is difficult to generalize the findings to a wider grouping. Therefore further research is required to explore the experiences of other officers that were not covered by the research. Further research can also utilize alternate methodologies and design. This will help triangulate the findings of this research. In a nutshell, this research is only a springboard to serve as a starting point for exploring more about decentralizing child welfare in Malawi.

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Annex 1: Data collection instruments: Interview Schedules for all district officers

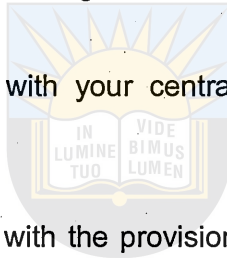
Annex 1: Data Collection Instruments: interview schedule for all district officers

- 1.0. The conceptualization of decentralisation by district officers.
 - 1.1. What do you understand by the concept of decentralization in relation to child welfare?
 - 1.2. What are the aims of decentralizing child welfare?
 - 1.3. What forms of decentralization are implemented by the district?
 - 1.4. In what way is decentralization ideal for child welfare provision in your district?
 - 1.5. What programmes in the district do you think are supposed to comprise child welfare?
 - 1.6. How should child welfare be implemented under decentralization?
 - 1.7. What do you think should child welfare services comprise under decentralization?

- 2.0. Experiences of district officers towards the impact of decentralization policy on child welfare.
 - 2.1. In what way does the district implement child welfare programmes in the district?
 - 2.2. What positive developments has decentralization brought to the district in general?
 - 2.3. What positive developments has decentralization brought to child welfare provision?
 - 2.4. If there are any positive developments brought about by decentralizing child welfare, what factors are responsible for this?
 - 2.5. What disadvantages has decentralization brought?

- 2.6. To what extent do you think is child welfare a matter of priority in decentralization and the district in particular?
- 2.7. How much funding is dedicated to child welfare in comparison to other sectors?
- 2.8. In what way is child welfare provision improving or not improving under decentralization?
- 3.0. The nature and extent of preparedness of district officers in meeting the demands created by decentralization in service provision.
 - 3.1. What kind of training did you have to be able to perform your current functions. ?
 - 3.2. If you have attended any training on decentralization and/or child welfare, what kind of training did you undergo ?, if no, explain why.
 - 3.3. Did your formal professional/academic training provide courses on decentralization?
 - 3.4. What training gaps does your initial training have in relation to decentralization and/or child welfare?
 - 3.5. What type of support (technical, material, financial, etc) do you receive from partners and central government?
 - 3.6. What type of support do you need to perform your functions with regard to child welfare?
 - 3.7. What support does your own district assembly provide to child welfare
 - 3.8. If any support is provided, How useful is it?
 - 3.9. What structures does the district have to support the implementation of child welfare activities?
 - 3.10. If there are any structures, are they functioning properly?
 - 3.11. Does the district have enough human resource capacity to implement child welfare functions in the context of decentralization?
- 4.0. The changes brought by devolution of child welfare functions
 - 4.1. What is the scope of your work in the service provision in the district

- 4.2. What responsibilities does the district have in the context of decentralization?
 - 4.3. What new duties and responsibilities has decentralization brought in your work in general?
 - 4.4. What new duties and responsibilities has decentralization brought in your work in relation to child welfare?
 - 4.5. How does child welfare relate to the rest of the sectors and/or departments under decentralization?
 - 4.6. What administrative changes has decentralization brought to child welfare
 - 4.7. How do you relate with your central ministries in relation to Child welfare programmes
- 5.0. The challenges associated with the provision of child welfare services under decentralization
- 5.1. What challenges do you meet in implementing child welfare activities under decentralization?
 - 5.2. In what way have the challenges impacted on provision of child welfare in the district?
 - 5.3. How do you address the challenges?
 - 5.4. Is there anything you would like to add which has not been asked?



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