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RURAL LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND DEVELOPMENT PLANNING, WITH EXPERIENCES FROM BUHERA DISTRICT, ZIMBABWE

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Abstract

In this paper an assessment is made of the problems, potentials and changing roles for rural local government in development planning. The paper moves from a general discussion on decentralised planning in Africa and changing local development planning styles, to more specific observations on rural district planning in Zimbabwe. A case study of improvements in rural local planning made by the Buhera District Council (Zimbabwe) in the late 1980s and early 1990s is used to illustrate some of the main points.

Though the record of decentralised planning has not been impressive, and criticism on local governments in Africa remains widespread, there are increasing calls to strengthen the local level in its development planning tasks. A prerequisite for an increased involvement of the local governments in local economic development is a meaningful form of decentralisation, which would give the local level more leeway in investment decisions. A revision of planning systems and a disaggregation of sectoral budgets to the local level are key measures proposed to support this process.

The paper further notes that, despite numerous planning constraints and the prevailing nature of centre-local relationship, there is some meaningful room for manoeuvre in the development tasks a rural local government body is able to fulfil. The gathering, recording, processing and updating of a district database; the strengthening of the project planning, implementation and management capacities; and initiatives to arrive at an integrated and participatory district planning system based on strategic development views are examples of the scope for improved local development initiatives.

These observations may also have repercussions on the tasks of local level development planners. As many of the standard analytical and planning tools are hardly ever put in practice there is need for a change of emphasis in task descriptions and training. These will have to centre around strategy development, project formulation, planning and management, accounting and database development, and negotiation, communication and social skills.

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RURAL LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND DEVELOPMENT PLANNING, WITH EXPERIENCES FROM BUHERA DISTRICT, ZIMBABWE.

1. INTRODUCTION

Decentralised planning for rural areas has both attracted considerable political and academic attention, and received significant amounts of development aid. Yet, despite these efforts, the record is bleak, and the success-stories are few. Central governments often consider decentralised planning as a conspicuous effort to erode their power base and point at inefficiencies and incompetence at the local levels. Local governments complain about the lack of appreciation of local situations by central government, and about their general lack of power in repressive centralised systems. It has often resulted in somewhat lethargic attitudes on the part of local governments and decentralised planning being considered as an obligatory ritual to be performed, rather than as a means to promote and guide development in a rural area.

This paper considers development planning by rural local government. It includes an account of how a number of rural local planning problems were approached by the Buhera District Council (Zimbabwe) in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The council had to operate within a number of constraints common to most local governments. Yet, unlike many other councils, it managed to improve its planning operations.¹

The history and experiences of Zimbabwe's post-independence district development planning is relatively well documented (Helmsing et al, 1991; Mutizwa-Mangiza, 1990; Wekwete 1991). There are three reasons for this particular paper to make an additional contribution to the existing knowledge on the subject. First, the paper gives an account of a conscious attempt to slowly, but gradually improve district planning in one of Zimbabwe's communal lands. As such it covers a period of several years and shows how, within the confines set by financial, political and administrative realities, there is scope for enhanced planned development activities, given a certain level of commitment and manpower. Second, in earlier contributions emphasis was on administrative tasks of local government, evolution of its structure, and financial patterns, and less on development responsibilities and planning roles of rural local governments. Third, in recent years it has increasingly been realised that planning at local levels both needs revitalisation and re-orientation. The dissatisfaction with decentralised planning experiences in many African countries, the emergence of new planning styles, the recognition of the important roles local governments can play in local economic development – these and other factors have accounted for a renewed interest in local level development interventions. This paper tries to relate the experiences in Buhera to this ongoing discussion about styles, scope and methods of decentralised development planning and promotion.

The paper describes the situation in Buhera District Council until 1 July 1993. At that date the amalgamation process of District Councils and Rural Councils formally started which created a state of flux and uncertainty at the local government level in Zimbabwe. Though in Buhera District this amalgamation process did not involve a merger, in contrast to most other districts in Zimbabwe, it did involve a restatement of tasks and functions, in line with general government guidelines, and hence an internal reorganisation. At the time of writing much of this process was

still unclear, but general observations on the amalgamation process in Zimbabwe are described in section 3.3.

The paper is structured as follows. In section 2 the limits and limitations as well as the potential strengths of decentralised planning and local governments in Africa are explored. Attention is also given to changing roles and perspectives of local level planning and to new or renewed planning styles and orientations at this level. Section 3 describes the decentralised planning structure in Zimbabwe. It pays specific attention to the role of the District Council and the constraints faced by this type of local government. It also assesses the recent and still incomplete local government reorganisation and its likely impact on decentralised planning. In section 4 the focus is on three areas in which improvements or innovations to district planning were tried in Buhera: data collection, project planning, and integrated area planning. Section 5 concludes the paper by relating the Buhera experiences to the general observations made earlier. It notes that even within a stifling structure improvements are feasible, given certain preconditions, and makes observations on the role of planners and planning education for decentralised planning in the 1990s.

2. CHANGING PERSPECTIVES ON DECENTRALISED DEVELOPMENT PLANNING AND THE ROLE OF RURAL LOCAL GOVERNMENT.

Perspectives on roles and functions of local level planning and of local government in the planning process have evolved in view of experiences in Africa in the last three decades. This section highlights some of the main issues and describes both potentials of and frustrations with decentralised planning, indicates the main lines of the decentralisation debate and presents some new developments in approaches to local development planning.

2.1. Limits to Local Level Planning

Local level planning, which in this paper is taken to be largely synonymous with district planning, refers to a level of planned intervention between national and project planning. It thus corresponds with regional planning and with integrated area planning in the sense that all are intermediate types of planning, but the term 'regional planning' is usually applied in situations in which several local authorities are involved. But these types of intermediate planning perform largely similar roles and functions (cf. Bendavid-Val, 1991; Helmsing, 1989; Lathrop et al, 1986; Van Raay et al, 1989). They are supposed to:

1. translate vague national policy goals into operational locational-specific policies and strategies; and to translate these policies and strategies into tasks and responsibilities for different (levels of) government agencies;
2. lead to better identified and prepared projects given local knowledge and suitably articulated and formulated policies and strategies. This involves the careful specification of expected costs and benefits of project proposals of projects, and the development and

- application of appraisal practices and decision rules to argue the relative merits of projects and to defend the choices made in establishing priorities for implementation;
3. coordinate sectoral planning activities, establish whether these sectoral approaches respond to local needs and opportunities, and consider the joint impact and effects of projects from various sectors, instead of concentrating on sector-specific effects only;
 4. stimulate local development initiatives through direct contacts with and participation by 'grassroots-organisations', villages, neighbourhoods etc.;
 5. focus on development activities geared to largely rural settings, as opposed to much of national planning which has traditionally centred around urban-industrial applications.

If well performed, it is argued, intermediate level planning will be much more than merely matching national/sectoral plans and policies with local needs and realities. It is meant to be a synthesizing force, a catalyst to subnational development, and pivotal to the creation of synergetic effects from development projects.

In some African countries hopes have been high that local level planning, as a complementary activity to national economic planning, would foster development, particularly in rural areas. But it has in fact often brought frustration and disappointment. The high expectations centred around the idea that planning at lower geographical and administrative levels would be more participatory, and hence better 'rooted'; that it would be able to integrate various sector interests and coordinate line ministries' activities; that it would lead to improved prioritisation and project selection; and that flexibility in planning would be enhanced.

Nevertheless dissatisfaction with local level development planning has been voiced ever since it was practised. Criticism has been geared towards the very same points it was meant to resolve. It has not been able to overcome interdepartmental rivalries and sector-dominated thinking at local levels. Coordination at local levels has been weak, and central government field administration has often been more powerful than (elected) local representatives. Meanwhile, in a number of countries major local tasks and sources of revenue were transferred to the centre. Meaningful participation has been minimal and where local mobilisation occurred effectively, it spawned some unplanned processes of itself. Project selection did not become more effective, and local level planning has obtained its own rigidities and rituals.²

There is thus a gap between the intentions of (integrated) national development planning and the practice experienced at local levels. Macro-economic planning and decentralised project planning are worlds apart, though they ideally should (have) be(en) bridged. Much of the planning has been separated from national, regional and local government budgets and budget cycles. The machinery to marry plan and budget has been absent and there has generally been long time-lags between plan preparation and the decision-date for action (Latimer, 1978). Moreover, though the desirability of decentralised planning systems has often been stressed by African governments, it has hardly ever been matched by a devolution of tasks and responsibilities and by opportunities for greater financial autonomy.

There also appears a wide gap between the traditional theory of regional, district and local planning and the practice in most Third World countries. In many cases plans are prepared, but never implemented (McNeill, 1985). Analytical and planning tools have been derived and developed which are hardly ever put in practice. Practice centres around administrative tasks and

is affected by time constraints and political pressures, ... "leaving little scope for planning techniques, apart from simple methods of priority setting" (Van Steenberg, 1990: 301). But simple methods of priority setting are hardly ever advocated in planning literature, most attention having been devoted to rather 'advanced' techniques of Cost-Benefit or Multicriteria Analysis, an advocate for simple techniques like Chambers being an exception (see for instance Chambers, 1978). Chambers has also pointed at the false assumption that the administrative capacity to plan and carry out projects would not form a bottleneck. He rather maintains that particularly small rural projects are administration-intensive, not very visible and hence less interesting to politicians and donors, but key in poverty alleviation and clearly addressing needs of large segments of the population.

Many of the problems and issues raised above are rooted in the structure of local government and are related to the decentralisation debate. The next section considers these aspects and tries to indicate to what extent structural characteristics of local governments and government systems affect the quality of local level planning.

2.2. Redefined Roles for Local Governments.

Writing about local government and decentralisation runs the grave risk of over-generalisation. There are many different forms and types of local governments, each set in rather unique economic and political circumstances, often also in a state of flux, and there are a range of aspects to consider when dealing with 'decentralisation'. This section therefore sketches some main forces and factors in (changing) tasks and functions performed by local governments only, identifying issues, rather than drawing firm conclusions. But it points at some political-administrative factors affecting the discussion about local level planning in the 1990s and is therefore important to the theme of the paper.

Despite the introduction of local governments in the late colonial period, at independence most African nations inherited a strongly centralised government system³. This centralised system has generally been maintained and is only slow to change. In addition to the colonial legacy, there are a number of forces that explain this tendency and have long been used as a rationale for a powerful central government. They include the need for political integration and the development of a unitary nation-state; the scarcity of managerial and technical expertise which would be put to best use in a centralised system; the emphasis on central planning which has been the leading view among many developmentalists until the late 1980s; and the adoption of industrialisation as a development strategy to be mainly promoted in major (capital) cities. In addition, the new elites and rulers, often consisting of one ethnic group, found the arrangements helpful in order not to share power. At a later stage, aid agencies and international banks have also welcomed the convenience of dealing with a strong central government.

In the course of time these factors have lost importance or proved spurious. The imposition of the idea of a nation-state has provoked both oppression and protest, often aligned with regional uprisings and separatist movements. As experience outside Africa has shown, local governments can very well serve as training grounds for managers and public administrators, which would be

a good reason to promote them in circumstances of scarcity. Industrialisation never really got off the ground in most African nations and has in fact often only developed at the expense of agriculture. Central planning, finally, waned with the increasing importance of structural adjustment programmes and largely disappeared along with the demise of communism in Eastern Europe.

Arguments against decentralisation have continued, however. They now mainly point at negative qualities of local governments: their inefficiency, incompetence, corruption, nepotism and selfishness, as well as the fact that they could constitute a base for secessionist movements and therefore instigate civil strife. In a number of cases local government has been strongly criticised and arguments have been put forward to suggest they may be effectively abolished. In Kenya, for instance, criticism has been directed towards the fact that local governments tend to confuse the direct chain of command from the centre; that they obscure the planning process by duplication of efforts; that financial mismanagement has been experienced in many local governments; that staffing has been weak, both qualitatively and quantitatively; and that there may even be better avenues to enhance popular participation (Wallis, 1990: 446-447). But these types of criticism often come from line ministry representatives, not from more political oriented appointees.

Though plans for decentralisation were launched by most African countries in the 1970s and/or 1980s, they were hardly implemented, or took the form of deconcentration –the strengthening of field administration– thereby increasing the grip of the State (Olowu, 1988, p. 40). The concept of decentralisation refers to the transfer of administrative and/or decision-making (political) power to lower organisational units. Meaningful decentralisation, it is argued, primarily concerns the transfer of political power, and thus devolution, rather than deconcentration.⁴ Decentralisation in this sense is not an absolute state of affairs, but a relative shift of power along a continuum, generally supposed to start from an undesired level of centralisation. But centralisation and decentralisation should also not be seen as two simple opposites. Decentralisation may include improved coordination and multi-level cooperation, rather than a significant relocation of power.

Conyers (1990:16) listed five arguments in favour of decentralisation related to planning. Decentralisation would: (a) increase popular participation in planning and development; (b) make plans more relevant to local needs; (c) facilitate co-ordinated or 'integrated planning; (d) increase the speed and flexibility of decision-making; and (e) generate additional resources and encourage more efficient use of existing resources. However, experiences have generally not been uncontroversial. Decentralisation has important resource requirements, and has often neglected or even ignored the socio-economic differentiation at regional and local levels, thus enlarging inequalities (Gasper, 1991).

Currently, local governments in Africa remain relatively weak, as is for instance evidenced by low numbers of staff and a limited budget. All around Africa a number of similar problems are faced, as summarised by Olowu and Smoke (1992, p.3):

"Local sources of revenue are poorly developed and administered, and local service needs are not well met. There are insufficient staff, and many employees lack adequate professional training. Civil services are badly organised and suffer from low pay scales and poor incentives. Recordkeeping is primitive, and managerial procedures are

underdeveloped or non-existent. Central governments exert stifling and inefficient bureaucratic control over many aspects of local authority operations, and there is extensive political interference in local administration."

They are thus far removed from Mawhood's characterisation of a decentralised local authority as 'having its own budget, a separate legal existence, and the authority to allocate substantial resources on a range of different functions, the decisions being made by representatives of the local people' (1983:9-10).

Tasks and functions performed by local governments in Africa differ from country to country as well as between rural and urban local areas⁵. In nearly all cases, however, they are involved in licensing and control, and registration of births, deaths etc. In addition, the administration of a number of essential local services (refuse collection and disposal, public 'green', public hygiene and preventive health, roads, fire prevention, and in a number of cases also education, health care and local police) is an important task, which directly affects the quality of living in the area.

Traditionally local governments have had these kind of regulatory and extractive roles and little to do with economic development (Cochrane, 1983). With recurrent calls for decentralisation, their prospective roles in development planning has been stressed.

The view that local governments could play a more positive role in development processes predominates today and hence (again) pressures for more decentralisation. Potentially strong points of local governments centre around two issues (see also Mawhood, 1983; Olowu, 1988). First, they are closest to the people and thus have a detailed knowledge of their needs, wishes and demands. They are also in a strong position to communicate and explain, and to incorporate local views and ideas. This not only contributes to responsiveness and accountable governance on the part of local government, but also to a sense of 'ownership' if decisions are felt to be taken by the people and their local representatives. Second, they could actually improve the effectiveness of central government by (i) decongesting them, (ii) providing a check on their performance, (iii) augmenting the effective tax base, and (iv) cushioning antagonisms between central government and local movements.

On the basis of seven case studies of successful local government in Africa, Olowu and Smoke (1992) highlighted a number of reasons behind the success⁶. Among these were factors which could be largely controlled or improved upon by local governments themselves, like their creativity in effectively raising local level revenues, the nature of the local management, the responsiveness to constituents and the interaction with other local authorities. Other factors were largely given, like the presence or absence of a significant economic base. A third and crucial category is concerned with local-central relations and is strongly related to the decentralisation debate.

Preconditions for effective decentralised planning by rural local government seem to at least include the availability of staff and a basic capacity to generate local revenue. Other factors play a role as well: the organisation of and the importance attached to 'popular participation', the ability of authorities (and planners) to communicate with levels 'below' and 'above' them, and the responsiveness at higher levels. Equally important is the planning style, or approach to planning adopted, an issue taken up in the next section.

2.3. Developments in Local Development Planning

Faced with the realisation that local level planning is rather restricted in its potential impact, with changing roles and functions of local government, and with different expectations from local groups and individuals, local development planning has been and still is undergoing a number of adaptations. Both the style and contents of planning have changed, and with them the tasks and requirements for development planners. Responses have included the emergence of more strategic types of planning, the emphasis on 'enabling approaches', increased attention to local economic development, the role of NGO's and public-private partnerships, and a renewed interest in community self-help programmes. In this section the focus will be on more strategic planning styles and on the growing interest in questions of local economic development.

Although strategic planning⁷ has a long-term history in the military and has been applied in health care and transport planning for some time, it developed as a separate approach in local and regional planning relatively recently. In regional planning some early 'strategic' methods were advanced in the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s including the Themes-Strategy-Projects (TSP) approach and the Reduced Planning approach as described by Bendavid-Val and Waller (1975) and the P3 approach by Van Raay (1982). These and other approaches were a reaction to both the failures of comprehensive planning and the problems encountered with isolated project planning. Comprehensive regional planning was criticised because of the time involved in plan preparation, the unavailability and unreliability of data, the static character of the plans, and the fact that one had to deal with (too) many unpredictable variables. Isolated project planning –often involving a major infrastructural project, like a dam, highway, irrigation scheme– on the other hand did not guarantee that the project selected was key to the development of the area, while it could trigger off a large number of unforeseen effects (Olthof, 1990).

Reactions in planning theory and practice acknowledged the need to take uncertainty into account as well as the ability to respond to changes in the external (economic, political) environment; to be selective in data collection, plan formulation and intervention; to constantly monitor, review and modify plans and proposals; and, above all, to emphasize a regional development strategy and strategic thinking instead of plan making. The importance of 'strategy' –seen as a set of guiding ideas for, or a 'vision' of a development direction, path, and outcome– was stressed in view of the realisation that regions are open economies, and that conditions, events and decisions external to the region will often have a more profound effect on its development than internal factors (Boisier, 1978).

While these modifications were initialised by professionals and academics from within the planning profession, a second move towards strategic planning at local and regional levels occurred, inspired by planning and management approaches in private corporations. These approaches stressed the need for proactive planning and the necessity to confront developments, values, beliefs, visions and needs in society with missions and activities of organisations⁸. Though often presented as a novel approach, it builds on old roots in management science. Moreover, to many public planners the principles of corporate strategic planning appear 'old wine in new bottles'. Many of these principles had been applied in planning practice, and had been covered

in planning training (Kaufman and Jacobs, 1987). Kaufman and Jacobs (o.c.) list 5 points which are seen as key to corporate strategic planning:

- * an orientation towards action, results and implementation;
- * the promotion of broad and diverse participation in the planning process;
- * an emphasis on understanding the external context of the planning object⁹ and determining opportunities and threats via an environmental scan;
- * a recognition of the competitive behaviour of planning objects;
- * an emphasis on the assessment of strengths and weaknesses of the planning object in the context its opportunities and threats.

They conclude that these points are familiar to public planners as implicit or explicit criticism on or reactions to comprehensive planning approaches. What is distinctive, however, is that corporate strategic planning brought the points together in a coherent planning process model (o.c., p. 30).

Strategic planning makes use of two 'tools': SWOT analysis and stakeholder analysis. The acronym SWOT stands for Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats and the purpose of SWOT analysis is to strategically link external conditions to internal characteristics. For key issues the opportunities and threats of the planning environment are assessed for its implications on the internal strengths and weaknesses of the planning object. Stakeholder analysis lists problems faced in achieving certain objectives and for each problem stakeholders are identified. Stakeholders can be defined as individuals or groups having access to resources needed to carry out an activity or prevent an activity from being performed. Stakeholder analysis thus matches problems with those groups and individuals that can help to resolve those problems. A simple matrix confronting problems with stakeholders helps in portraying the often large numbers of stakeholders involved and in realising that the solution to many problems is outside direct control of many of the stakeholders (Honadle and Cooper, 1989). A next step is then to devise ways and means for coordination and cooperation among and between the stakeholders.

In public planning, these principles are mainly applied in the European or North American context. Few examples exist from developing countries, particularly at the local level. For Zimbabwe Helmsing (1990) proposed an application of strategic planning at the provincial level. Though the advice has been widely acclaimed and accepted, the practical implementation has been slow¹⁰. Nevertheless it is useful to summarise the main points. A planning sequence of six steps was proposed (o.c., p. 12):

- (1) Scanning of the environment
- (2) Selection of Strategic Policy Areas (key issues)
- (3) Setting of 'mission statements' or broad goals
- (4) Undertake external and internal analysis
- (5) Develop goals, objectives and action plans with respect to each Strategic Policy Area, and
- (6) Formulate a strategy (joint action plan) to carry out the strategic actions in a coordinated manner.

The entire process includes regular monitoring and periodic updating.

The first step involves the identification of opportunities and threats facing the province, based on socio-economic, demographic and policy trends. On the basis of this external scanning, key development issues can be distinguished (step 2) and only after that will broad development goals or mission statements be selected (step 3). More thorough external and internal analysis will follow

in step 4, relating the internal strengths and weaknesses to the external opportunities and threats. In step 5 more concrete action plans are developed for each key area, followed by strategy for implementation involving coordination among stakeholders.

Similar approaches may be useful for the local or district level as well, though the degree of control over developments and agencies/stakeholders is often considerably less than at the provincial or regional level, while uncertainties caused by external circumstances are greater.

With respect to scale and contents of planning a trend has been observed in many places in the world concerning a shift to the local level, with this level assuming more responsibilities for (local economic) development planning (Tomlinson, 1993). This trend is linked with the emerging field of Local Economic Development (LED) which has its origins mainly in the Australian, European and North American context (Blakely, 1989; Bingham and Mier, 1993), but with a rapidly gaining interest in Third World situations (see for example Zaaier and Miranda Sara, 1993). Blakely referred to Local Economic Development as

"the process in which local governments or community-based (neighbourhood) organizations engage to stimulate or maintain business activity and/or employment. The principal goal of local economic development is to develop local employment opportunities in sectors that improve the community using existing human, natural and institutional resources" (1989:15).

The central argument is that local initiatives in economic development and employment creation are likely to be more successful than national ones, as general problems have specific local manifestations. Local responses are likely to be more creative, flexible, adjusted to local needs and opportunities and hence more successful and sustainable, with a greater chance for lasting employment and income effects. To that end local government can enter new partnership arrangements with private or community-based organisations, and assume an initiating rather than passive role.

These approaches and developments, though new and unfolding and developed in different circumstances, are likely to have an increasingly important effect on local development planning in the Third World. This will have implications on both institutional arrangements and on the roles, functions and skills of local development planners.

Following the considerations above, local governments and planning agencies will have to assume new roles, with less emphasis on plan making and more on strategy development; less on direct control, and more on appreciation and influencing; less on direct intervention, more on enabling, coordinating, stimulating and initiating. Referring to an urban planning framework McNeill (1985) has argued for limited, but more realistic tasks for planning, starting from an assessment of (local) government's powers and instruments available, as well as powers of the planning agency in order to restrict activities to those over which some influence can be exerted. In addition, he mentions that what planning agencies might do best is coordinating activities, with anticipating events and initiating actions as more ambitious tasks. Such modifications may require new institutional forms, task divisions and information channels.

The consequent role for a local development planner will also differ from traditional tasks and functions. The planners will be more involved in coordination, meetings, negotiations, strategy

development etc., rather than primary research, data analysis, and plan preparation. More with socio-economic issues, and less with physical planning. This will of course have implications for job descriptions, skills and training, an issue further taken up in section 5.

3. STRUCTURE OF AND TRENDS IN DISTRICT PLANNING IN ZIMBABWE

District planning in Zimbabwe involves a number of different actors: central government departments, non-governmental agencies and local representation bodies (District Council, WADCO, VIDCO). The way these agencies relate, their tasks and functions in district planning, and above all the development planning problems faced by them, are issues dealt with in this section.¹¹ In sections 3.1. and 3.2. the focus will be on the decentralised planning framework at district level with special reference to the rural local government structure of District Councils (3.1.)¹² and the operation of the District Development Committee (3.2.). The recent rural local government reorganisation exercise and its implications for district development planning will be dealt with in section 3.3.

3.1. Decentralised planning at district level in Zimbabwe

After Independence the central government of Zimbabwe launched some major policy reforms in the mid 1980s in order to enhance decentralised planning. Three decentralisation policy documents were published, viz. the First Prime Minister's Decentralization Directive of 1984, the Second Prime Minister's Decentralization Directive of 1985 and the Provincial Councils and Administration Act of 1985. In summary, these initiatives established the following decentralised planning framework:

- a hierarchy of representative authorities and channels of popular participation, being the Village Development Committee (VIDCO), the Ward Development Committee (WADCO), the District Council and Provincial Council;
- an institutional structure for horizontal coordination of development planning and implementation of central government field agencies and local authorities, viz. the District Development Committee and the Provincial Development Committee;
- production of annual and five year development plans by the development committees from village to provincial level through a bottom-up procedure.

District Councils were established in 1980 under the provisions of the District Councils Act. At Independence Zimbabwe inherited a dual rural local government structure of Rural Councils administering commercial lands and African Councils administering communal lands. This Act was a first step to transform these different rural constituencies based on a framework of racial land segregation. The 242 small and fragmented African Councils were consolidated into 55 District Councils, while the Rural Council as institution remained more or less intact for the time

being, although intents and purpose of the existence of the latter changed slightly (Helmsing, 1991). The Rural District Councils Act of 1988 is the second major step to reform the rural local government structure by amalgamating the former Rural and District Councils (see section 3.3). The implementation of this Act commenced in all modesty in July 1993.

Some of the basic characteristics of District Councils in Zimbabwe have been described as (Olthof and Wekwete, 1992):

- financially highly dependent on central government resources for the delivery of basic resources and for their own institutional sustainability, reflected for instance by grant aid to most key executive posts;
- covering areas with limited readily exploitable and developed resources, worsening the dependence on central government. Nevertheless, improved management of natural resources such as wildlife has provided opportunities for increasing local revenue;
- having peasant agriculture on marginal land as its major economic base. Limited urbanisation and a general lack of non-farming activities continues to cause labour migration to other areas;
- with limited finances and few opportunities for human resource development, the management capacity and technical skills of executive staff have remained relatively undeveloped, resulting in a more administrative than development oriented District Council;
- the statutory powers of councils are generally limited allowing for few and standard activities. Such limited powers are evident in terms of local revenue raising powers, which are restricted to inelastic tax resources, while many services are provided by central government ministries and parastatals;
- although councillors play an important role in representing the interests of their constituents, they have in their activities frequently been overshadowed by National Members of Parliament, and by representatives of other interest groups, mainly due to the lack of resources available to council

The District Councils Act of 1980 made provisions for setting up an elected local authority with an executive staff to support the powers of the council. On the representative side the council consists of elected councillors, the policy makers of the District Council, who are advised and informed during the decision making process by the executive staff of the council or if requested by representatives of other government departments. Each councillor represents one ward. A ward is defined as consisting of an administrative unit of approximately 6 000 to 7 000 people, further organized into 6 villages of about 1 000 people each. In practice there is some variation with more or less than 6 villages forming one ward and population numbers deviating considerably from the nominal average with a range between 1 000 and 13 000 for rural communal wards (census 1992). A village in Zimbabwe is not a nucleus of houses grouped together, but consists of numerous scattered homesteads.

In order to deal effectively and efficiently with the different tasks of the District Council the following five committees have been formed: Finance, Works and Planning, Education, Health and Natural Resources Committee. Each committee consists of a number of councillors and relevant executive staff. One of the councillors is elected as chairperson. Committee recommendations are discussed in Full Council meetings which all councillors are supposed to attend.

On the executive side the council is headed by the Chief Executive Officer, i.e. the District Administrator (DA), who does not reside at the District Council office. The District Administrator is the administrative apex of the district and the functional linchpin to the central government. The DA is a civil servant employed by the Ministry of Local Government, Rural and Urban Development (MLGRUD). As the central government's most senior district official he is charged with the overall administration of the district and coordination of the activities of the different central government ministries, local government and non-governmental organizations (ngo's) active at district level. The DA is chairing the main coordinating planning body at district level, viz. the District Development Committee. Being the District Council's Chief Executive Officer (CEO) the DA has a special position towards the Council. In this role he is to advise and guide the council's activities and ensure that the provisions of the District Councils Act (1980), Rural District Councils Act (1988) and related administrative procedures are adhered to. In other words he is the de jure head of the District Council.

The day-to-day running of the council falls under the responsibility of the Senior Executive Officer. At most district councils the SEO supervises five departments: Finance, Projects, Education, Administration and Health Department. Each department is headed by an Executive Officer (EO) who is assisted by some junior personnel. Differentiation in staffing per council is caused by the funding system of salaries. The District Council receives administrative grants from central government for a core of staff only, while the remaining staffing costs are covered by local revenue sources. In some councils certain positions may therefore not exist or be filled, because of lack of council finance and/or differences in priorities set.

Tasks and functions of the District Council related to the overall planning in the district are diverse. Council has an important role in land use planning (i.e. the alienation and allocation of land for commercial, industrial, residential, agricultural or other uses, and the control of prospective development in terms of issuing leases and building permits). It receives development requests from councillors. It carries out feasibility studies of its own project proposals. It participates in different consultative, coordinative government (sub-)committees. It gathers information, prepares project documents, administers and monitors activities executed by and under the responsibility of its own departments. It is instrumental in mobilizing donor assistance to supplement local community and government contributions. It partly interferes with the preparation, execution, monitoring or evaluation of central government based projects and programmes. It assists central government departments in sectoral planning by means of providing information about the development needs of villages and wards such as new schools, clinics, roads, boreholes, and dams. The main department at most councils to carry out these duties is the Project Department.

In principle both the District Administration Office and the District Council are suitable institutions to influence the coordination and planning of the different development activities that are taking place for in a district. Both (should) have an overview of the total development process in the district and an insight and understanding of the district development needs, problems, opportunities, resources and limitations. Both are involved in practically every sector of the development process at district level and have access to all development actors operating in the district. Other actors involved in district development activities are more focused on the planning of their specific sector-based programmes or projects, or on relative small geographical areas

(ward or village), and not on the entire district.

However, both the DA's and the District Council's ability to practise functions of development planning are hindered by several factors. Skilled manpower is often lacking, and officers are pre-occupied with the day-to-day running of the departments and are unable to set aside sufficient time for middle to long term development planning. A proper and updated information system about the development problems, potentials and activities is normally lacking. The general approach towards developmental activities is a project or sector approach and not an integrated district planning approach. In addition, the DA's office does not have a specific department responsible for project planning and implementation.

The ambiguous relationship between the District Council and the DA further complicates the district planning system. On the one hand the DA is only an advisor to the council, but on the other he is its chief manager. The degree of control over the daily operations of the council by the DA depends on the capacity to delegate and the countervailing power and quality of executive staff at the council. The management style of the DA can vary from 'laissez-faire' to tied control. For development planning it implies that unclarities exist in the exact coordinative responsibilities of both government institutions (e.g. who is accountable to whom, who collects the information for the production of the district development plans, who guarantees the participation of the inhabitants in the planning process and who priorities and selects the projects). Moreover, policy intentions or project proposals could be overruled or pushed through either by the DA or by councillors.

The centralistic style of government administration also limits the options for a separate district development policy. At district level central government policy is mainly implemented by its line ministries, which are deconcentrated without much autonomy in the budget allocation for district development activities. Moreover, district officials from line ministries are not accountable to the local government, but to their own superiors at national level. The council, despite being the district planning authority, lacks the legal power to translate national policies and strategies into tasks for different government departments. Central government departments and donors have the tendency to by-pass the council or only formally involve it without giving the opportunity of meaningful contributions towards their developmental intentions.

3.2. DDC and District Plans

A central position in district planning is taken up by District Development Committee (DDC), whose characteristics and functioning also form a crucial bottleneck in the planning process. The DDC is the main coordinating committee for the different government departments and non-governmental agencies dealing with general district development issues. This committee consists mainly of central government field representatives and is not functionally related to the District Council. Meetings are sometimes attended by heads of departments but more often junior by staff members, resulting in an irregular pattern of attendance (see also Mutizwa-Mangiza, 1991b). Most DDC members lack sufficient knowledge of planning concepts and ideas. Meetings of the DDC mainly have an informative value: officers share experience and details about development activities of other government departments and ngo's in the district. The approved

recommendations and resolutions do not have binding implications, often resulting in a lack of implementation.

Its main planning function relates to the formulation of the annual and five year district development plans. Steps in the preparation and submission of these two types of plans are based on the First and Second Prime Minister's Decentralization Directives. Village Development Committees (VIDCOs) are supposed to forward village needs and proposals to the Ward Development Committees (WADCOs). These submissions should then form the basis for the generation of development proposals in a hierarchical structure of planning (district plans, provincial plans, national and sector plans). WADCOs coordinate the village plans and forward ward plans to the District Council. The council coordinates the WADCO plans, combines these plans with other identified needs and proposals and prepares a submission to the DDC. The central government field departments, parastatals and ngo's also submit their own development plans to the DDC, which then composes a final draft to be approved at a Full Council meeting by the councillors. The DA is the person ultimately responsible for the formulation of the district development plans and coordinates the work of the different sub-committees.

The de facto writing of the annual and five year district development plans is performed by sub-committees of the DDC. These sub-committees cover sectors like housing and infrastructure, industry and commerce, agriculture, natural resources, tourism and social welfare,. These planning sub-committees of the DDC do not functionally align to council committees, a non-alignment which hampers a two-way communication between local government and DDC. Moreover, those members of the DDC responsible for development plan preparation are usually not involved in implementation and monitoring of projects ultimately funded. There is thus no feedback and built-in learning effect for the composers of the district development plans in the absence of a confrontation with the adjustments or possible failure of the planned interventions.

The VIDCO-WADCO source of planning information is meant to facilitate a bottom-up approach. Local people are supposed to participate in the compilation of the village and ward plans. But there is insufficient supervision (by the DA or District Council) to guarantee that this participation actually occurs and to avoid that the contents of these plans merely reflects the view of the local leadership. The role of the councillor is rather crucial in this consultation process. The end product contains an inventory of wishes, needs and suggestions, or in other words a shopping list of projects.

Each ward list is supposed to be incorporated in the annual and five year development plans, but in practice the district plans produced by each sub-committee are seldom a genuine reflection of the wishes of the grassroots agencies. Quite often they are still dominated by the other main source of planning information, viz. the sector based central government departments. In the process criteria for priority setting are lacking, as is a development strategy, which could serve as a guideline during the selection process. The proposed district development plans are then sent to District Council for final approval during a Full Council meeting. Councillors typify this approval procedure as rubber stamping. No meaningful participation or influence occurs in such meetings.

These annual and five year development plans are often very rudimentary, broad in scope and prepared in a very short time. A large number of projects is generated on the basis of

unconstrained needs identification and is neither justified in terms of development priorities, nor of resource availability. Many projects are unfeasible with respect to issues like budget, location, local community support and maintenance arrangements. The number of projects included exceeds the number to be funded from central government sources by far. As indicated earlier, the focus is on individual projects instead of broad district objectives, strategies, policies and integrated plans.

District development plans are plans without a budget. Budgeting for most projects occurs within central government sector ministries and not by MLGRUD, while the District Council and the DDC have no financial autonomy about the projects proposed in the plans. The main instrument of public finance for these annual and five-year district development plans is the Public Sector Investment Programme (PSIP). Projects for the PSIP programme are extracted from the district plans and the document submitted reflects first priority project proposals for the district, but rarely any project included in the bids is financed. Implementation of most government projects in the district is realized by the relevant sector ministries with funds being allocated by their head offices at national level. This procedure of sector-specific budgeting combined with the separation of planning and budgeting often resulted in the selection of projects by ministries which fit their own priorities and has impeded coordinated and integrated district development planning.

Besides central government, there are other organisations supporting development projects and programmes at district level. These are foreign based donor institutions (diplomatic missions), local non-governmental agencies and the District Council itself. The District Council is in a position to receive funds through donors and ngo's for specific projects and programmes, independent from the formal central government planning and financing structures. In addition, District Councils also generate revenue from their own local revenue base e.g. taxes, licences and fees. If optimal generation and management are ensured these local revenue sources have a potential to play an important role in financing of locally initiated development projects. In practice most of the implemented community based projects rely heavily on funding by local non-governmental organisations and diplomatic missions. Short term funding related to a specific project or programme is prevailing, while medium or long term programme funding by donor agencies is largely absent. Many of these projects are based upon views of self-reliance of the communities involved, and co-financing by them, in cash or kind, is considered essential.

A number of weaknesses and frustrations in district planning in Zimbabwe have been mentioned above (for an overview see also Chiwanga, 1990; Mutizwa-Mangiza, 1991a; and SNV, 1990) and can now be summarised as:

- (a) the national development planning system, requiring district plans as inputs in provincial plans, which again feed into national plans. In the process, which is extremely time-consuming, nearly all the district inputs disappear;
- (b) the character of district plans, mainly consisting of a detailed, but inadequate demographic and socio-economic inventory and a non-prioritised shopping list of projects;
- (c) the absence of a project appraisal and selection mechanism at district level;
- (d) the separation between plan and budget; resulting in many project proposals never receiving funding and hence frustrations at district and community levels;
- (e) the lack of decentralisation and implicitly the lack of trust in planning capacities of District Councils on the part of central authorities;

- (f) the mismatch between the time and effort spent making plans and keeping plans up to date on the one hand and the results from these plans on the other;
- (g) the lack of planning skills of district level staff;
- (h) the separation between the organisation tasked with plan making (DDC) and the ones primarily involved in plan and project implementation;
- (i) the general lack of district level resources (funds, manpower, transport) to initiate and implement projects;
- (j) donor agencies and line ministries largely by-passing district councils in their project planning and activities.

3.3. Reorganising Local Government and District Planning Structures

The full implementation of the Rural District Councils Act which was passed in Parliament in 1988 will cause major changes in the general pattern of fragmented local government in Zimbabwe. This law entails the amalgamation of the local governments administering communal land, small scale commercial land, large scale commercial land and resettlement areas into one Rural District Council. This unification process has already been on the political agenda since Independence. It has been justified politically as removing one of the last vestiges of colonial rule of a segregated local government system. Or according to a statement of the Ministry of Local Government, Rural and Urban Development: "the general policy guiding the promulgation of the Rural District Councils Act no.8. of 1988, was to change and revolutionize the Administrative, Social and Economic structures of rural Zimbabwe, by removing all colonial trappings of separatism based on racialism and its resultant economic imbalances between mainly the country's black and white communities" (MLGRUD, 1990). It is assumed that a unified local government system will have larger and more viable units with a significantly broader resource base to deliver services more efficiently.

Officially the implementation of this Act started on the first of July 1993. On this date former District Councils and Rural Councils were renamed Rural District Councils, while administrative boundary changes were made. The first year (i.e. until July 1994) is a transitional period during which the organisational systems of both rural government bodies have to be merged. Its transitional status is reflected in the temporarily continuation of separated budgeting and accounting systems for both councils.

Despite its delayed start there are still many key policy areas to be clarified such as division of responsibilities between central and local government, future financing of Rural District Councils, administrative and organisational structures (e.g. renamed and new departments, and various committees), duties for infrastructural development, the role of chiefs and other traditional leaders, and staffing arrangements. For most of these areas the Act only provides a broad policy framework, while the specifications and adjustments allowed have to be addressed in the various district situations.¹³

For many local government officials involved the overriding concern is the question of financial viability, or to quote Roe: "... it is not clear how these Rural District Councils are to be effectively

financed and just who is to provide what by way of revenue to them" (1992:8). Another and related fundamental problem hampering the implementation of the Act is the division of functions between central and local government. In its First Schedule the Act specifies 64 areas in which the Rural District Council is empowered to act. There are certain services which are recognised to be entirely the responsibility of local government. These are limited in number and scope and include the issuing of various licences, communal land allocation and the provision and maintenance of local amenities (e.g. market places, parks, toilets). Many services, however, are the shared responsibility of central government and local government. The main ones are roads, education, health, urban infrastructure and housing, water and sanitation, land use and conservation, agriculture and livestock services and physical planning. Because of the lack of basic principles on the division of responsibility between Rural District Councils and central government, there are no criteria for deciding what functions within each service the councils are supposed to undertake or how they would obtain the resources needed to perform their functions effectively (MLGRUD, 1992, p. 4-7).

The Act empowers Rural District Councils to become active in the development and control of growing urban settlements, but pays insufficient attention to the development of communal land. It does not provide statutory powers to councils to address important issues such as unemployment and environmental degradation.

Although amalgamation is much more about local government reform than it is about decentralisation, some elements of decentralisation are promised in amalgamation legislation (e.g. reviewing the position of the District Administrator as Chief Executive Officer of the Rural District Council and the role of the council in the Rural District Development Committee). On the other hand also some centralising tendencies occur, especially in the case of education and health, for central government field agencies will take over responsibilities from council. Moreover, the size of wards in a number of districts has been increased significantly as a consequence of a guideline of MLGRUD that a Rural District Council should typically have no more than 30 councillors. This measure weakens communication lines and popular participation channels of VIDCOs and WADCOs. Finally the phrase "with the approval of the minister" runs through the Act as a chorus. In other words: decision making on many issues remains subject to the endorsement of the national headquarters.

The Act gives the Rural District Council the responsibility for coordinating development operations of sectoral ministries at district level and for preparing district development plans. The Rural District Development Committee (RDDC) plays a key role in this respect, since it is the main instrument for coordinating all forms of development activity in the district. The official reason for making the RDDC a full committee of the council is to strengthen the link between this planning committee and local government, thus enabling the council to exercise its coordinating and planning roles. However, there are some problems associated with this part of the Act. The Act is inconsistent in that the RDDC can not be an effective committee of the council if it is composed largely of central government representatives, who are accountable to their provincial and national headquarters and if it is chaired by the District Administrator. Moreover, the Act is silent about the bottleneck of how to incorporate district plans into provincial plans and in turn into national plans and budgets (MLGRUD, 1992, p. 8). Further, planning continues to be separated from budgeting. Neither the council nor its development planning committee can set

development priorities or otherwise influence the budgeting process of the line ministries active in its area of jurisdiction.

In order to ensure that Rural District Council's planning responsibilities get off on a sound base, Roe has suggested to disaggregate the budget of line ministries to district level. By having an indication what they might receive at the beginning of a financial year, Rural District Councils would be in a much better position to plan and implement priority projects and services in their districts. At least bids for the next financial year should be prepared within a ceiling that indicates what each district agency can expect to be allocated by ministry headquarters after the start of the financial year. The guiding principle behind the disaggregation exercise would be that Rural District Councils, and by implication their RDDCs, must be allowed to assess their own planning and implementation capacity. In carrying out their legally-mandated responsibilities, the Rural District Councils should be subject only to the guidelines and ceilings imposed at the outset of each budgeting cycle. Real tactical decisions about resource allocation and the pace of project implementation are to be taken at district level (Roe, 1992, p. 21-23). Similar ideas have been expressed by the World Bank (1992), which has argued for block grants for District Councils and/or increased local taxation powers.

But pleas for disaggregation of budgets and related autonomy in decision making by rural local government might infringe too much upon the current bureaucratic system of central controls and restrictions. In the past harmless proposals for increase of local government rates, fees and charges have too often been disapproved by central government, which leave one pessimistic about options for substantial budgetary reforms. Still, it is not unlikely that central government will grant some more powers to Rural District Councils in terms of finance and development planning. The implementation of the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP), which was adopted by the government of Zimbabwe in 1990, not only involves measures like deregulation, trade liberalisation, fiscal reforms, reductions of public spending and currency devaluation. It also supports decentralisation of responsibilities to local government, in particular in areas of finance of council budgets, local economic development, social service delivery and maintenance of infrastructure. Combined with the amalgamation process this could imply that councils will be given more powers to strengthen their own local revenue base, including tapping new tax sources, powers to borrow money and acquire assets. It is also likely that councils will be more substantially involved in the planning and management of certain specific development programmes among others in the sectors of water, roads and natural resources. In this respect various and valuable lessons can be drawn from recent decentralised planning initiatives applied in some development programmes in Zimbabwe like:

- sector coordination and integration, participatory planning and community based maintenance (based upon experiences from the Integrated Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Programme);
- community planning and natural resource management (from the Campfire Programme, i.e. Communal Area Management Programme for Indigenous Resources, see for instance Peterson, 1991; Olthof, 1993);
- capacity building of district development planning and district block funding (from ODA Pilot District Support Project); and
- local government institution building, community based project planning and implementation, integrated district planning and community participation planning (from

SNV District Council Programme, see SNV, 1990).

But whether the changes and developments will indeed lead to substantially and structurally improved district planning is doubtful as long as Rural District Councils are not empowered with meaningful development planning roles and related legal authority with respect to central government field agencies. Nevertheless, even within confining structures useful improvements may be made, as the next section on Buhera will show.

4. IMPROVING DEVELOPMENT PLANNING IN BUHERA DISTRICT BY RURAL LOCAL GOVERNMENT

In contrast to other administrative districts in Zimbabwe Buhera District covers one land category only, i.e. communal land. This means that the local government structure in this district is not fragmented like in other districts, where different local government bodies were operating in different land categories. In Buhera the administrative area of the district corresponds with the area of jurisdiction of the only local government institution. Buhera District is situated in the south-western part of Manicaland Province in Eastern Zimbabwe and fully covers the Save Communal Lands, one of the largest District Council areas in Zimbabwe. Annex 1 provides some background information about this district.

In this section three key aspects of district development planning are described. In each of these fields the Buhera District Council has deliberately tried to improve on its operations. These aspects are:

- (1) base-line planning data
- (2) project planning at district level
- (3) integrated district development planning

4.1. Creating a Base-Line Information System

An early priority in Buhera was the improvement of the district planning database and the creation of an up-to-date and accessible information system. Often existing secondary sources of information proved to be unreliable, inaccurate and/or outdated. Hence most of the data had to be collected by the council (Project Department) itself. Information gaps were filled through inspection visits, interviews and questionnaire surveys. Some of the surveys were carried out in cooperation with the University of Zimbabwe.

The improvement of the district planning data-base was deemed essential for several reasons. First, it provides a general point of departure for an analysis of the development problems and potentials and the formulation of development goals, objectives, strategies, priorities and policies. As such it facilitates a more objective planning approach based on numerical information and it assists in counterbalancing decision-making motivated by personal, emotional or political

arguments. Second, it decontrols knowledge stored in the memories of a small group of planners, or administrators who might "walk away" with this information in case of a transfer. Instead it assures continuous accessibility to policy makers interested to know more about their ward and district. Third, it assists council management in promoting the district to private and public agencies and in influencing decision making processes about allocation of scarce financial means by these agencies. In short, it enhances the coordinative role of local government at district level.

Before commencing with the actual collection of the district base-line data it was necessary to know which data had to be collected and for what purpose. The Project Department of the Buhera District Council compiled a list containing the variables to be included for a "district profile". Five main categories of information were distinguished:

- (a) land categories and population
- (b) natural environment
- (c) physical, social and economic infrastructure
- (d) economic structure and
- (e) administration, institution and organisation.

Within these categories key variables were listed and their status with respect to place of collection and methods of presentation were indicated (see annex 2 for an example). Subsequently a priority ranking was made to indicate which type of data to gather first. This ranking was related to the responsibilities and tasks of local government.

For Buhera District Council the collection of the following types of data was given preference:

- mapping of administrative boundaries of the district, wards and villages;
- location of physical and social infrastructure (health services, primary and secondary schools, settlement pattern, roads, telephone and electricity network, boreholes and deep wells);
- economic structure and potential, especially the state of affairs of the agricultural sector and the availability and quality of natural resources.

At a later stage several in-depth surveys were carried out. A business centre survey recorded per business centre the total number of commercial stands, subdivided for general dealers, butcheries, grinding mills, bottle stores and others; for outlets closed, under construction and open with lease and license number. Another study collected information about key characteristics of clinics administered by the Buhera District Council (e.g. address, location, staff composition and infrastructural assets). Up to date key features of primary schools in Buhera District were recorded through a primary school survey (e.g. enrolment, staff composition, number of classrooms, staff houses, sanitary facilities, primary water source, shortage of infrastructural assets). Finally, a conservation study looked into the exploitation of the natural resources and the environmental problems.

Most of the written information was stored in a special file with different categories. A ringbinder filing system facilitated updating of information and allowed easy access by council employees and councillors alike. Maps were an indispensable tool to present some of the data in an accessible and condensed way. They visualized the absolute and relative location as well as the spatial pattern of infrastructural features. Both the topographical maps scales 1:50 000 and 1:250 000 were very useful to depict the location of primary schools, secondary schools, health service centres, the

settlement pattern (i.e. growth points, district service centres, rural services centres and business centres), roads and primary water supply points. The purchase of a personal computer further assisted the extension and updating of the district data base. Simple spreadsheets were used to store and present some of the base-line information.

The improvement of the district planning data base generated a number of direct and indirect benefits. Large maps with district information were displayed in the council office and proved an easy tool to remind staff and councillors of the infrastructural state of affairs in the various wards. The maps were quite often referred to in discussions on social services provision, food handouts, project location etc. The business centre survey provided an up-to-date overview of businesses in the district and revealed a considerable backlog in payment of license fees. Through this survey and the establishment of an improved information system of leases and licences, the council enhanced the collection of funds with respect to these local revenue sources from the business community in the district. Finally, the improved knowledge about the district, particularly with respect to schools, clinics, agriculture and environmental problems, facilitated the writing of well-argued requests for specific assistance and has certainly influenced the generally positive response from donors.

4.2. Strengthening Project Planning

Much of the process of district development centres around the identification, planning and implementation of individual projects. While not all projects go through the District Council, council does play an important role in most of them. In Buhera there has been a conscious effort to improve the project planning process including project identification, developing appraisal criteria, widening the support base, improving administration and monitoring, as well as the efficiency and cost-effectiveness of implementation and, in general, strengthening the pivotal role of the council.

In Buhera the Project Department of the District Council –the department tasked with project planning and implementation– has traditionally been well staffed¹⁴, a situation positively deviating from those in most rural local governments in Zimbabwe. In the District Councils, the position of the Executive Officer Projects was not funded by a Central Government grant. Instead it has been up to individual council to create and sustain such a post from their own local resources. It is a sign of the importance the Buhera District Council has attached to project-led development and its willingness to render development planning services. Moreover, staff turnover in this department has been low, which allowed a learning effect in planning and management skills.

The responsibilities of the Project Department cover both physical planning duties (i.e. dealing with licenses, leases, building plans, inspection of buildings, development control, stand allocation and pegging) as development planning tasks. Apart from the assistance in the preparation of the district development plans (see sections 3.1. and 3.2.) the other planning functions are related to project preparation and implementation of (so called) income generating projects for the council itself as well as community based development projects.

The input of the Buhera District Council in the preparation, implementation and monitoring of community based projects varies per development sector. The council plays a central role in the planning, implementation and/or supervision of social services programmes and projects, like a building programme for disadvantaged primary schools, for which the project formulation had been done by the Project Department. It has also been instrumental in "education with production" projects at a number of other primary schools. In addition, it administers the implementation of the building grant for secondary schools. Within the sector health the council is directly involved in the monitoring of different physical infrastructure programmes (clinics under construction, staff houses, piped water schemes, solar power systems). The council assisted these community based development projects in the form of personnel, material and/or financial support (e.g. project identification, feasibility studies, project write-ups, organizing meetings with community groups and donors, transportation of building materials, coordination, technical supervision, mileage, monitoring and administration of funds).

These type of community based projects can be planned and decided on at local government level. In Buhera decision making about the identification, feasibility and implementation of a project was greatly enhanced by the improvement of the base-line data (see section 4.1.). This allowed the development of more objective criteria for priority ranking and decision making. For example, in appraising building projects for primary schools data were used reflecting the state of the infrastructure in relation to the enrolment and the number of staff. Important selection criteria were the degree of hot-seating (i.e. ratio classes – completed classrooms), the number of teachers accommodation in relation to staff and the shortage of sanitary facilities. Although less measurable, the quality of the school management and the co-operation with the parents were considered as well.

The Project Department has also been involved, though to a lesser extent, in water supply, agricultural and conservation projects (e.g. consolidated gardens, woodlots, dams). Efforts were made to increase and strengthen council's involvement in these type of projects. Assistance provided included community mobilisation, organisation, formulation of proposals, coordination and administration. Because of the often specialised nature of these projects, technical advice had to be given by central government departments such as the District Development Fund – Water Section, and the Department of Agricultural, Technical and Extension Services (Agritex). These projects often start from initiatives of project beneficiaries (e.g. farmers clubs, women or youth groups). The project request is then presented to the Buhera District Council directly or through the village and ward development committee channels. The feasibility of the request is assessed by civil servants and council staff members in consultation with the ward councillor. Besides the technical aspects, the appraisal also includes social and organisational issues, like the past record of the beneficiaries in embarking upon similar projects on their own initiative and with their own inputs, as an indication of group cohesion and commitment. In addition, the level of organisation, size and composition of the local groups is assessed. For small scale agricultural projects their contribution to food security and natural resource conservation at micro-level is considered.

A standard format was introduced for the writing of project proposals. It covers aspects such as project objectives, location, characteristics of beneficiaries, description of the project, technical design and layout, type of inputs, investment costs subdivided into three parts (external funding, local contribution, valuation government services), an overview of total project costs, including

future operating and maintenance costs, organisation of the project (division of tasks, including accountability), responsible persons (signatures of presenting and supporting bodies) and project justification (economic and social benefits). The introduction of a personal computer expedited the actual writing of these documents.

A list of potential donors was made and many of them were approached to assess their interest in different types of development projects in Buhera District. Information was also requested on specific donor criteria, focus and interests. This allowed for a more targeted approach at a later stage when particular projects were forwarded to individual donors. This process also raised awareness by donors on the socio-economic situation in Buhera and the organisation and commitment of local government.

In many cases ngo's or embassies expressed interest for relatively small projects. The standard financial set-up of these donor assisted projects is that a financial grant is provided in addition to monetary valuation of contributions from the project beneficiaries and government departments involved. The concept of community self-reliance is workable for projects with a small budget (say less than Z\$ 50 000) or with a clearly defined group of beneficiaries (e.g. farmers groups or school parents). For other type of community based projects such as construction of bridges or health centres the consequence of self-reliance is repudiating the implementation responsibility to the local community.

Though it has been successful in attracting a relatively large number of such projects, it also implied that the administrative and organisational tasks of the Project Department multiplied. As referred to earlier (section 2.1.) these kind of projects are extremely management intensive. In such cases the allocated donor grant is normally used for the purchase of non-local building materials. For physical construction projects it often means that the local community is expected to provide labour and/or traditionally burned clay bricks, which by the way may have negative side effects in the form of deforestation. The payment of builders' fees is another component usually not covered by donor grants. These funds have to be raised either by the local community, the Buhera District Council or by other government departments. In case the government is not in a position to finance the builder charges the community members involved will have to collect the money among themselves. For community projects without a clear group of beneficiaries (eg. a clinic) this may seriously delay implementation. For other construction projects such as a new classroom block or a teacher's staff house, the community often applies measures to economize on the builder fees resulting in an end product of lower quality. Flexibility in this system of donor funding could avoid some of these negative effects.

The Project Department has attempted to reduce implementation costs by introducing a strict system of tendering for construction activities. In this way personal favours and excessive and uncontrolled cost overruns could be curtailed. A monitoring system for projects under construction was designed and regular visits to construction sites made, both to check on progress and problems and to discuss remedial action when necessary.

Finally, the Project Department has been instrumental in creating awareness of the socio-economic differentiation in Buhera District. The recognition of this differentiation is important in the identification and mobilisation of project beneficiaries. While the great majority of the

population are poor peasant families with increasingly less land available per family as a result of population growth, they can hardly be classified as a uniform group of people, as planners and project initiators often tend to do. They may not even necessarily see themselves as a group, because of differentiation in their economic and social position. For the project planner it is important to check whether the project intervention will guarantee equal access to the project goods and services for all the members of the project target group. In other words: the beneficiary group is supposed to be homogeneous with respect to criteria relevant to the project objectives and benefits, e.g. the availability and/or size of certain resources or the access to certain services. By raising these questions development projects will be better targeted and hence will funds and efforts be used more effectively.

4.3. The Buhera District Integrated Rural Development Planning Exercise

As was outlined earlier, the district planning structure and process in Zimbabwe does usually not result in comprehensive and integrated district development plans. District plans are often shopping lists without priority indications, projects are proposed without inter-linkages, while channels for popular participation are insufficiently utilized. Moreover, proposed projects are normally not set in an analytical context highlighting the development objectives, strategies, conditions, problems and potentials of the district.

In 1992 the Buhera District Council initiated an exercise to enhance its district development planning and to ease these kind of problems. The objectives of this so-called 'Integrated Rural Development Planning Exercise' were:

1. to interrelate the different development efforts by government, ngo's and private agencies in the district, taking into account the functional and spatial complementarities of the development interventions;
2. to coordinate the development activities with the aim to improve the overall efficiency in and effectiveness of resource allocation and the overall spatial distribution of development;
3. to screen existing annual and five year development plans and to add viable new proposals;
4. to introduce a capacity to prioritise project and programme proposals based on a common framework of a district development strategy and criteria and checklists of project selection;
5. to influence public and private sector investment allocation (e.g. PSIP bids) and
6. to allow for donor funded projects to be systematically incorporated into the overall district development plan.

A private planning consultant was contracted¹⁵ who started by producing a first set of documents as a framework and a point of departure for the process leading to the formulation of an integrated and participatory rural development plan. These documents included an overview of the current social and economic base of the population in Buhera (base-line survey), an identification study of sustainable economic activities and land use patterns (resource base), a strategy-proposal, and policy recommendations for courses of action.

Active community participation was an indispensable aid to the proposed planning process. It was realized that a planning structure that separated people from the actual decision making process incurred high risks of failing to achieve the intended development efforts. A pilot methodology was prepared to involve the community more systematically in the different stages of the planning cycle such as the identification of needs and potentials, the feasibility assessment of a project, and the formulation of a plan.

At district level two workshops were organised by the District Council to present the preliminary results of the baseline survey and resource base research, to formulate district development objectives and strategies and to prioritize development sectors. Participants at these workshops were key persons such as councillors, chiefs, district development committee members, businessmen, extension workers and vidco chairmen. Parallel to the district planning workshops pilot ward meetings were held in three wards with and for the local community, in order to let people participate in an inventory of natural, social, economical and institutional resources, in the identification of problems and opportunities, and in the making of recommendations.

In June 1993 a follow-up central workshop was organised. The objectives of this workshop were to formulate both broad and detailed procedures for producing ward and district plans and to establish the roles of the development committees, technical officers, councillors and community in the ward and district planning process. One of the outcomes of this workshop was that a ward planning system should be adopted based on the pilot methodology applied at the three meetings in the year before.

These pilot ward development planning meetings had shown that the participative planning capacity at ward level could be enhanced by means of establishing procedures for project identification, appraisal and setting of priorities. Results of these ward meetings were to be the basis for the formulation of a ward development plan. These ward development plans in turn are supposed to include a ward profile, an analysis and a strategy and are expected to provide the building blocks for an annual (or rolling) programme of priority projects. A ward planning handbook is meant to structure this system.

This system of ward based planning as proposed and tested in Buhera is in line with the principles of the decentralized planning system in Zimbabwe as well as with the statutory planning functions of local governments, viz. (1) receiving and considering ward development plans and (2) organising and presenting annual and five year development plans. It is therefore not a fundamentally different approach, but one that differs somewhat in kind and emphasis. It is meant to guarantee an improved bottom-up filtering process and thus a better list of feasible priority projects.

The ward development plans will in turn provide the main building blocks of the district development plan. Clear procedures are still to be developed about how to move from the ward development plans via the district strategy and policies to annual district development plans. Questions to be answered include: who will be involved in this selection process, how will the prioritised projects at ward level be incorporated into the district plan and how will this district plan be incorporated in the range of plans submitted to the provincial level. These procedures should promote an open and transparent decision making process and avoid the dominance of a

few development actors. The final document could be used for forwarding to the province in accordance with statutory provisions, for the council PSIP bids, and for other funding bids (eg. to ngo's).

The Buhera Integrated Planning Exercise has stressed one of the two ways in which information and project proposals are forwarded for incorporation in annual and five year district development plans, viz. the bottom-up procedure through villages and wards. This also constitutes the procedure over which it has a great deal of control. The other procedure relies on inputs from district representatives of various sector ministries. However, the role of District Councils in coordinating and influencing these proposals has been dependent on the quality of informal contacts between council staff and district level representatives of central government ministries and departments. A more meaningful coordinative role in this respect could only come about after more fundamental changes in the tasks and responsibilities of local governments are institutionalised (see section 3.3.).

Another point of discussion concerning the Buhera District Integrated Rural Development Planning Exercise is that it has been carried out without due attention to financial implications. In other words, an improved planning system is being developed without an indication of funding and chances of project implementation. Within the context of the adopted overall development strategy and priority sectors so far only a skeleton for a plan of actions and priorities for sub-programmes and projects at ward and district level has been devised. Without the allocation of a block district and/or ward development fund it is doubtful whether the entire exercise might be successful in the long run. A block fund might enable the community to participate in the planning process around implementable programmes and projects. This will avoid the current tendency where district plans are drafted as a mere formality without financial backing, resulting in plans never realised and communities being frustrated. The fund should not mean to create dependency, but rather steer the strengthening process of the community.

A ward block fund or ward development budget could be used to finance locally achievable, small scale projects identified at ward level. Although for these projects a self-help approach is assumed, there may still be need for administrative, organisational or advisory services from the District Council or for additional material support from outside the ward. Larger ward level projects could be incorporated in district development plans for which a district development block scheme could be created.

Whether the planning process will be replicated in other districts is another point of debate. Although the process was set in motion by local government the actual formulation of the first set of district documents (base-line survey, resource base, development objectives, strategies and policy recommendations) was performed by a consultant. The District Council staff promoted the planning process to district and provincial officials, assisted in data collection and organised meetings and workshops. Data analysis and writing of reports was contracted out. This luxury set-up might not be feasible for other interested District Councils. Moreover, initially at ward level a community facilitator is essential to introduce the enhanced development planning system. In short, during its introduction stage the process will require some external technical support in addition to a well functioning Project Department. Special training sessions and the use of planning manuals for council staff and councillors could partly overcome the lack of local

planning skills.

A precondition for acceptance of this planning approach is the willingness to invest human and financial resources in a process with small tangible benefits at the start. It also requires a council committed to local economic or district development, rather than one merely performing administrative duties.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND REFLECTIONS

The picture painted of rural local government is often not a bright one. General qualifications, like 'highly subsidized', 'dependent on central government', 'inefficient', 'irrational decision making', 'incompetent', 'weak legal bodies', 'transmission belts of central government resource flows', 'administrative, bureaucratic entities' and 'political arenas' provide a negative image. On the other hand, a potential positive role in decentralised planning has been identified, related to participation in public decision-making, project identification and selection for mainly rural environments, and coordination of sector-based planning activities.

This paper has tried to illustrate that, despite numerous planning constraints and the prevailing nature of centre-local relationship, there is some meaningful room for manoeuvre in the development tasks a rural local government body is able to fulfil. The gathering, recording, processing and updating of a district database; the strengthening of the project planning, implementation and management capacities; and initiatives to arrive at an integrated and participatory district planning system based on strategic development views are examples of the scope for a more developmental role of a rural local government institution.

While the record of decentralised planning has generally not been an impressive one, and local governments in Africa remain rather weak institutions, there are increasing calls to strengthen the local level in its development planning tasks. A prerequisite for an increased involvement of the local governments in local economic development is a meaningful form of decentralisation, which would give the local level more leeway in investment decisions. A revision of planning systems and a disaggregation of sectoral budgets to the local level are key measures proposed to support this process.

Despite the Prime Ministers Directives on decentralisation centre-local relations in Zimbabwe remain strongly unbalanced. The decentralised planning system is time consuming and extremely frustrating from the local point of view. Moreover, the relations between central governments' field administration and local governments have been obscure and confusing. While this latter aspect has been addressed in the reorganisation process linked with the amalgamation exercise of 1993-1994, decentralised planning seems to remain a problem.

But while the planning and government structure may be stifling, there is still some space for improvements within the structure. The Buhera example has shown that targeted initiatives in the

field of information collection and project planning and a more strategic and participative approach to district planning yield results. These experiences may be replicated elsewhere, but are predicated upon a sense of professionalism and commitment on the part of the local government employees and councillors. Buhera has been fortunate to possess a stable and dedicated staff base.

Buhera's experiences point at the need for a stronger position of rural local government in development planning. Besides its general role as planning authority of the district, Rural District Councils can fulfil specific functions in the field of project and integrated area planning. Moreover, it remains one of the few available agencies for direct contact with the rural population. Its legal status of district planning authority and its institutional structure of sub-district development committees offer possibilities of popular participation in public decision-making processes. Methodologies still have to be improved to ensure that development proposals reflect the need and wishes of the people concerned, but the structure of ward and village committees as such provides a valid channel to enhance self-reliance for the local community. In addition, local government could play a significant role in the coordination of development planning activities of central government line ministries and departments. Their sector-based projects can be examined in terms of response to need of the local population, contribution to district economy and choice of project site.

Through project planning and management a rural local government agency can render one of the most concrete and visible forms of development services to the people. Local initiated small scale projects are normally clearly defined, have a fixed time and locational component and can be implemented without much interference and control from provincial or national authorities. In this field of planning Rural District Councils have a fair degree of freedom of action.

Like Buhera, other rural local governments might set in motion a normative planning process of formulation of district development goals, objectives and strategies. For this process the concepts of sustainability and integration as applied during the Buhera District integrated rural planning exercise seem useful. Sustainability has been sought by involving the local population in planning their own living environment and by identifying a district strategy which could be largely implemented by utilising district-led resources. Moreover, as a local driven plan based on the District Council's initiative, it is well supported by councillors and executive staff. Integration has been achieved by recognising the connections between objectives, policies and projects and by relating these to the economic and social dimensions of the rural area. The economic aspects aim to optimise locational and natural advantages, while the social aspects try to obtain an equality of access to improved facilities.

An important starting point to perform these planning roles is a targeted district planning database. An accessible and reliable information system is a pre-condition to succeed in the enhancement of development promotion by the council. But information collection and storage is not an aim in itself. It is collected to support decision-making, to rationalise project proposals, and in general to secure a more equitable intra-district distribution of services and infrastructure.

If the Buhera case is representative for the local planning situation in other areas of Zimbabwe and in other African countries, some additional observations can be made. For instance, it calls for a review of the application and usefulness of traditional planning techniques for rural areas.

On the basis of tools and techniques listed in textbooks and training manuals for regional and rural planners (Bendavid-Val, 1991; van Raay et al, 1989; Rondinelli, 1985) a list has been provided of 20 analytical techniques and their (potential) application in Buhera (see annex 3). The list is not exhaustive¹⁶ and the classification is ours¹⁷, but the table presents prominent techniques widely deemed applicable in situations of rural-regional planning. For each technique an indication has been provided whether it has been applied in Buhera District planning, and in case it was not, whether it was due to data unavailability, lack of perceived usefulness, or both.

It is surprising and also somewhat disheartening to see how few of the tools and techniques of regional analysis and planning have been applied in the Buhera case. Some have not been used in the absence of data or because of pressing priorities in other planning tasks. But many techniques were simply judged to be inappropriate for the case at hand: too complex and demanding, not yielding results and insights useful for planning conditions in Buhera, or involving procedures and outcomes unclear to councillors and council staff.

A similar observation can be made with respect to the use of Personal Computers (PC's) and Geographical Information Systems (GIS) in local level planning. Although positive prospects for effective use have been mentioned, the experiences so far have been less than favourable (Hedberg, 1991; van Teeffelen et al., 1992). This is not so much related to hard- or software problems, but mainly to problems related to 'orgware', the institutional and technical organisation, and manpower requirements related to the introduction of a PC-based systems (Olthof, 1990). In Buhera one PC was introduced, mainly for the purpose of writing plans and reports, facilitating project formulation, and storing and processing district base-line data. GIS applications were inappropriate for the planning situation at hand. Instead simple topographic maps with manually added planning information displayed on the walls of the council office were preferred as constant and open reminders of the conditions in the district.

Finally, the experiences described above have implications for the tasks, functions and skills (and thus the training) of 'development planners'. Tasks and functions are no longer mainly oriented towards extensive research and analysis, and towards the writing of detailed plans. They rather centre around strategy development, project formulation, planning and management, accounting and database development, and negotiation, communication and social skills. Many of the standard planning techniques seem irrelevant to rural area planning, just like the use of advanced Geographic Information Systems. A planner's toolbox in the 1990s needs to be adjusted accordingly, and hence training will have to include strategic thinking, writing of concise reports, project planning, financial management, as well as a number of skills related to meetings, negotiations and communication in general.

Notes

1. A contributing factor to the relative success in Buhera has been the council's request for a planning advisor through SNV, a Dutch NGO. However, such a planning advisor could not operate effectively if the environment in which he had to work would have been less than conducive. The relative success of the Buhera planning exercise must therefore be ascribed to a team effort of council staff, councillors and planning advisor alike.
2. For African examples and elaborations of several of the points mentioned, see for instance Brand, 1991; Conyers, 1990; Mutizwa-Mangiza, 1990; and Wallis, 1990.

3. Conyers (1990) mentions that in the first years after independence most developing countries inherited centralised systems of government and initially maintained if not strengthened these systems in order to encourage a sense of national unity and reinforce the new government and its policies. After some years, however, most considered some form of decentralisation a necessity. Mawhood (1983), on the other hand, observed decentralised government as a major colonial policy in Africa in the 1950s, something which was retained after independence, only later to be followed by a trend towards central planning and greater central control over public resources. Later again, there was a 'swing' back towards the decentralised structures of the 1950s.
4. Devolution, or political decentralisation, concerns the transfer of substantial decision-making powers and responsibilities to corporate units outside the framework of the central government; deconcentration, or administrative decentralisation, refers to the transfer of responsibilities to field administrative units of the central government. It should, at the same time, be noted that these definitions are crude and cover many different forms and dimensions of decentralisation (see Gasper, 1991, section 2).
5. The cases described by Mutizwa-Mangiza (1992) and Wekwete (1992) may be illustrative. Both portrayed a local authority in Zimbabwe, but the former in a rural setting (Gokwe) and the latter in an urban environment (Harare). Type of economic base, legal position and means, local government finance, tasks, problems and preoccupations all differed significantly.
6. In the framework of this paper it must be noted that the criteria for success applied by Olowu and Smoke were primarily financial: a surplus balance sheet for several years; the ability to mobilize growing sources of local revenue, and local expenditures related to a range of significant social and infrastructural services. Though these factors may also be related to the ability to successfully undertake local development planning, they are not necessarily sufficient preconditions, and will normally have to be supplemented by a participatory planning approach and supportive central-local relations.
7. The term 'strategic planning' is used here as a particular style of planning emphasizing the generation of a vision for the development of an area, in view of both external and internal conditions and expectations. It therefore does not merely refer to long-term planning, as is often done in (British) planning terminology (cf. Roberts, 1993).
8. For a recent application of strategic planning for various types of organisations, see Kaufman (1993).
9. Kaufman and Jacobs were concerned with communities and community level planning. We have used their observations in a more generalised context, hence the use of the term 'planning object'.
10. The Second Five-Year National Development Plan 1991-1995 (Republic of Zimbabwe, 1991) includes a separate part on provincial development strategies, but strategies proposed for the eight provinces are generally vague and remarkably similar in their stress on natural resource exploitation in the provinces.
11. For studies about a lower levels of planning (village, ward) or higher ones (provinces) the reader is referred to Brand, 1991, Gasper, 1991, Helmsing, 1991, and Mutizwa-Mangiza and Helmsing, 1991.
12. The absence of a Rural Council in Buhera District implies that development planning operations of this rural local government institution in Zimbabwe will not be discussed in this paper and that rural local government features will be more or less synonymous with District Council features. The paper will also not deal with the traditional structure of

kraalheads, headmen and chiefs, to which many rural people adhere.

13. General reasons for the slowness in amalgamating both councils are: lack of experience, complexity of the process, racial counter-force and political sentiments.
14. The Project Department in Buhera consisted of an Executive Officer Projects, an Assistant Executive Officer Projects and a Project Clerk.
15. SNV Zimbabwe provided funds for this consultancy as it could provide a useful learning exercise for other districts in which it is involved in Council Support through planning advisors.
16. In fact, the table only presents a number of well-established techniques in regional analysis. It does not list decision-making aids, nor project planning techniques (techniques in project selection and appraisal, monitoring and management tools etc.), nor techniques of environmental impact assessment.
17. Bendavid-Val (1991) stresses analytic tools and makes a distinction between tools for aggregate area analysis and for intra-area analysis, though the difference is not absolute. Van Raay et al (1989) differentiate between analytic and planning and decision-making tools and acknowledge the fact that some tools fall in both categories. Our classification has grouped the techniques in a number of main classes and provided common examples in each of the groups.

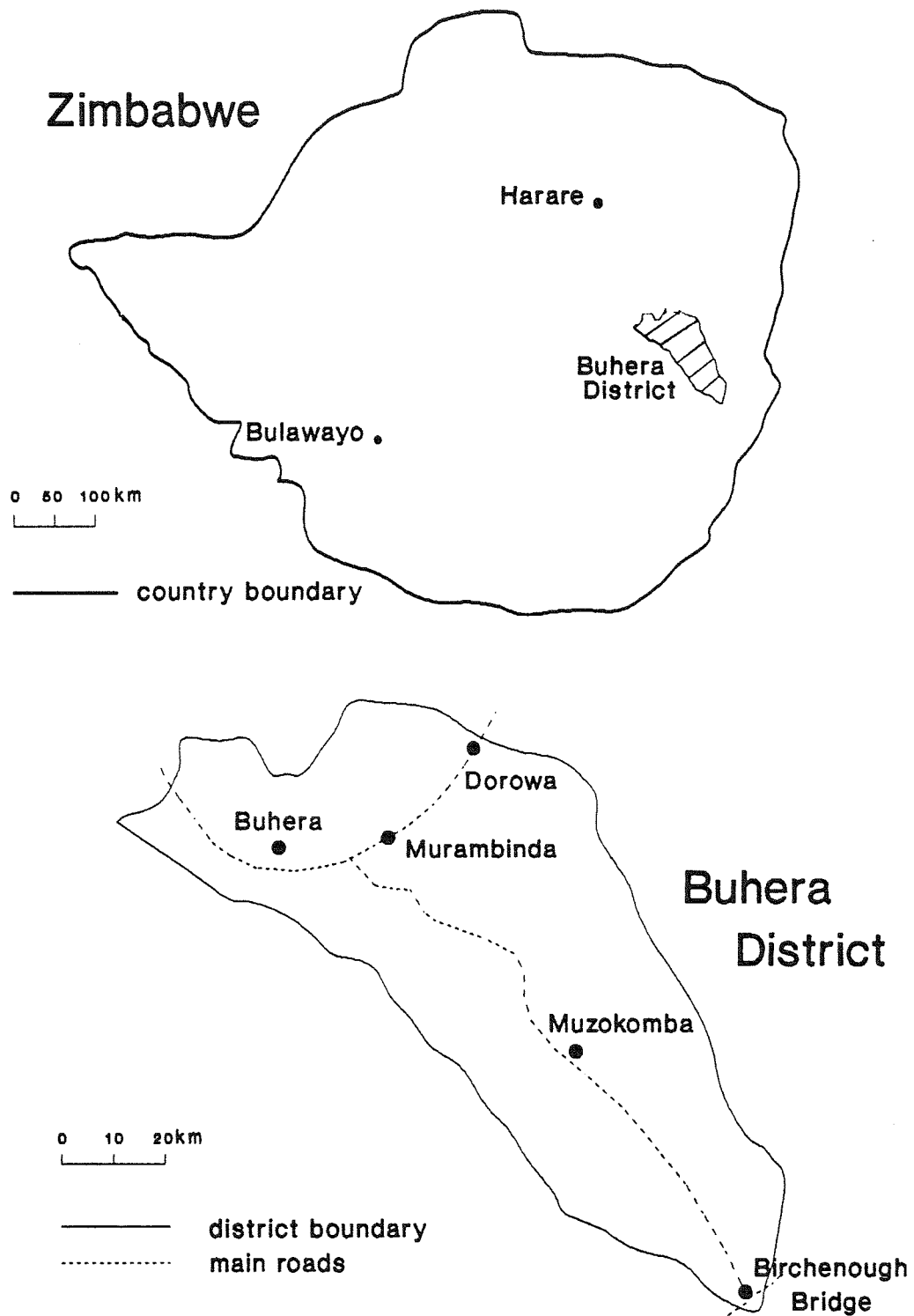
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Figure 1: Location of Buhera District in Zimbabwe



Annex 1: Geographical Synopsis of Buhera District

Buhera District is situated in the south-western part of Manicaland Province (see figure 1) and is bordered by the Save River to the east and the Nyazwidzi River to the west and south. Covering about 5400 square kilometres and consisting entirely of one communal land (Save Communal land) it is one of the largest communal areas in the country.

In 1992 the population was almost 204 000 people (CSO, 1992). People live dispersed over the district, but the population density varies per natural farming region (see table 1). Urban centres of economic significance are absent. The main centres –the growth points Murambinda and Birchenough Bridge – have less than 2000 inhabitants each.

Table 1: Area, Population Size and Density per Natural Region in Buhera District, 1992.

Natural Region	Land Area (sq km)	(%)	Population (abs.)	(%)	Population Density (pop./sq km)
III	1 716	32.0	80 390	39.4	46.8
IV	1 818	33.9	70 150	34.4	38.6
V	1 830	34.1	53 370	26.2	26.1
Total	5 364		203 910		
Average					38.0

Sources: Buhera DDC, 1990; CSO, 1992.

The elevation decreases from north to south from 1 300 to 500 metres. Most of the soils are sands and loamy sands with low to moderate fertility. The temperature and rainfall vary in a similar spatial pattern, where the north is overall better off (more rainfall, cooler) than the south (dry and hot). This pattern accounts for the three natural regions (III, IV and V), which roughly coincide with the northern, middle and southern part of the district (Herlaar, 1990). Average temperatures in the summer are very high with extremes of 35 degrees Celsius in lower altitudes. Winters are mild with average temperatures around 22 degrees. The rainy season lasts from November to March, but rainfall figures vary considerably over the years. For example, the average precipitation recorded at Buhera Rural Service Centre (natural region III) is around 725 mm, but varied from 950 mm in a good year (1985), to 224 mm in a bad year (1991). Similar figures for Birchenough Bridge (natural region V) are much lower (475 mm in 1985 and 132 mm in 1991). Severe droughts are recurrent the most recent ones occurring in 1982–83 and 1991–92.

Subsistence farming forms the economic base for 80–90% of the population in the district. Dryland farming is predominantly subsistence oriented because of the communal tenure system and the relatively poor agricultural quality of the land. Major crops grown are maize, mhunga (millet), sorghum, groundnuts, rapoko, sunflower and cotton. Maize has been replacing mhunga as the staple, particularly in the north of the district. Towards the south drought resistant crops like sorghum and rapoko become more important. Under dryland farming conditions only one harvest

per year is possible with the agricultural production subject to the vagary of the annual rainfall pattern. Gardens with vegetables are grown next to available water sources. Livestock in the form of cattle, goats, sheep, chicken etc. is held by most households. It is relatively more important in the dryer areas of the district where crop cultivation is a risky activity.

Arable land is considered as family "property" under customary law. No title deeds exist on the land, which officially belongs to the state with District Councils as its custodians. The latter also applies to grazing land which, however, is considered as pure communal under traditional law. Alternative employment is limited. Rates of urbanization and industrialization are extremely low, although potential for agro-processing industries exists. The only large industrial company is the Dorowa Mine, the largest phosphate mine in the country. Employment in retail, commerce and government sectors is limited. Small business centres are scattered over the area with undertakings such as general dealers, bottle stores, butcheries and grinding mills.

Just like all communal lands in Zimbabwe the area was neglected before Independence in terms of social and economic infrastructure. After Independence large investment took place mainly in the education and health sector. At present the district has 131 primary and 47 secondary schools. The road network in the district is sub-standard. It is estimated that only 3% of the existing roads network is tarred. The rest is primary, secondary or tertiary dust roads. The provision of water is a major problem in the district. Most of the rivers and streams dry up in the winter, causing the communities to depend on boreholes and deep wells for both human and animal consumption. Most of the existing dams have siltation problems due to erosion.

The 1991-92 drought has seriously affected the human and livestock populations in this district, just as in many other ecological vulnerable parts of the country. An estimated number of 100 000 people were dependent on food handouts. Some of the drought relief programmes have been phasing out, but the degree of malnutrition was still high in mid 1993. At that time it was estimated that 35% of the children under five years are suffering from malnutrition, while at the peak of the previous drought (1982-83) this figure was 45%.

Annex 2: List of variables included in the Buhera base-line information system

[for a list of abbreviations, see end of the table]

Type of variable	Where to collect	Way of presentation
A LAND CATEGORIES AND POPULATION		
1 district size and boundaries	Agritex + DA	map + report
2 ward and villages: boundaries and size	Agritex + DA	map + report
3 kraal boundaries	DA	map + report
4 population: size, density, age categories and sexe	Pop. Census '82 and '92	report
5 fertility, crude birth and death rate	District Hospital	report
B NATURAL ENVIRONMENT		
1 land forms and altitude zones	Surveyor General	map
2 natural regions	Agritex	map + report
3 soils	Surveyor General	map + report
4 surface water (streams and rivers)	Surveyor General	map + report
5 mineral resources	MOM Mining Commissionar	map + report
6 state natural resources (erosion, deforestation, overgrazing)	Agritex, Council, NRB	report
C PHYSICAL, SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC INFRASTRUCTURE		
1 primary and secondary schools: name, site, number of pupils, (un-) qualified teachers, classrooms, houses, sanitary facilities	MOE + Council	map + report

Type of variable	Where to collect	Way of pre- sentation
2 clinics: name, site, staff composition, number of houses, number of patients, water, fencing, electricity, clinics under construction	MOH + Council	map + report
3 district hospital: number of hospital beds, physicians/surgeons, nurses and midwives	MOH	report
4 water and sanitation: boreholes, deep and shallow wells, piped water schemes, blair toilets	MOH + DDF Water + MEWRD + NGO + Council	map + report
5 transportation network: road network, airstrips, busservices (roads and frequency)	DDF Roads + MOT	map + report
6 settlement hierarchy: growth point, district service centre, rural service centre and business centre (name, site, number and type of shops)	Council	map + report
7 electricity network	ZESA	map
8 telephone network	PTC	map
9 cattle dips	DVS	map + report
10 sale pens (CSC)	DVS	map + report
11 GMB, CMB, DMB	Agritex	map + report
12 dams, irrigation and grazing schemes: site, size and implementation agency	Agritex	map + report
13 mines and quarries	DA	map
14 Government institutions	DA	map + report

Type of variable	Where to collect	Way of pre- sentation
15 tourist facilities: hotels and national parks	DA + Council	map
16 others: warehouses, co-operatives, police courts, post offices, DDF and MOT restcamps, CMED, training centres, etc.	DA + Council	map + report
D ECONOMIC STRUCTURE		
1 agriculture: % of land suitable for arable and grazing, % of land used as arable and grazing, number of cattle and other livestock, LU per ha, cattle sales, type of crops, production per ha, total production main crops, vegetables, marketability, type of production unit	Agritex	report
2 forestry: nurseries and major woodlots	Forestry Commission	report
3 mining: production, employment and potential	MOM	report
4 manufacturing industries: type and location in case of more than 10 employees, small-scale industries (modern and traditional type of products)	DA + Council + MOTC	report
5 commercial services: type and location	DA + Council	report

Type of variable	Where to collect	Way of presentation
E ADMINISTRATION, INSTITUTION AND ORGANISATION		
1 government departments, parastatals, NGO's: name/type, main programmes/ projects if applicable	DA	report
2 interdepartmental (sub-) committees: name	DA	report

List of Abbreviations

Agritex:	Department of Agricultural, Technical and Extension Services
DA:	District Administrator
DDF:	District Development Fund
DVS:	Department of Veterinary Services
MEWRD:	Ministry of Energy, Water Resources and Development
MOE:	Ministry of Education
MOH:	Ministry of Health
MOM:	Ministry of Mines
MOT:	Ministry of Transport
MOTC:	Ministry of Trade and Commerce
NGO:	Non-Governmental Organisations
NRB:	Natural Resources Board
PTC:	Post and Telecommunication Corporation
ZESA:	Zimbabwe Electricity Supply Authority

Annex 3: Rural-regional planning techniques and methods: applicability and usefulness

Techniques of Regional Analysis	In Buhera District Planning:			
	applied	not applied due to:		
		lack of data	lack of relevance	both
A. (Spatial) Analysis of Concentration and Distribution				
A1 Location Quotients			x	
A2 Index of Concentration			x	
A3 Measures of Distribution			x	
A4 Lorentz Curves			x	
B. Population Analysis				
B1 Population Densities	x			
B2 Population Projections		x		
B3 Interaction Modelling				x
B4 Population Potential				x
C. Settlement Systems Analysis				
C1 Settlement Typology	x			
C2 Functionality Analysis			x	
C3 Centrality Index			x	
C4 Threshold Analysis		x		
D. Flow Studies				
D1 Network Analysis	p		p	
D2 Transportation Studies	p	p		
D3 User origin analysis		x		
D4 Trade Flows		x		
E. Regional Economic Techniques				
E1 Shift-share analysis				x
E2 Economic Base analysis				x
E3 Input-output analysis				x
E4 Income Measures & Product Accounts		x		

Note: p = partly

