

Enhancing Local Inclusion for Improved Energy Access

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1.0 – Introduction

Sub-Saharan Africa has the lowest electricity access rate in the world, accommodating 77% of the people living worldwide without access (International Energy Agency, 2022). However, affordable energy access is widely seen as the backbone to attaining and sustaining a modern livelihood in the rural societal context (World Bank, 2018).

Affordability can be understood to mean that rural households can tenably meet their energy needs without compromising their other basic needs. It is less well understood that durable, sustainable energy access requires engaging with local communities to understand what drives household income dynamics, energy sustainability, and community-wide socio-economic variations.

While there is some citizen participation that is found within project implementation activities, there is an opportunity for the Government of Zambia to improve local citizen input into the energy policy process. The ability of providers to establish this kind of communication is integral to achieving effective outcomes from policies that are implemented to advance energy access objectives. This opportunity can be realized alongside its current plans to decentralize the governance process for energy development.

2.0 - A need for integrated citizen participation in Zambia

The Zambian government has a set target to increase rural electricity access from 3% to 51% by 2030 (National Assembly of Zambia, 2021). At the time of the target's inception in 2009, the rural electrification rate was 7.4%. However, as of 2020, the rural electrification rate remains low at 14% (World Bank, 2023) (Figure 1). Thus, there has not been any significant improvement in rural access over the last decade.

A recognized barrier to greater energy access in Zambia has been the poor incorporation of local input into the energy policy process which is vital to supporting local energy solutions. Importantly, as well as providing vital information, it legitimizes desired local satisfaction in the energy services that are provided through public programmes to national residents. While community consultation is currently a key step to energy project development, sustained local input is vital in helping overcome local project challenges – it is also important to note that whilst consultation is recognized as important in the literature, practice is less well-established. It is however instrumental to understanding citizen concerns, affordability hurdles, local dynamics, community needs and values, and highlighting equity issues with respect to energy use. The case of the Mpanta Solar mini-grid highlights this need.

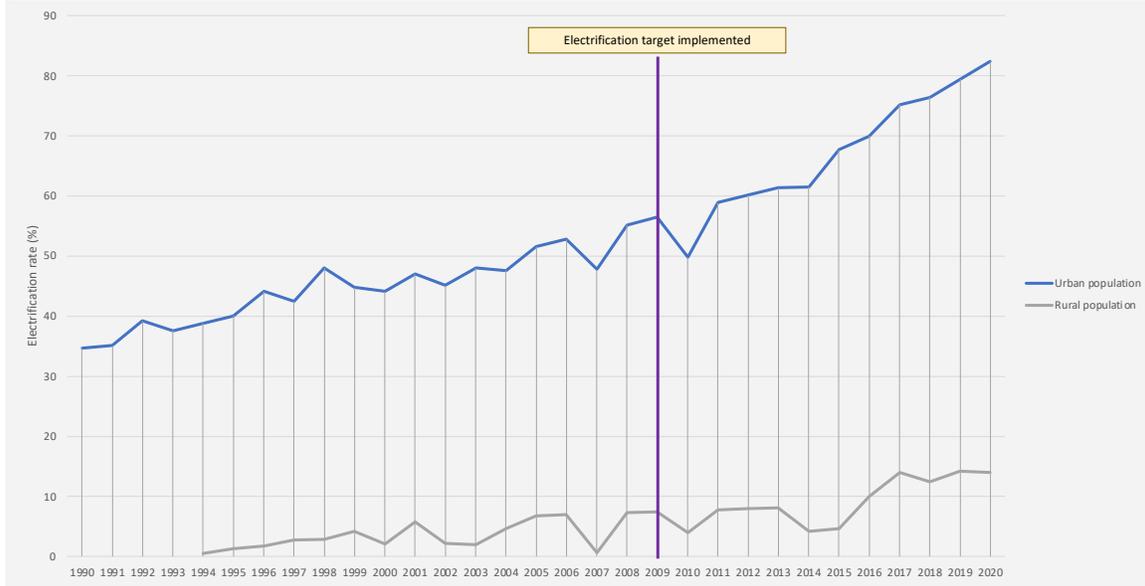


Figure 1: Rate of electrification of urban vs rural population over time

Source: Data from (World Bank, 2023)

3.0 – The Case of Mpanta Solar

The Mpanta Solar mini-grid (Mpanta Solar) is one of three electrification pilot projects that was initiated to demonstrate technical and financial viability of renewable mini-grids in rural Zambia. To encourage community participation, operation and management responsibilities were conferred to the community members, through the multi-purpose cooperative Kafita Cooperative Society (KCS). However, several important aspects that were not paid attention to rendered Mpanta Solar inoperable. Figure 2 below summaries the various aspects that led to crucial project insufficiencies:

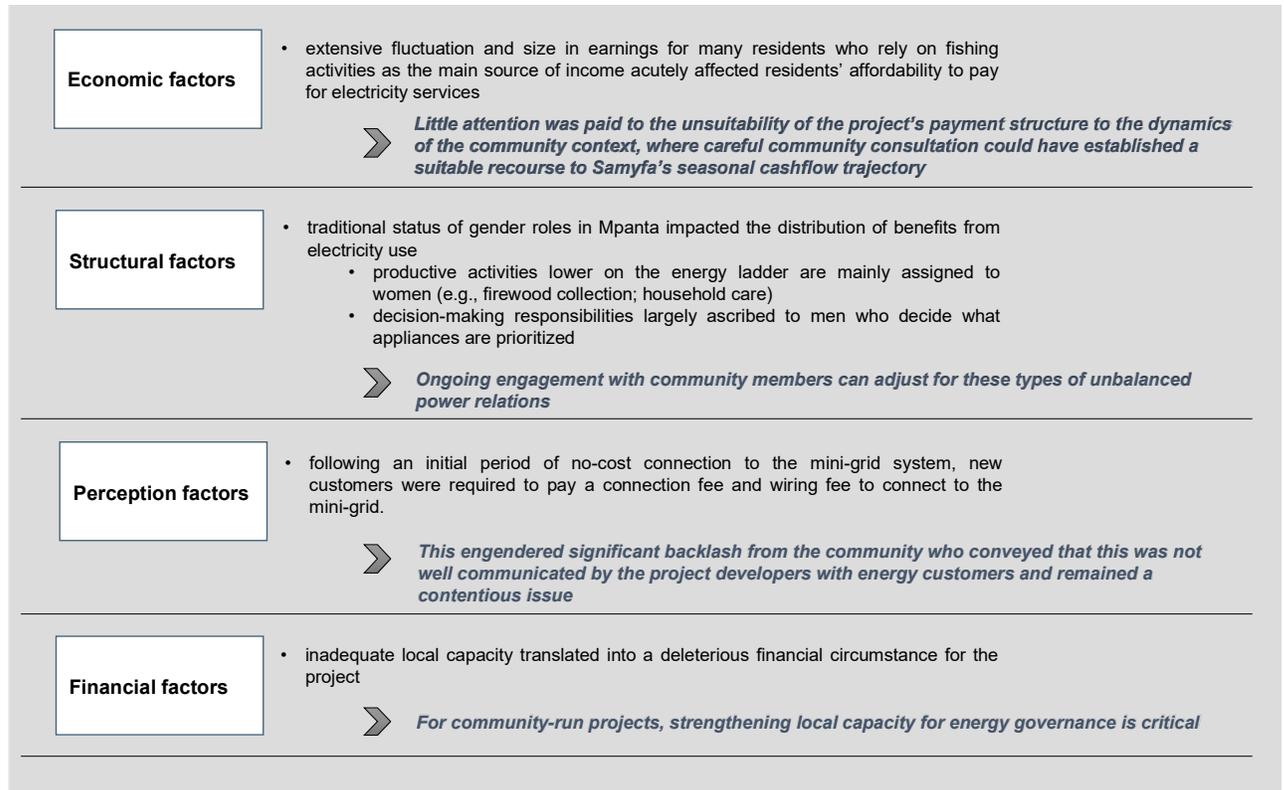


Figure 2: Identified barriers to the success of the Mpanta solar mini-grid project

Source: (World Bank, 2017; Muhoza and Johnson, 2018; Johnson, Gerber and Muhoza, 2019; Leary et al., 2019; Stritzke and Jain, 2021)

4.0 – Decentralisation of Planning Structures for Development

The Government of Zambia has recognized the need to create decentralized planning and implementation structures at the sub-national levels, namely the provincial, district, and ward levels. Explicitly, this decentralization has been introduced through the Provincial Development Coordinating Committees (PDCCs), the District Development Coordinating Committees (DDCCs), the Ward Development Committees (WDCs). Each Coordinating Committee ensures citizen participation through the inclusion of chief representatives, who in principle are beholden to and speak for their local community stakeholders. As such, constitutionally, there is a formal arrangement through which local participation can be had incorporated and can feed up to the national level activities. The figure below provides an overview of this institutional structure and how they feed into one another.

While a decentralized structure has been put in place, it should be noted that the current devolved structural processes have not been fruitful in seeing through effective realization of development objectives. While the policy process has allowed for an institutional structure that encompasses sub-national government and non-government players having involvement in the administration, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation of development objectives, there are no explicit formal mechanisms that have been established to support this arrangement.

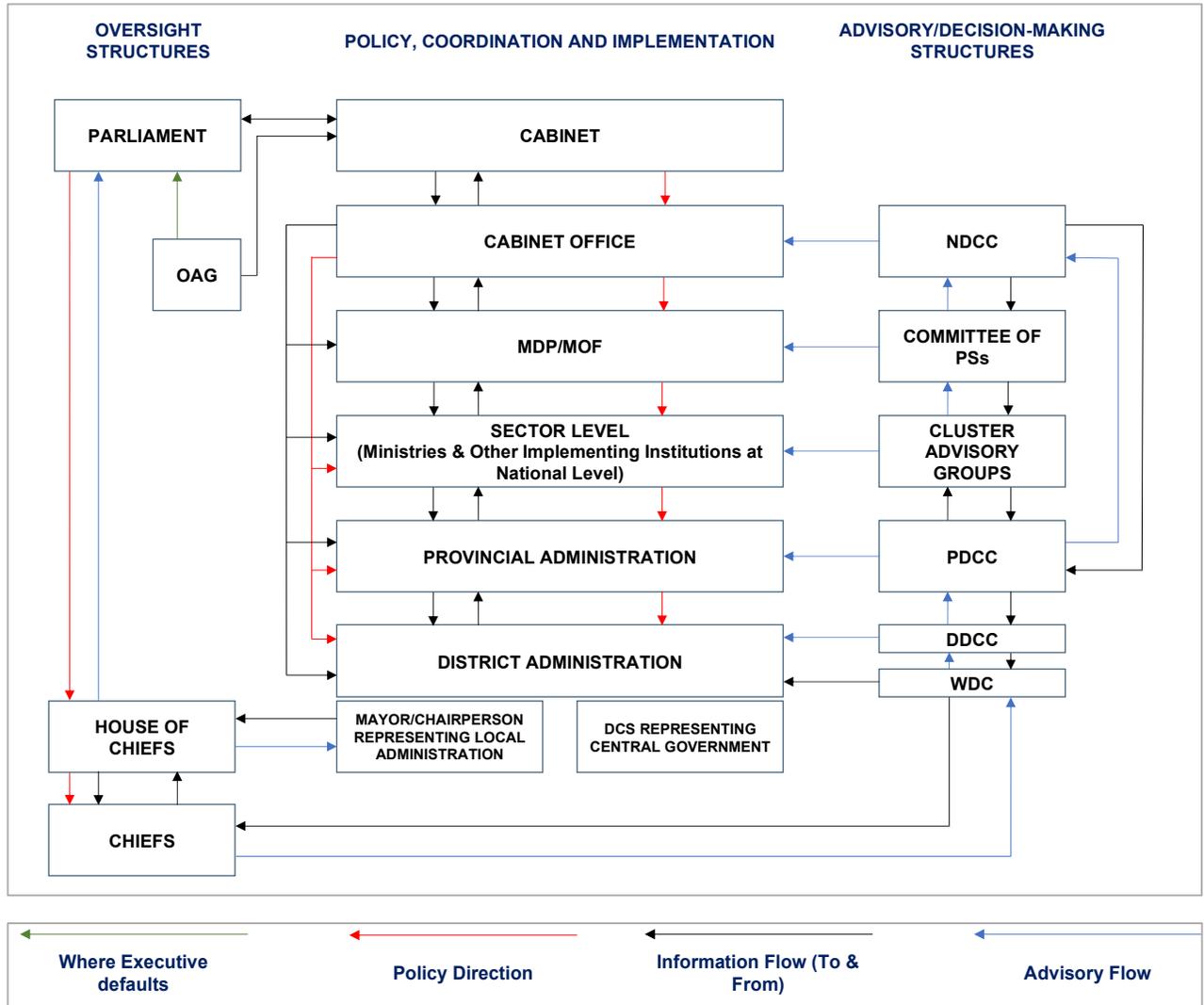


Figure 3: Institutional Arrangement for Coordination of Development Activities
 Source: Adapted from (Ministry of National Development Planning, 2017)

This policy brief calls for a recognition of the problems of praxis (practice, distinguished from theory) in developing the formation and institution of explicit mechanisms in the policy framework that will enhance the capacity of local stakeholders in this regard and highlights potential areas where such mechanisms can be constructive. If the challenge of 597 million people without access to electricity in SAA in 2021 (Statistica, 2023) is to be addressed, functional and appropriate approaches to community participation must be developed.

5.0 – Mechanisms for enhanced local involvement and citizen participation in energy development

The following strategies are recommended to provide prescribed avenues through which administration, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, and coordination can be enabled in the Zambian context.

Determine the roles and responsibilities of members of decentralized committees:

Set out roles and responsibilities and a governance model that ensures that there are clearly defined assignments and capacities, and which provides a process for accountability. This will also address linkages, i.e., communication and coordination relationships within the committees as well as between the committees.

Institute political champion(s) for local voices at all levels:

At the sub-national levels, the mandate of a political champion would ensure that local stakeholder input is appropriately imparted through the committees. This could be undertaken by the chiefs' representatives, who are prevailed on to act on behalf of local stakeholders and who have been appointed to the decentralized committees. It is also imperative that a political champion is placed within the National Development Coordination Committee (NDCC), which provides policy recommendations based on matters raised by the decentralized committees. This would facilitate (beyond formal feedback) contribution to policy adjustments that are made with respect to the energy transition.

Developing the infrastructure for information dissemination:

This establishes the mode through which feedback, performance, and other relevant information is communicated within the decentralization governance model and upward through to national-level functions. It should define the outputs and deliverables that will be developed, by whom they will be developed, and how frequently they will be developed. Information must also be made publicly available for additional stakeholders such as civil society stakeholders and academia, to allow such groups to integrate information about local experiences into the programmes and initiatives. This can feasibly occur through the development of websites and other communication channels that are updated regularly, and which could further incorporate dialogue exchange with the aforementioned groups.

Participative governance strategies.

Public participation in the energy governance process enables effective participation between local citizens and energy actors in several ways. In addition to local engagement that occurs in the preliminary steps of energy project planning, design, and development, it sustains and strengthens open dialogue between such stakeholders but also enables active decision-making responsibilities in vested energy affairs and proceedings. Participation also promotes knowledge transfer that facilitates greater education and awareness around energy policies and practices that serve residents in the local realm.

This can occur through strategic partnerships such as: 1) having co-design contribution from the beginning of community energy projects; 2) co-ownership of energy projects that enables citizen administration and management of rural energy projects; 3) having a financial stake in rural energy projects.

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