

# Constituency Development Fund as a Mechanism for Empowerment: Is it really Gender Inclusive?

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## Executive Summary

Community development funds as a mechanism for ensuring a local focus for community-centric development is a key proponent in driving decentralised development. In Zambia, the Constituency Development Fund (CDF) is the preferred tool that the government through the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development has sought to pursue. In order for this approach to have the desired impact on the communities, the national and fiscal policies that govern it must ensure that it has the tenets of inclusion and participation. Now more than ever, it is important to make certain that the needs of the constituencies are assessed through a gender lens so as to have a tangible and meaningful impact on the constituents, particularly on the women and girls.

This policy brief discusses the CDF as a mechanism for empowerment. It further highlights the need for gender inclusivity in the fund for it to have the desired impact as an empowerment mechanism and proposes that when a gendered approach is taken, the gaps in the fund can be remedied.

## **1. Introduction and Background.**

Community development funds are funds given to communities to finance the implementation of activities that support community development. Globally, community development funds have been utilized as tools to have an inclusive process of economic development. These funds are used in different parts of the world to drive developmental pursuits through a more decentralized mechanism and as a means to narrow the inequality gap. Largely, women, youths, and the people living with disabilities are usually the most affected and bear the brunt of these inequality gaps. While economic development alone can play a major role in driving down the inequality between men and women, when this is coupled with the empowerment of women, the results are far reaching and all of society benefits. Therefore this policy brief seeks to highlight the importance of the Community Development Fund, specifically assessing the Constituency Development Fund (CDF) as a mechanism for women's inclusivity and empowerment.

## **2. A Review of Community Driven Development (CDD)**

In trying to implement CDF, Zambia has borrowed from pre-existing community development programmes that have had varied success in their different localities. Of note is Community Driven Development (CDD), which is highly decentralized with a participatory approach to local development. It decentralizes financial and operational control over public goods to communities, while at the same time, seeks to promote an inclusive, transparent and a very participative approach to local decision-making. This has been adopted in countries such as Indonesia, Afghanistan, Sierra Leone, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Liberia, the Philippines, and Sudan.

## **3. CDF as a Tool for Inclusivity and Empowerment**

As a means to pave a path for the communities to take charge of addressing their various developmental needs, in 2021, the 'New Dawn' under the UPND government significantly increased the budgetary allocation for CDF in the finance minister's national budget speech. For the fiscal year 2022, the allocation was increased to 4 billion Kwacha from the previous K 250 million. With its increased allocation, CDF has the potential to unlock employment and business opportunities for the local communities which would alleviate poverty. To ensure that CDF is both inclusive and gender sensitive, its disbursement mechanisms, capacity building processes, and needs assessment of local communities are all crucial for its successful implementation. Hence, this brief attempts to demonstrate the gaps in the current disbursement and allocation mechanisms and offers potential forms of redress to curb these.

The CDF guidelines, 2022 list the following as the three major components of the fund whose distribution will be as follows;

# Table 1: CDF Allocations

Component	Percentage
Community Projects (5% Disaster Contingency)	60%
Youth and Women Empowerment (40% Grants, 60% Soft Loans)	20%
Secondary School (Boarding) & Skills Development Bursaries)	10%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Adapted from the Community Development Fund Guidelines (2022)

In its current allocation, the CDF might not effectively target women's needs especially that only 20 percent of the fund is apportioned to Youth and Women Empowerment whereas 60 percent is allocated to Community Projects. In making the 60 percent more gender inclusive, deliberate actions should be taken to ensure that there is both representation and inclusivity in the distribution of the amounts allocated to Community Projects. Furthermore, the selected community projects should be intentional in their response to the needs of women and girls and the issues affecting them in the communities so as to ensure that they participate fully.

## 4. Underlying gaps inherent in the CDF

The following are some of the factors that could hinder CDF from serving its intended purpose of inclusivity and empowerment for the communities. If left unaddressed, the inclusion of women in the access to the fund may be under threat and empowerment outcomes reduced. For the purpose of this policy brief, the following will be considered:

### 4.1 The Nominating Power of the Members of Parliament.

The power given to the Members of Parliament to nominate stakeholder representatives to be members of the CDF Committee by the CDF Guidelines, 2022, has the potential to negatively influence the decision making of the committee and likely to reduce objectivity and merit in project beneficiaries. This could further sway funding decisions in favour of those that are politically aligned and perpetuate the notion of politics of access, which in most cases does not favour women.

### 4.2 Representation of Women in the Constituency Development Fund Committees and Ward Development Committees.

The composition of Constituency Development Fund Committees (CDFCs) and Ward Development Committees (WDCs) is merely guided by the statement that, 'nominations of members of the CDFC shall take into account the need to achieve gender equity' in the CDF guidelines, 2022. Additionally, The CDF Act, 2018 simply makes mention of 'equity' as one of the principles upon which management, disbursement from and utilisation of the Fund would be done. Therefore, gender equity needs to be more pronounced and enshrined in the CDF Act, 2018 to ensure that women are included in these key decision-making units in the whole CDF process. Reduced representation of women in such committees may prioritize projects that have no gender buy in for the women that may be in need of empowering.

### **4.3 The Lack of Comprehensive Needs Assessment**

The lack of a comprehensive needs assessment across constituencies and merely following the prescriptions made by the CDF Guidelines of 2022 could potentially impede the inclusion of women. When projects are imposed on these communities without adequately identifying the needs of the communities, particularly those of women, this one size fits all approach may exclude the needs of women. For instance, in some areas women may have to travel long distances to fetch water and may need a water source such as a borehole or a hand pump brought closer to them. In other areas, the need might be that of getting farming inputs, in others, the need might be equipment to process fruits into finished products like juice and dried fruit snacks. The varying needs therefore require a tailor-made approach for different communities to ensure that the community needs are at the heart of the decision making regarding CDF allocation and disbursement. When a unique approach is given to the different needs of constituencies, this may enhance the potential for the fund to be more inclusive. Uniquely identifying the needs of the constituencies may also address some of the gendered needs that may have largely been down played.

### **4.4 Limited Capacity Building and Sensitization.**

There is inadequate capacity building, sensitization and awareness about the CDF. Compounding this is that women's literacy levels (83.08%) fall (7.52%) lower than men (90.6%), with consequences for women's ability to effectively respond to the CDF guidelines for bankable proposals, this leaves women with less viable options for projects that may not in the long terms empower them.

## **5. Interventions to strengthen CDF as a mechanism for empowerment**

In light of the above, the following steps could be taken to ensure that CDF as a tool bears gendered inclusivity:

- To limit the possibility of the fund being controlled by the MP, the nomination of stakeholder representatives can be derived from the communities with help from the Ministry of Community Development and Social Services, the Department of Gender under the office of the President working in collaboration with the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development. The selection of these stakeholders must include actors with particular expertise stemming from civil society organizations, religious organizations and relevant institutions.
- Revision of the CDF guidelines, 2022 and the CDF Act, 2018 need to be more explicit about the involvement of women in the administration and management of CDF through the WDCs and CDFCs so as to ensure more inclusive participation.
- As earlier noted, market and community needs assessments of constituencies should be undertaken in order to ensure projects are addressing the needs of the communities and done so in a gender disaggregated manner.

- To be more impactful and ensure that women are involved in the uptake of CDF, the information available should be simplified, including ensuring that application forms are written with the consideration of community literacy levels. Other issues of consideration include; the processes of simplifying company or cooperative registration to encourage formality and legalization of small scale businesses. Additionally, capacity building needs around project proposal writing and the intricacies of what a bankable project looks like should be made available in their simplest form to encourage more women to apply for the fund.

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