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Optimising Constituency Development Funds in Africa: A Comparative Analysis

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ABSTRACT

The Constituency Development Fund (CDF) has emerged as a critical tool for promoting grassroots development in several African countries, including Tanzania, Uganda, Nigeria, Kenya and Zambia. Through a systematic review of 36 studies, this analysis provides a comprehensive comparative examination of CDF frameworks, focusing on their governance structures, allocation mechanisms, successes and challenges. While CDFs have demonstrated their potential to address localised development needs, their effectiveness is often undermined by systemic issues such as corruption, lack of transparency, weak accountability mechanisms and limited community participation. Tanzania's multi-factor allocation formula and Kenya's equity-based approach stand out as good practices that balance equity and needs-based distribution. In contrast, Uganda's CDF was discontinued due to mismanagement, while Nigeria lacks a formalised CDF system, relying instead on informal budget allocations. Zambia, while showing an increase in funding through recent increases in CDF allocations, continues to face inefficiencies in the use of funds. This comparative analysis underscores the need for robust governance, enhanced community participation and improved fund allocation mechanisms to maximise development impact. The study offers actionable policy recommendations, including strengthening transparency, reducing political interference and promoting local engagement, to ensure that CDFs fulfil their intended role in promoting equitable and sustainable development. These findings highlight the importance of institutional reforms necessary to address systemic challenges and optimise the impact of CDFs on poverty reduction and community empowerment.

Il Fondo per lo Sviluppo delle Circoscrizioni – Constituency Development Fund (CDF) – è proposto come uno strumento fondamentale per promuovere lo sviluppo di base in diversi paesi africani, tra cui Tanzania, Uganda, Nigeria, Kenya e Zambia. Attraverso una revisione sistematica di 36 studi, questa analisi fornisce un esame comparativo completo delle caratteristiche dei CDF, concentrandosi sulle loro strutture di governance, sui meccanismi di allocazione, sui successi e sulle sfide. Sebbene i CDF abbiano dimostrato il loro potenziale nell'affrontare esigenze di sviluppo localizzate, la loro efficacia è spesso minata da problemi sistemici quali la corruzione, la mancanza di trasparenza, i deboli meccanismi di responsabilità e la limitata partecipazione della comunità. La formula di allocazione multifattoriale della Tanzania

e l'approccio basato sull'equità del Kenya si distinguono come buone pratiche che bilanciano l'equità e la distribuzione basata sui bisogni. Al contrario, il CDF dell'Uganda è stato interrotto a causa di una cattiva gestione, mentre la Nigeria non dispone di un sistema CDF formalizzato, che si basa invece su stanziamenti di bilancio informali. Lo Zambia, pur mostrando un aumento dei finanziamenti grazie ai recenti aumenti degli stanziamenti CDF, continua a dover affrontare inefficienze nell'uso dei fondi. Questa analisi comparativa sottolinea la necessità di una governance solida, di una maggiore partecipazione della comunità e di migliori meccanismi di allocazione dei fondi per massimizzare l'impatto sullo sviluppo. Lo studio offre raccomandazioni politiche attuabili, tra cui il rafforzamento della trasparenza, la riduzione dell'interferenza politica e la promozione dell'impegno locale, per garantire che i CDF svolgano il ruolo previsto nella promozione di uno sviluppo equo e sostenibile. Questi risultati evidenziano l'importanza delle riforme istituzionali necessarie per affrontare le sfide sistemiche e ottimizzare l'impatto dei CDF sulla riduzione della povertà e sull'empowerment della comunità.

Keywords: Constituency Development Funds, Governance and Accountability, Community Participation, Decentralization, Grassroots Development

1 – Introduction

Decentralisation has been widely adopted as a strategy to improve governance, service delivery and equitable development (Rondinelli, 1981). One of the key instruments of fiscal decentralisation is the Constituency Development Fund (CDF), which provides direct funding to constituencies to facilitate grassroots development projects. The primary objective of the CDF is to bridge the gap between national policies and local needs by empowering legislators and communities to implement projects that address specific regional challenges (Adeyemi & Joseph, 2023). This grassroots development model has been adopted in several African countries, including Tanzania, Uganda, Nigeria, Kenya and Zambia, with varying degrees of success (United Republic of Tanzania, 2013; Monitor, 2014; The Citizen, 2014; Stats Kenya, 2025; Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection, 2023; Republic of Zambia, Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development, 2023).

The rationale behind the CDF is to empower local communities and legislators to identify and implement projects that address specific local needs, thereby bridging the gap between national development policy and local service delivery. However, while the fund is intended to enhance community participation and development, its effectiveness has been the subject of debate due to concerns about transparency, accountability and efficiency of utilisation (Musamba & Phiri, 2019; Kawimbe & Tembo, 2024). In Zambia, for example, disparities in the distribution of funds and weak accountability mechanisms have limited the effectiveness of CDFs (Chulu *et al.*, 2021). Similarly, in Uganda, mismanagement and lack of accountability led to the discontinuation of the CDF around 2008 (Karugaba & Namubiru, 2009).

Despite these challenges, some countries have institutionalised CDFs with structured allocation mechanisms. For example, Tanzania's Constituencies Development Catalyst Fund (CDCF) uses a multi-factor formula to ensure equitable distribution of resources (United Republic of Tanzania, 2009). Kenya's CDF allocates 25% of its funds based on a poverty index to direct more resources to constituencies with higher poverty levels (Kenya National Council for Law Reporting, 2022). These structured approaches highlight the potential of CDFs to address both equity and needs-based distribution.

In Tanzania, the CDCF was established under the Constituencies Development Catalyst Fund Act of 2009 to support community-based development projects (United Republic of Tanzania, 2013). The allocation of the CDCF follows a structured formula, with 25 per cent distributed equally across all constituencies, 45 per cent based on population size, 20 per cent based on the poverty line, and 10 per cent based on the geographical size of the constituency (United Republic of Tanzania, 2009). This approach ensures that funding reflects demographic and socio-economic disparities and addresses development inequalities between constituencies.

In Uganda, the CDF was introduced in the 2005/2006 financial year, but was discontinued around 2008 due to mismanagement and lack of accountability (Monitor, 2014). This serves as a cautionary tale of how governance challenges can undermine grassroots development initiatives.

In Nigeria, the concept of a CDF has been proposed to promote grassroots development through national budget allocations, but nationwide implementation remains unrealised (The Citizen, 2014). Instead, lawmakers facilitate constituency projects through budgetary allocations, amounting to over NGN1 trillion between 2009 and 2019 (The Editorial Board, 2022).

In Kenya, the CDF was established in 2003 to ensure equitable grassroots development (Stats Kenya, 2025). The fund is allocated on the basis of a formula that allocates 2.5% of the national government's ordinary revenue to the CDF annually, of which 75% is distributed equally to all constituencies and 25% is based on a poverty index (Kenya National Council for Law Reporting, 2022).

In Zambia, the CDF was established in 1995 to finance local development projects (Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection, 2023). The fund has grown significantly in recent years, but challenges remain, including low community participation and inefficiencies in project approval (Republic of Zambia, Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development, 2023).

This study systematically reviews the CDF frameworks in Tanzania, Uganda, Nigeria, Kenya and Zambia and compares their implementation structures, challenges and outcomes. By systematically reviewing these differences, the study aims to draw lessons that can inform policy improvements in decentralised development finance. The main objective of this study is to systematically review the effectiveness of CDFs in promoting grassroots development in these countries. Specific objectives include:

1. Examining the governance structures and allocation mechanisms of CDFs in each country.
2. Identifying the successes and challenges associated with CDF implementation.
3. Analysing the role of community participation and accountability in the effectiveness of CDFs.
4. Providing policy recommendations to enhance the impact of CDFs in promoting equitable development.

The significance of this study lies in its comprehensive analysis of CDF frameworks in several countries, providing a comparative perspective that highlights best practices and common challenges. By addressing gaps in the existing literature, this study provides innovative insights into how CDFs can be optimised to achieve their intended goals. The study fills critical gaps by:

a. Providing a detailed comparative analysis of the CDF frameworks in Tanzania, Uganda, Nigeria, Kenya and Zambia, which has not been comprehensively addressed in previous studies.

b. Highlighting the role of governance structures, allocation mechanisms and community participation in the success of CDFs, and offers new perspectives on how these factors can be improved.

b. Proposing actionable policy recommendations based on empirical evidence, addressing the need for practical solutions to improve the effectiveness of CDFs.

2 – Literature Review

2.1 – *Theoretical Foundations of Decentralization*

The theoretical underpinnings of decentralisation are rooted in the work of scholars such as Chandler, Williamson and Jensen and Meckling (Christie *et al.*, 2003), who emphasised the trade-offs between centralisation and decentralisation in organisational and political structures. On the other hand, Christie *et al.* (2003) extended these ideas by examining how firms balance knowledge transfer and decision-making power to maximise value. They argued that decentralisation is driven by the characteristics of a firm's investment opportunities, such as knowledge specialisation, investment externalities and regulation. These factors influence the costs of knowledge transfer and the loss of control, thereby shaping the degree of decentralisation within organisations. While this study focused on firms, its findings are relevant to understanding decentralisation in public administration, particularly in the allocation and management of CDFs.

Falleti (2005) challenged the assumption that decentralisation inherently empowers subnational governments. Her 'sequential theory of decentralisation' posits that the order in which fiscal, administrative and political decentralisation occur significantly affects the power dynamics between the national and subnational levels. This theory has been instrumental in explaining the different outcomes of decentralisation initiatives, including CDFs, in different contexts. In Latin America, for example, decentralisation has not always led to increased power for regional or local leaders, highlighting the importance of sequencing and contextual factors.

2.2 – *Decentralization and Development Outcomes*

Rondinelli (1981) argued that decentralisation leads to better development outcomes, such as faster growth, more equitable distribution of benefits and efficient use of resources. This perspective has influenced the adoption of decentralisation strategies by international aid agencies and developing countries. However, recent studies have shown that the success of decentralisation initiatives, including CDFs, depends on the country's political context (Green, 2018; Tsubura, 2013) which ultimately affects effective implementation, transparency, community empowerment and participation.

Likewise, Amat *et al.* (2009) had earlier on introduced a political perspective on decentralisation, arguing that it is often used as a strategy by national leaders to maintain power. They highlighted the role of political dynamics, such as the influence of regional parties and internal competition within national parties, in shaping decentralisation decisions. This

perspective is particularly relevant for understanding the political motivations behind the establishment and management of CDFs in different countries.

2.3 – CDF Implementation and Challenges

CDFs have been widely adopted as a tool for local development in countries such as Kenya, Zambia, Tanzania and Nigeria. However, their effectiveness has been mixed, with studies highlighting both successes and challenges. Adeyemi and Joseph (2023) examined the implementation of constituency projects in Nigeria during the 8th National Assembly and found that while these projects improved the quality of life for some citizens, issues such as corruption, embezzlement and lack of transparency hampered their overall impact. They recommended greater collaboration between the legislature and local communities to achieve inclusive development.

In Zambia, several studies have examined the impact of CDFs on local development. Musamba and Phiri (2019) found that while CDF allocations increased access to social services in some constituencies, uneven distribution of funds, delayed disbursements and weak accountability mechanisms limited their effectiveness. Similarly, Chulu *et al.* (2021) found inefficiencies in resource mobilisation, project selection, and community engagement in Chadiza District and recommended increased funding, transparent procurement processes, and strengthened monitoring and evaluation. Additionally, Kawimbe and Tembo (2024) examined the impact of the Zambian CDF on poverty reduction following a significant increase in funding in 2022 and 2023.

While the fund was widely recognised as a tool for government empowerment, challenges such as political patronage, nepotism and excessive influence by members of parliament hindered its equitable distribution. Phiri (2016) and Muyaloka and Kachamba (2023) also highlighted limited community participation and lack of transparency as key barriers to the success of CDF projects in Zambia.

In Kenya, CDFs have been a central component of decentralisation efforts. Matete *et al.* (2023) assessed the impact of CDFs on rural development in Ikolomani Constituency and found that while 84.4% of respondents were aware of the fund, challenges such as low community participation, corruption and poor leadership limited its effectiveness. Kigotho (2016) investigated the impact of CDF programmes on poverty reduction in Kilifi County, concluding that while education programmes had a significant impact, water and sanitation, health, and economic empowerment programmes did not have a significant impact. These findings highlight the need for sector-specific strategies to increase the effectiveness of CDFs.

2.4 – Political Economy of CDFs

The political economy of CDFs has been the focus of several studies. Tsubura (2013) analysed the relationship between CDFs and political power dynamics in developing countries, proposing a typology based on the balance of power between the executive and the legislature and the presence of regime change. He argued that CDFs are often used by the executive to dismantle existing patronage networks and gain legislative support. Tsubura (2014) further explored this dynamic in Tanzania, where the ruling party adopted a CDF to strengthen the legislature and regain public support following corruption scandals.

Ochieng'Opalo (2022) examined the persistence of clientelism in Kenya, arguing that the credibility of electoral promises is heavily influenced by state capacity, legislative strength, and

historical context. He highlighted how the rising costs associated with clientelism can drive reforms towards programmatic politics, as evidenced by the creation of the CDF. This study provides valuable insights into the political motivations behind decentralisation initiatives and their potential to shift from patronage to programmatic politics.

2.5 – Community Participation, Transparency and Accountability

Community participation and accountability are critical factors in the success of decentralisation initiatives. Matipa (2020) found that community participation in the identification of CDF projects in Mwense Constituency, Zambia, was minimal, with projects largely driven by councillors and members of parliament. Similarly, Chisala (2021) highlighted the challenges of fiscal decentralisation in Zambia and recommended a funding model based on poverty indices to reduce political influence and enhance local development.

In Tanzania, Mgani *et al.* (2020) analysed the effectiveness of the Constituency Development Catalyst Fund (CDCF) Act of 2009 and found that while the fund supported existing projects, it failed to initiate new ones as intended. They recommended that the Act be revised to reflect practical realities and increase community participation. Makwai (2022) also highlighted the positive impact of the CDCF on community development in Bahi District and recommended continued funding and greater community involvement. All the studies point to the need for increased community participation, transparency and accountability to increase effective utilization of CDFs.

2.6 – Country-Specific Analyses

2.6.1 – Tanzania

In Tanzania, the Constituencies Development Catalyst Fund (CDCF) was established under the Constituencies Development Catalyst Fund Act of 2009 to support community-based development projects in different constituencies (United Republic of Tanzania, 2013). The allocation of the CDCF follows a structured formula, with 25 per cent distributed equally across all constituencies, 45 per cent based on population size, 20 per cent based on the poverty line, and 10 per cent based on the geographical size of the constituency (United Republic of Tanzania, 2009). This approach ensures that funding reflects demographic and socio-economic disparities and addresses developmental inequalities between constituencies. Tanzania's multi-factorial allocation formula is notable for its emphasis on both equity and needs-based distribution, setting a precedent for other countries.

2.6.2 – Uganda

Uganda introduced its Constituency Development Fund (CDF) in the 2005/2006 financial year to provide Members of Parliament with resources for local development initiatives (Monitor, 2014). Initially, each MP received UGX 10 million annually, but concerns about mismanagement and lack of accountability led to the abolition of the CDF around 2008 (Karugaba & Namubiru, 2009). Unlike Zambia, Tanzania and Kenya, where the CDF was sustained, Uganda's experience highlights the challenges of decentralised financing mechanisms in the absence of robust oversight and governance structures. Currently, Uganda does not operate a Constituency Development Fund and serves as a cautionary tale of how mismanagement can undermine grassroots development initiatives.

2.6.3 – Nigeria

In Nigeria, the concept of a Constituency Development Fund has been proposed to promote grassroots development through national budget allocations (The Citizen, 2014). Legislative efforts, such as the Constituencies Development Fund Bill, have sought to institutionalise the CDF, but nationwide implementation remains unrealised (The Citizen, 2014). Instead, the legislature facilitates constituency projects through budgetary allocations that amount to over NGN1 trillion between 2009 and 2019. For example, the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria (SMEDAN) saw an increase in capital allocations for constituency projects from NGN 960 million in 2013 to NGN 2.18 billion in 2017 (The Editorial Board, 2022). Nigeria's reliance on informal budget allocations rather than a formalised CDF system contrasts with the structured approaches in Tanzania, Kenya and Zambia. This case illustrates how alternative financing mechanisms can perform similar functions to the CDF, albeit without the same level of institutionalisation.

2.6.4 – Kenya

Kenya's Constituencies Development Fund (CDF) was established in 2003 to ensure equitable development at the grassroots level (Stats Kenya, 2025). The fund is allocated according to a formula that allocates 2.5% of the national government's recurrent revenue to the CDF each year. The total amount is then distributed as follows 75% equally among all constituencies and 25% based on a poverty index to direct more resources to constituencies with higher poverty levels (Kenya National Council for Law Reporting, 2022). Over time, the fund's allocation has increased, with different allocations per constituency in the 2024/2025 financial year. For example, Suba South and Budalangi constituencies each received KSh 70.5 million (Stats Kenya, 2025). Kenya's CDF is notable for its dual focus on equitable distribution and targeted poverty alleviation, making it a model for balancing equity and needs-based resource allocation. Figure 1 shows an information flow chart for CDF allocation to counties in Kenya.

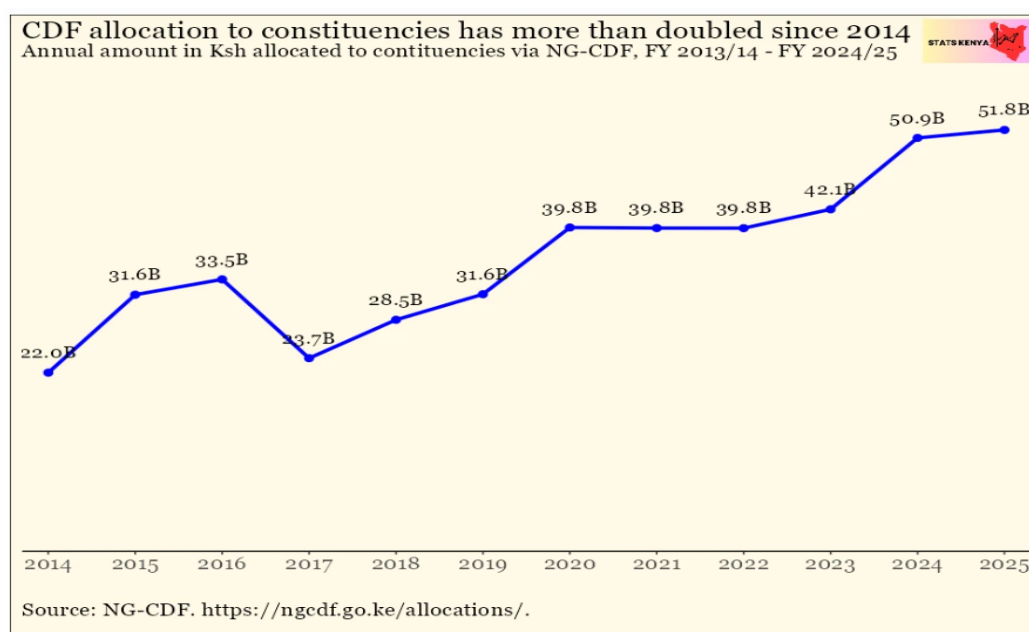


Fig. 1 – Information Flow Chart (Source: Stats Kenya, 2025)

2.6.5 – Zambia

In Zambia, the Constituency Development Fund (CDF) was established in 1995 to finance local development projects (Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection, 2023). Initially, the allocation of funds per constituency was minimal, but there has been a significant increase in recent years. The fund has grown from K1.6 million in 2021 to K36.1 million in 2025 (Sichula, 2024). However, disparities in fund utilisation persist, with only 42% of community project funds being used in 2023 (Transparency International Zambia, 2025). The CDF Act of 2018 was enacted to strengthen accountability and governance, but challenges remain, including low community participation and inefficiencies in project approval (Republic of Zambia, Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development, 2023). The Zambian experience underscores the importance of addressing structural issues, such as delays in project implementation and insufficient capacity at the local level, to ensure effective use of funds. The Figure 2 shows the allocation of CDF per constituency from 2020 to 2025.

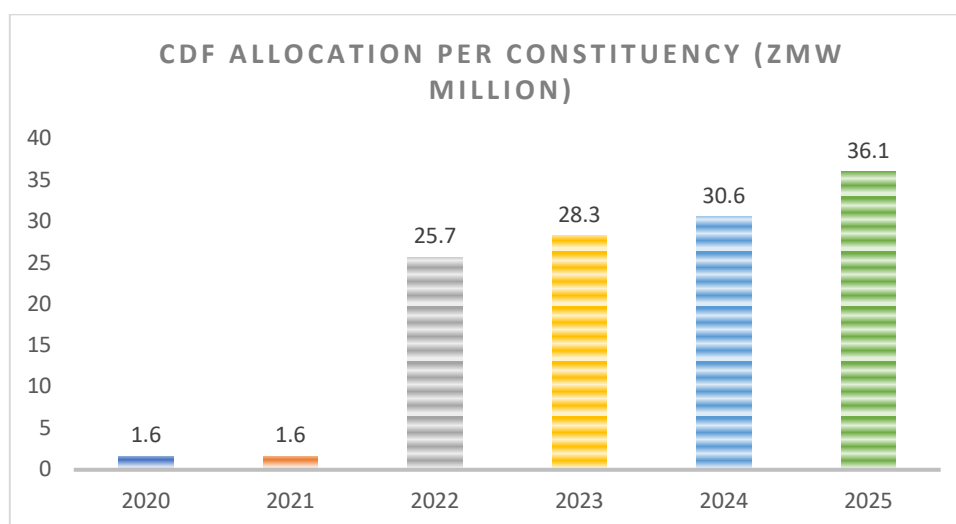


Fig. 2 – Allocation of CDF per Constituency in Zambia
(ZMW, Million) (Source: Authors, 2025)

The Figure 3 below presents the management, disbursement, utilisation and accountability of the constituency development fund in Zambia.

2.7 – Comparative Analysis

The CDF frameworks in Tanzania, Kenya and Zambia share similarities in their structured allocation mechanisms and focus on equitable development. Tanzania's CDCF uses a multi-factor formula, while Kenya allocates 25% of its CDF based on a poverty index, and Zambia has significantly increased its funding per constituency in recent years.

These countries demonstrate how structured allocation formulas can address both equity and need. In contrast, Uganda's CDF was discontinued due to mismanagement, and Nigeria relies on informal budget allocations rather than a formalised CDF system. These differences highlight the importance of robust governance and accountability mechanisms to ensure the success of decentralised development funds. Challenges such as low community participation, inefficiencies in project implementation and lack of transparency are common to all countries and underscore the need for systemic reforms.

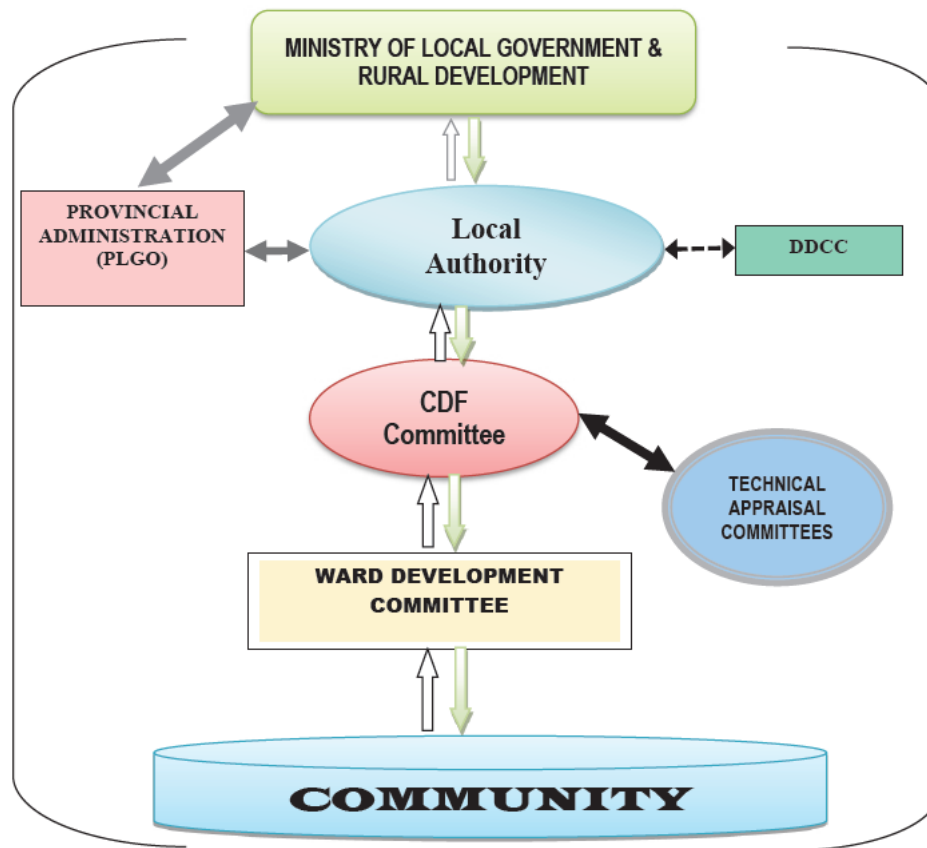


Fig. 3 – Information Flow Chart

(Source: Republic of Zambia, Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development, 2022).

3 – Research Design and Methodology

The methodology used was a systematic review of previous studies on CDF implementation, mainly in Zambia, Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda. Semantic Scholar excels in the area of scholarly publications, although Google Scholar has a huge cross-disciplinary index. But it's important to remember that Semantic Scholar and Google Scholar are only the beginning of the research process. They are really good at finding a wealth of possible sources. A systematic literature review (SLR) is a methodical and well-organised approach to locating, evaluating and critically appraising each and every relevant study that has been conducted on a particular topic. A SLR takes research beyond its current state, although Google Scholar and Semantic Scholar are excellent resources for getting started.

According to Tranfield *et al.* (2003), a systematic review is an important tool for promoting discussion and sharing of scientific findings among different researchers. According to Manatos *et al.* (2017), a systematic review is a method for locating, evaluating and examining previously published contributions while remaining faithful to a specific research question. A review consists of the following steps: planning, conducting, reporting and dissemination.

3.1 – Planning for Review

This study carefully examines the Constituency Development Fund (CDF) in selected countries in Africa. The Tranfield *et al.* (2003) methodology, which includes planning the study, conducting the review, reporting and disseminating the findings, has been used by a number of

previous researchers, although their databases and research topics varied (Yangailo, 2024a, 2024b; Chongo *et al.*, 2023; Kigozi *et al.*, 2019; Yangailo *et al.*, 2024; Manatos *et al.*, 2017).

An elaborate search plan was designed to ensure an exhaustive and complete review. The search terms used in both Google Scholar and Semantic Scholar were 'Constituency Development Fund (CDF)' or 'CDF in Zambia/Kenya/Uganda/Tanzania', 'CDF and decentralisation'. These search terms were chosen to retrieve a wide range of relevant articles. In addition, the inclusion and exclusion criteria specified that articles had to be in English, peer-reviewed and published between any time period, although many focused on more recent studies to be considered for review. Articles that did not meet these criteria were not included in the review.

3.2 – Conducting the Review

The following standards were used in this phase:

I – The paper composed of the following: CDF, CDF and Decentralisation, CDF implementation in African Countries.

II – Only English peer-reviewed papers were to be taken into consideration.

Studies that met the initial screening criteria were re-screened to determine if they still met the inclusion criteria after electronic copies of the paper were obtained. Their abstracts and titles were also reviewed and considered for inclusion.

The following factors reduced the number of papers from the two databases (Semantic Scholar and Google Scholar) to 36:

I – Removed due to lack of focus on CDF or/and Decentralisation despite correct title

II – Appears in another database

III – Exclusion determined by the abstract and title

IV – Lack of critical review of CDF or/and Decentralisation.

Table 1 presents a summary of the 36 reviewed articles on CDF and decentralisation and their Impacts mainly from Zambia, Kenya and Tanzania.

Table 1 – Summary of Studies on Decentralization, Constituency Development Funds (CDFs), and their Impacts mainly from Zambia, Kenya and Tanzania

No.	Year	Author	Methodology	Result of Aid -Growth Nexus	Comments/ Recommendations
1.	2024	Kawimbe and Tembo	Zambia	CDF in Zambia increased public awareness but faced challenges like political patronage, nepotism, and excessive MP influence.	Address political interference and improve equitable distribution of CDF funds to enhance poverty alleviation efforts.
2.	2024	Katonon	Kenya	Public engagement, resource mobilization, and legal framework positively influenced CDF project implementation in Embakasi South Constituency, Kenya.	Enhance community engagement and conduct further research on monitoring and evaluation of government projects.

No.	Year	Author	Methodology	Result of Aid -Growth Nexus	Comments/ Recommendations
3.	2023	Adeyemi and Joseph	Nigeria	Constituency projects improved quality of life in Nigeria but were hindered by corruption, embezzlement, and poor implementation.	Collaboration between legislature and communities is needed. Legislature should focus on lawmaking and oversight, while the executive handles project implementation.
4.	2023	Matete <i>et al.</i>	Kenya	CDF in Ikolomani Constituency, Kenya, was well-utilized but faced challenges like corruption and low community participation.	Ensure strict adherence to CDF implementation guidelines and promote sustainable rural development.
5.	2023	Muyaloka and Kachamba	Zambia	CDF project failures in Chongwe Constituency, Zambia, were due to funding delays, lack of transparency, weak monitoring, and limited community involvement.	Improve project management, stakeholder engagement, and monitoring to increase project success rates.
6.	2023	Likando <i>et al.</i>	Zambia	Low uptake of CDF by SMEs in Kafue, Zambia, was due to inconsistent disbursement, lack of accountability, and political influence.	Increase CDF allocation by 40%, strengthen monitoring, and provide skills training for SMEs and CDF administrators.
7.	2022	Makwai	Tanzania	CDCF in Bahi District, Tanzania, positively impacted community development, particularly in health and youth empowerment.	Continue funding community projects through CDCF and encourage community participation.
8.	2022	Ochieng'-Opalo	Kenya	Clientelism persists due to weak state capacity and ineffective legislatures, but rising costs can drive reforms toward programmatic politics.	Institutional reforms and historical context shape the transition from clientelism to programmatic politics.
9.	2022	Samson Thomas and Makwai	Tanzania	High community participation in CDCF in Bahi District, Tanzania, led to positive outcomes.	Encourage continued community engagement and amend the CDCF Act to outline community participation in project initiation and implementation.
10.	2021	Chulu <i>et al.</i>	Zambia	Inefficiencies in CDF implementation in Chadiza District, Zambia, included poor material mobilization, lack of community engagement, and lack of independent CDF management.	Increase CDF funding, establish independent CDF offices, and enhance project monitoring and evaluation.

No.	Year	Author	Methodology	Result of Aid -Growth Nexus	Comments/ Recommendations
11.	2021	Chisala	Zambia	Fiscal decentralization in Zambia faced challenges, hindering local economic development.	Accelerate fiscal decentralization and revise the CDF Act to reduce MP influence and adopt a poverty-based funding model.
12.	2020	Chrine <i>et al.</i>	Zambia	CDF had limited impact on rural development in Rufunsa Constituency, Zambia, due to inconsistent funding and low community participation.	Increase civic education, ensure consistent funding, and allocate CDF based on constituency needs.
13.	2020	Mgani <i>et al.</i>	Tanzania	CDCF in Vwawa Constituency, Tanzania, funded ongoing projects rather than initiating new ones, contrary to the Act's intent.	Revise the CDCF Act to focus on supporting existing projects rather than mandating new ones.
14.	2020	Awofeso and Irabor	Nigeria	Constituency funds in Nigeria are susceptible to corruption and embezzlement.	Implement oversight tools like routine audits and queries to ensure effective management of constituency funds.
15.	2020	Ojuok <i>et al.</i>	Kenya	Physical facilities in CDF-built schools in Kenya had a weak but significant relationship with student performance.	Provide necessary facilities to ensure quality education in CDF secondary schools.
16.	2020	Said and Gakuu	Kenya	Political influence had the strongest impact on CDF project completion in Mvita Constituency, Kenya, followed by timely funding and monitoring.	Ensure timely fund disbursement, implement robust monitoring, and enhance community involvement to improve project success rates.
17.	2020	Susiku	Zambia	Effective use of CDF tools (project identification, fund allocation, stakeholder involvement, monitoring) improved project outcomes in Kabwe District, Zambia.	Enhance management of CDF tools to ensure timely project completion and community benefit.
18.	2020	Matipa	Zambia	Community participation in CDF project identification in Mwense Constituency, Zambia, was minimal, with projects largely driven by Councillors and MPs.	Increase meaningful community involvement in project identification and planning.
19.	2019	Miyoba	Zambia	Similar to Chulu <i>et al.</i> (2021), inefficiencies in CDF implementation in Chadiza District, Zambia, were identified.	Recommendations align with Chulu <i>et al.</i> (2021): increase funding, establish independent CDF offices, and enhance monitoring.

No.	Year	Author	Methodology	Result of Aid -Growth Nexus	Comments/ Recommendations
20.	2019	Musamba and Phiri	Zambia	CDF improved access to social services in some Zambian constituencies but faced challenges like fund mismanagement, lack of transparency, and weak accountability.	Strengthen community engagement, improve transparency, and ensure timely fund disbursement to enhance CDF effectiveness.
21.	2018	Kimirri	Kenya	Constituency size, political participation, and poverty levels significantly influenced CDF utilization in Kenya.	Government should consider these factors during fund allocation and develop policies to support effective project implementation.
22.	2018	Tool	USA	The Discretionary Economy argues against predetermined political and economic fate, emphasizing the power to shape institutions and policies.	Policymakers should adopt continuous adaptation and collective discretion to solve social problems, drawing on the American tradition of thought.
23.	2016	Kigotho	Kenya	CDF educational programs significantly reduced poverty in Kilifi County, Kenya, but other sectors (water, health, economic empowerment) showed limited impact.	Improve economic empowerment and education programs, implement transparent monitoring, and set clear targets for program evaluation.
24.	2016	Phiri	Zambia	Community participation in CDF projects in Kanyama Constituency, Zambia, was limited to consultation and unskilled labor.	Increase community sensitization and engagement to promote active participation in CDF processes.
25.	2014	Tsubura	Tanzania	Tanzania's CDF was adopted to strengthen the legislature, re-establish party unity, and regain public support after corruption scandals.	CDFs can promote transparency and accountability if properly implemented with formal project selection and monitoring mechanisms.
26.	2014	Abdalla Saleh	Zanzibar	CDCF in Zanzibar faced challenges like low community awareness, political influence, and weak operational laws.	Increase community awareness, amend CDCF laws, and improve transparency to enhance effectiveness.
27.	2014	Kairu and Ngugi	Kenya	Education level of PMC members significantly influenced CDF project implementation in Machakos Town Constituency, Kenya.	Further research is needed to understand factors affecting CDF implementation across Kenya.
28.	2014	Simiyu <i>et al.</i>	Kenya	CDF in Kenya improved socio-economic well-being, with high community participation in projects like roads, bursaries, and health centers.	Enhance management of devolved funds to further improve community well-being.

No.	Year	Author	Methodology	Result of Aid -Growth Nexus	Comments/ Recommendations
29.	2013	Chibomba	Zambia	CDF in Katuba Constituency, Zambia, had mixed results, with questions about its contribution to local development versus political popularity.	Further research is needed to assess whether CDF genuinely contributes to development or serves as a political tool.
30.	2013	Tsubura	Multiple	CDFs in developing countries are influenced by power dynamics between the executive and legislature, often used to dismantle patronage networks or maintain legislative loyalty.	CDFs can be a tool for political strategy, but their effectiveness depends on the power balance and regime context.
31.	2013	Mallya and Kessy	Tanzania	Tanzanian CDFs failed to achieve objectives due to poor understanding, lack of transparency, and limited public participation.	Improve transparency, public participation, and clarify the role of MPs in development projects.
32.	2009	Amat <i>et al.</i>	Multiple	Decentralization is a political strategy used by national leaders to maintain power, influenced by the balance of power between national and regional parties.	Decentralization may lead to short-term power preservation but could result in long-term loss of control. National leaders should consider the trade-offs of decentralization.
33.	2005	Falleti	Latin America	Decentralization outcomes vary; the sequence of fiscal, administrative, and political decentralization affects power dynamics between national and subnational governments.	Decentralization does not always empower subnational governments. The order of decentralization processes is critical in shaping outcomes.
34.	2003	Christie <i>et al.</i>	Multiple	Decentralization is driven by investment opportunity characteristics (specialization of knowledge, investment externalities, regulation). Empirical evidence supports the relationship between these factors and decentralization.	Firms should balance knowledge transfer and decision-making power. Decentralization decisions should consider costs of knowledge transfer versus loss of control.
35.	1995	Gamble	Global	A "new political economy" is emerging, integrating economics and political science to analyze power, institutions, and economic behavior.	The new paradigm offers a nuanced framework for understanding the interplay between politics and economics in a changing world.
36.	1981	Rondinelli	Developing	Decentralization improves development outcomes (growth, equity, resource	Decentralization is a key strategy for sustainable and inclusive development. Local communities should have control over resource

No.	Year	Author	Methodology	Result of Aid -Growth Nexus	Comments/ Recommendations
				utilization) and empowers marginalized communities.	allocation and service delivery.

3.3 – Reporting and Dissemination

The studies summarised in Table 1 reveal several key findings and recommendations regarding decentralisation and the implementation of Constituency Development Funds (CDFs) in different countries. A recurring theme is that decentralisation, when effectively implemented, can lead to improved development outcomes such as economic growth, equitable resource distribution and improved service delivery. However, the effectiveness of CDFs is often undermined by challenges such as corruption, lack of transparency, weak accountability mechanisms and political interference. For example, in Zambia and Kenya, CDFs have been instrumental in improving access to education and health services, but their impact has been limited by mismanagement, delays in disbursement of funds, and low community participation. Similarly, in Tanzania and Nigeria, CDFs face problems such as political patronage, embezzlement and poor project implementation, which hamper their potential to drive meaningful development.

One of the most important findings is the critical role of community participation in the success of CDF projects. Many studies show that community participation is often limited to consultation and unskilled labour, with minimal involvement in project identification, implementation and monitoring. Factors such as low awareness, poverty and inadequate information dissemination further limit meaningful participation. For example, studies in Zambia's Kanyama and Mwense constituencies show that projects are often driven by local councillors and Members of Parliament (MPs), leaving communities with little say in decision-making. This lack of engagement not only reduces the effectiveness of CDFs, but also undermines their legitimacy as tools for local development.

Political and institutional factors also play an important role in shaping decentralisation outcomes. Several studies, such as those by Amat *et al.* (2009) and Tsubura (2013), argue that decentralisation is often used as a political strategy by national leaders to maintain power. The balance of power between national and regional parties, as well as the sequencing of decentralisation processes (fiscal, administrative and political), significantly influence outcomes. In countries such as Tanzania and Kenya, CDFs have been used to strengthen legislative support and restore party unity, but they have also been criticised for perpetuating clientelism and political patronage. This highlights the need for institutional reforms to ensure that decentralisation and CDFs serve their intended purpose of empowering local communities rather than reinforcing existing power structures.

The studies also provide a wealth of recommendations to address the challenges identified. Strengthening transparency and accountability is a common suggestion, with many researchers advocating for robust monitoring and evaluation systems, independent CDF offices, and amendments to CDF laws to reduce political interference. Strengthening community participation is another key recommendation, with calls for increased sensitisation, awareness campaigns and active involvement of communities in all stages of project implementation. In addition, improving fund allocation and disbursement processes, ensuring timely funding, and increasing CDF allocations based on constituency needs are seen as critical steps to increase the

effectiveness of CDFs. Capacity building for CDF administrators, SMEs and community members is also emphasised to improve project management and implementation.

Based on the publications reviewed in this study, Figure 4 shows several trends and patterns. Geographically, Zambia dominates the research landscape with 14 studies (39% of the total) focusing on its CDF implementation, followed by Kenya with 9 studies (25%) and Tanzania with 6 studies (17%).

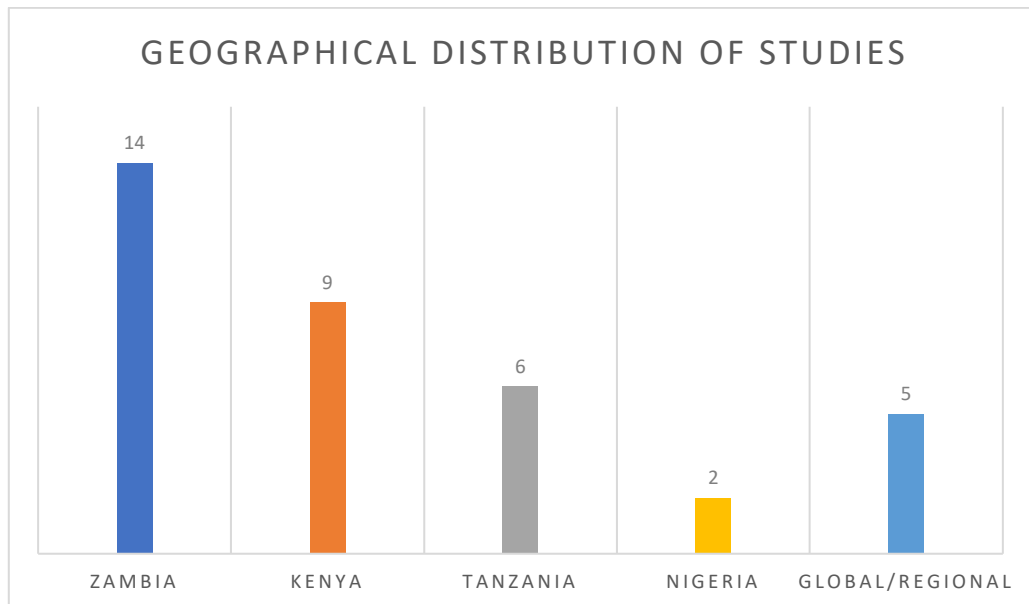


Fig. 4 – Geographical Distribution of Studies (Source: Authors, 2025)

Figure 5 shows that corruption and mismanagement are the most frequently cited challenges, appearing in 20 studies (56%), while low community participation is highlighted in 18 studies (50%). Political interference and delays in funding are also important issues, mentioned in 15 (42%) and 12 (33%) studies respectively.

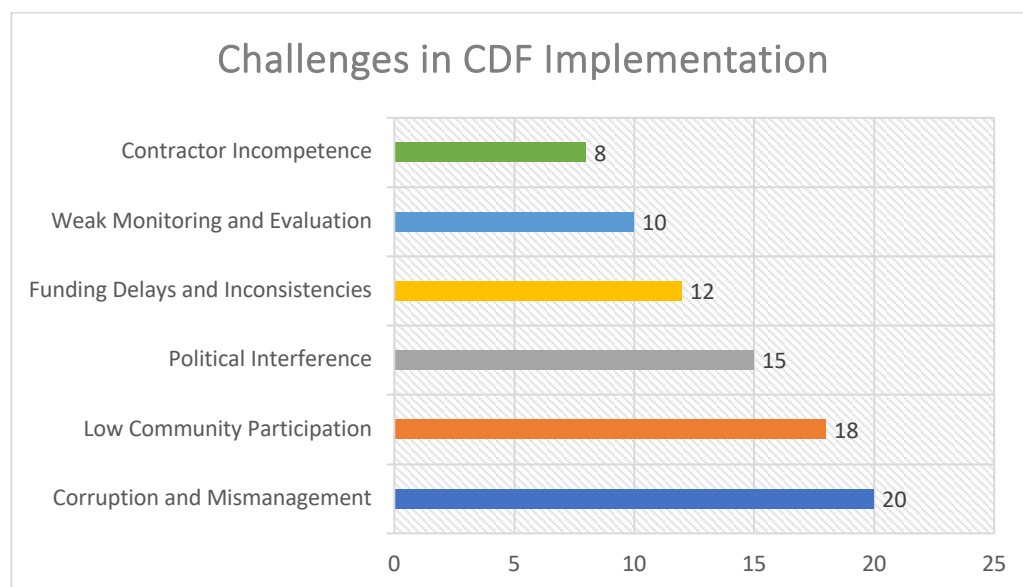


Fig. 5 – Common Challenges in CDF Implementation (Source: Authors, 2025)

On the positive side, Figure 6 shows that education is the sector most positively impacted by CDFs, with 10 studies (28%) reporting improvements, while poverty reduction and community development are mentioned in 8 (22%) and 7 (19%) studies respectively.

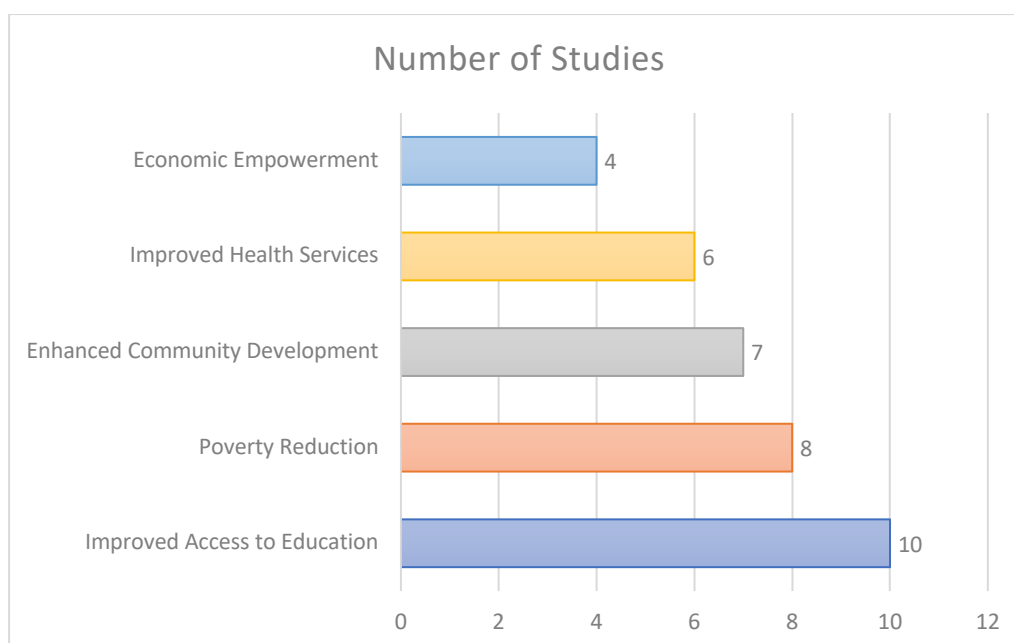


Fig. 6 – Positive Outcomes of CDFs (Source: Authors (2025))

Figure 7 shows the main recommendations for improving the implementation of the Constituency Development Fund (CDF), focusing on improving governance, efficiency and community engagement.

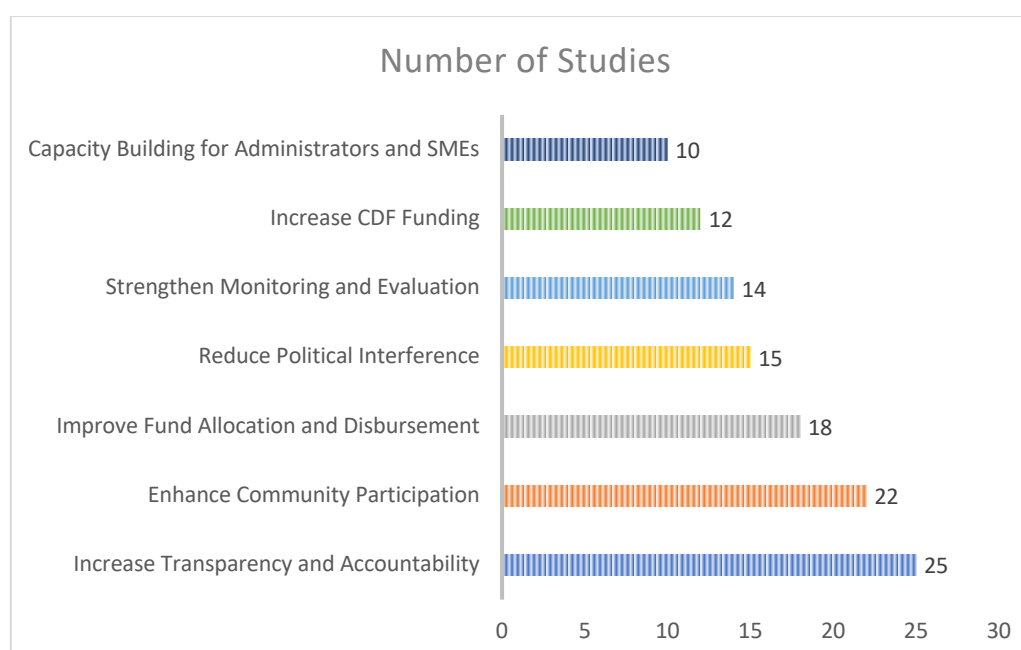


Fig. 7 – Recommendations for improving the implementation of the CDF
(Source: Authors, 2025)

The most commonly suggested reform is to increase transparency and accountability (69% of studies), closely followed by increasing community participation (61%) to ensure that projects meet local needs. Improving the allocation and disbursement of funds (50%) is also critical to address inefficiencies. Other recommendations include reducing political interference (42%) to prevent misuse, strengthening monitoring and evaluation (39%) for better oversight, and increasing CDF funding (33%) to expand its impact. Finally, capacity building for administrators and SMEs (28%) is needed to improve project management and implementation. Together, these measures aim to increase the effectiveness and sustainability of CDF initiatives. The time trends in Table 2 show that earlier studies (1980s-2000s) focus primarily on decentralisation as a development strategy, while more recent studies (2010s-2024) address the challenges and effectiveness of CDFs in specific contexts.

Table 2 – Temporal Trends in Studies

Time Period	Focus of Studies	Number of Studies	Percentage of Total Studies
1980s-2000s	Decentralization as a development strategy	5	14%
2010s-2020s	Challenges and effectiveness of CDFs in specific countries	31	86%
Total		36	100%

Sectoral analysis, as shown in Figure 8, indicates that while education and health programmes have shown positive results, agriculture, economic empowerment and water/sanitation initiatives have had limited impact, indicating the need for targeted improvements in these areas.

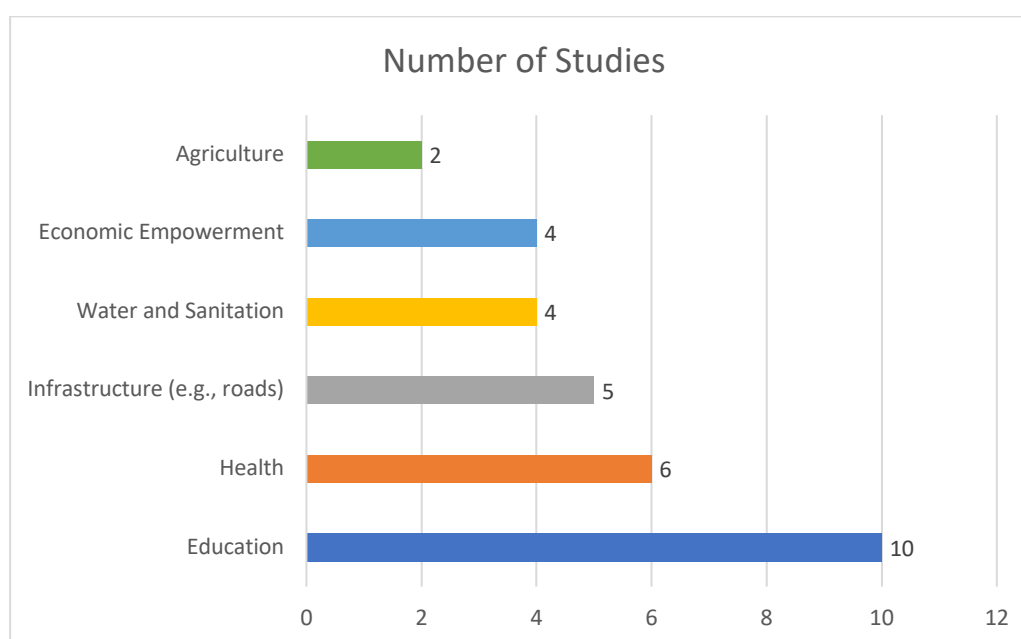


Fig. 8 – Sectoral Impact of CDFs (Source: Authors, 2025)

Table 3 shows CDF implementation by region.

Table 3 – Regional Variations in CDF Implementation

Country	Key Findings	Common Challenges	Recommendations
Zambia	CDFs improve education and health but face corruption and political interference.	Corruption, funding delays, low participation	Increase funding, enhance transparency, reduce MP influence.
Kenya	CDFs reduce poverty through education but face mismanagement and political bias.	Political interference, weak monitoring	Strengthen community engagement, improve fund allocation.
Tanzania	CDFs used as a political tool with mixed development outcomes.	Lack of transparency, low community awareness	Amend CDF laws, increase community participation.
Nigeria	Constituency projects susceptible to corruption and embezzlement.	Corruption, lack of accountability	Implement oversight tools like audits and queries.
Global/Regional	Decentralization improves development but outcomes vary by context.	Political strategy, weak governance	Focus on institutional reforms and capacity building.

In Zambia, CDFs have contributed to improvements in education and health, but their effectiveness is often undermined by corruption and political interference. Challenges in the country include delays in funding, low community participation, and excessive influence of Members of Parliament (MPs) in the allocation of funds. To improve the impact of CDFs, it is recommended that funding be increased, transparency measures be strengthened, and the influence of MPs be reduced to ensure equitable distribution and effective use of resources.

Kenya's CDF programme has played a significant role in poverty reduction, particularly through investment in education. However, issues of mismanagement and political bias have weakened the effectiveness of these funds. Political interference and weak monitoring systems remain major challenges. Strengthening community engagement and improving fund allocation mechanisms are critical steps needed to address these issues and increase the effectiveness of CDF use.

In Tanzania, CDFs have been widely used as political instruments rather than focusing solely on development, with mixed results. A major challenge in the country is the lack of transparency and low community awareness of how funds are allocated and used. To address these shortcomings, it is necessary to amend the CDF laws to provide clearer regulations and promote greater community participation in decision-making processes to improve accountability and effectiveness.

Nigeria's experience with CDF-like constituency projects highlights significant concerns about corruption and misappropriation. The lack of adequate accountability mechanisms has

led to widespread misuse of funds, undermining the development impact of these projects. To mitigate these challenges, the introduction of robust oversight tools, such as regular audits and financial inquiries, is recommended to ensure transparency and accountable management of funds.

Globally and regionally, decentralisation has been associated with improved development outcomes, but its success is highly dependent on governance structures and political contexts. Weak governance and the use of CDFs as political instruments remain critical barriers to effective implementation. To maximise the benefits of decentralised financing, institutional reforms and capacity-building initiatives should be prioritised to improve governance, accountability and the overall effectiveness of these funds.

In a nutshell, the studies underline the potential of decentralisation and CDFs to promote sustainable development, especially when implemented with transparency, accountability and active community participation. However, systemic challenges such as corruption, political interference and weak governance structures continue to hamper their effectiveness. Policymakers must prioritise reforms to address these issues, including amendments to CDF laws, capacity-building initiatives, and improved monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. In this way, CDFs can become more effective tools for poverty reduction, equitable development and community empowerment.

4 – Discussion

Constituency Development Funds (CDFs) have been established in several countries to promote grassroots development by directly funding projects at the constituency level. The primary objective of CDFs is to bridge the gap between national policies and local needs by empowering legislators and communities to implement projects that address specific regional challenges. The effectiveness of these funds depends largely on their governance structures, allocation mechanisms and community participation. This grassroots development model has been adopted in several African countries, including Tanzania, Uganda, Nigeria, Kenya and Zambia, with varying degrees of success. While the fund is intended to enhance community participation and development, its effectiveness has been debated, with concerns about transparency, accountability and efficiency of use. In Zambia, for example, uneven distribution of funds and weak accountability mechanisms have limited the effectiveness of CDFs. Similarly, in Uganda, mismanagement and lack of accountability led to the suspension of the CDF around 2008. Despite these challenges, some countries have institutionalised CDFs with structured allocation mechanisms, highlighting their potential to address both equity and needs-based distribution.

4.1 – Country-Specific Analyses

In Tanzania, the Constituencies Development Catalyst Fund (CDCF) was established in 2009 under the CDCF Act. The fund uses a multi-factor allocation formula, with 25 per cent distributed equally among constituencies, 45 per cent based on population size, 20 per cent based on poverty lines and 10 per cent based on geographical size. This model strikes a balance between equity and needs-based distribution, making it a precedent-setting approach in the region. However, challenges have been identified, such as limited community participation and the fund's focus on supporting existing projects rather than initiating new ones. In Uganda, the CDF was launched in 2005/2006 but was suspended around 2008 due to mismanagement and accountability concerns. The lack of robust oversight mechanisms led to the failure of the fund,

making Uganda a cautionary tale of how poor governance can undermine decentralised development initiatives.

In Nigeria, the concept of a CDF has been proposed to support grassroots development through national budget allocations, but nationwide implementation remains unrealised. Instead, lawmakers facilitate constituency projects through budgetary allocations, amounting to over NGN 1 trillion between 2009 and 2019. However, without a formalised framework, these allocations lack the transparency and accountability mechanisms seen in Tanzania, Kenya and Zambia. Nigeria's experience highlights how alternative financing mechanisms can perform similar functions to the CDF, albeit without the same level of institutionalisation.

In Kenya, the CDF was established in 2003 to ensure equitable grassroots development. The fund is allocated on the basis of a formula that allocates 2.5% of the national government's ordinary revenue to the CDF each year, of which 75% is distributed equally to all constituencies and 25% is based on a poverty index. This dual approach of equity and targeted poverty alleviation has improved development outcomes, but also faces challenges such as political interference and mismanagement.

In Zambia, the CDF was established in 1995 to finance local development projects. The fund has grown significantly in recent years, with allocations increasing from K1.6 million in 2021 to K36.1 million in 2025. Despite this growth, only 42% of the allocated funds were utilised in 2023, highlighting inefficiencies in project implementation. Challenges such as low community participation and delays in project approvals persist, necessitating governance reforms. Zambia's experience highlights the importance of addressing these structural issues to ensure effective use of funds.

4.2 – Comparative Analysis

Tanzania, Kenya and Zambia all have structured allocation mechanisms that ensure an equitable distribution of resources. Tanzania's CDCF uses a multi-factor formula, while Kenya allocates 25% of its CDF based on a poverty index, and Zambia has significantly increased its funding per constituency in recent years. These countries demonstrate how structured allocation formulas can address both equity and need. In contrast, Uganda's CDF was discontinued due to mismanagement, and Nigeria relies on informal budget allocations rather than a formalised CDF system. These differences highlight the importance of robust governance and accountability mechanisms to ensure the success of decentralised development funds. Common challenges such as low community participation, inefficiencies in project implementation and lack of transparency are common to all countries and underline the need for systemic reforms.

4.3 – Major Findings and Trends

4.3.1 – The Role of Decentralization

Effective decentralisation improves development outcomes, but its success depends on governance structures. Studies show that while CDFs improve economic growth and service delivery, weak accountability mechanisms limit their impact. For example, in Zambia and Kenya, CDFs have been instrumental in improving access to education and health services, but their impact is limited by mismanagement, delays in funding and low community participation. Similarly, in Tanzania and Nigeria, CDFs face problems such as political patronage,

embezzlement and poor project implementation, which hinder their potential to drive meaningful development.

4.3.2 – Community Participation

Limited community participation weakens the effectiveness of CDFs. Many studies show that community participation is often limited to consultation and unskilled labour, with minimal involvement in project identification, implementation and monitoring. Factors such as low awareness, poverty and poor information dissemination further limit meaningful participation. For example, studies in Zambia's Kanyama and Mwense constituencies show that projects are often driven by local councillors and Members of Parliament (MPs), leaving communities with little say in decision-making. This lack of engagement not only reduces the effectiveness of CDFs, but also undermines their legitimacy as tools for local development.

4.3.3 – Political and Institutional Dynamics

Decentralisation is sometimes used as a political tool. Several studies argue that decentralisation is often used as a political strategy by national leaders to maintain power. The balance of power between national and regional parties, as well as the sequencing of decentralisation processes (fiscal, administrative and political), has a significant impact on outcomes. In countries such as Tanzania and Kenya, CDFs have been adopted to strengthen legislative support and restore party unity, but they have also been criticised for perpetuating clientelism and political patronage. This highlights the need for institutional reforms to ensure that decentralisation and CDFs serve their intended purpose of empowering local communities rather than reinforcing existing power structures.

4.4 – Policy Implications and Recommendations

The implementation of Constituency Development Funds (CDFs) in Tanzania, Uganda, Nigeria, Kenya and Zambia highlights both the potential and the challenges of decentralised development finance. While CDFs have demonstrated their ability to address grassroots development needs, systemic issues such as corruption, lack of transparency, weak accountability and low community participation have hindered their effectiveness. To maximise the impact of CDFs and ensure that they achieve their intended goals, policymakers need to adopt targeted reforms and strategies. These reforms should focus on strengthening governance structures, enhancing community participation, improving fund allocation mechanisms and building institutional capacity.

A – Strengthen Transparency and Accountability Mechanisms: Weak accountability mechanisms and lack of transparency are major barriers to effective use of CDFs. Without robust oversight, funds are vulnerable to mismanagement, corruption and political interference. To address this, governments should establish independent CDF oversight bodies at national and local levels to monitor the allocation, disbursement and use of funds. Regular financial and performance audits should be conducted to ensure that funds are used as intended. In addition, detailed reports on CDF allocations, project progress and expenditure should be published to promote transparency, build public trust and to deter corruption. These measures will help restore confidence in CDFs and ensure that they are used for their intended purpose.

B – Strengthen Local Community Participation: Limited community involvement in project identification, implementation and monitoring reduces the relevance and sustainability of CDF projects. Empowering communities ensures that projects are aligned with local needs and priorities. Governments should launch awareness campaigns to educate communities about the CDF and their role in decision-making. Establishing community-based committees to oversee project selection, implementation and monitoring can ensure grassroots participation. In addition, creating channels for community members to provide feedback and report grievances related to CDF projects will promote greater accountability and inclusivity.

C – Utilize Equitable Fund Allocation and Disbursement Mechanisms: Inequitable or delayed allocation and disbursement of funds can undermine the effectiveness of CDFs, particularly in marginalised or high-poverty areas. Governments should adopt needs-based allocation formulas that take into account factors such as poverty levels, population size and geographical area to ensure equitable distribution of resources. Streamlining bureaucratic processes to reduce delays in disbursing funds and implementing projects is also essential. Prioritising high-impact sectors such as education, health and infrastructure can maximise the development impact of CDFs.

D – Reduce Political Interference and Ensuring Integrity of CDFs: Political interference, include use of CDFs for patronage or electoral gain, which undermines their development objectives and erodes public confidence. Governments should amend CDF laws to reduce the role of Members of Parliament (MPs) in fund management and ensure non-partisan management. Legal frameworks must also be strengthened to penalise misuse of CDF funds and protect them from political exploitation. Empowering local governments and community leaders to manage CDFs can further reduce dependence on national politicians and promote decentralised decision-making.

E – Develop Institutional and Local Capacity for Effective CDF Implementation and Monitoring: Weak institutional capacity at the local level often leads to inefficiencies in project implementation and fund utilisation. Governments should provide training for local government officials, CDF administrators and community representatives in project management, financial oversight and monitoring and evaluation. Strengthening the capacity of local governments to effectively plan, implement and monitor development projects is also critical. Supporting small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and local contractors to implement CDF projects can ensure quality and sustainability.

F – Promote Sector-Specific Strategies: While CDFs have been successful in sectors such as education, their impact has been limited in areas such as agriculture, water and economic empowerment. Governments should focus on sectors with the greatest potential to reduce poverty and improve livelihoods, such as education, health and rural infrastructure. Developing tailored guidelines for implementing projects in key sectors and monitoring sector results can ensure alignment with national development goals and identify best practices.

G – Ensure Sustainable and Long-Term Impact: Many CDF projects fail to achieve long-term sustainability due to poor planning, lack of maintenance and insufficient community ownership. Governments should involve communities in the planning and maintenance of projects to ensure long-term sustainability. Aligning CDF projects with broader national and

local development strategies can maximise their impact. Allocating a portion of CDF budgets to the maintenance and upkeep of completed projects can also ensure their longevity.

H – Leverage CDFs to Mitigate Regional Disparities and Promote Equitable Development: Inequities in the distribution and use of funds often leave marginalised or remote communities underserved. Governments should adopt allocation formulas that take into account factors such as poverty levels, population size and geographical challenges to ensure equitable distribution. Prioritising funding for constituencies with high poverty rates or limited access to basic services can address regional disparities. Monitoring the impact of CDFs in different regions can help identify and address gaps in development outcomes.

I – Utilize Technology to Enhance Transparency in the Implementation of CDF Projects: Manual processes and a lack of data-driven decision-making often leads to inefficiencies in CDF implementation. Governments should implement digital platforms for fund tracking, project monitoring and reporting to improve efficiency and transparency. Developing online dashboards to provide real-time updates on fund allocation, project progress and spending can improve accountability. Using data analysis to identify trends, assess impact and inform future allocations can ensure more effective decision-making.

J – Countries Should Adopt Best Practices from Successful CDF Models: Countries with successful CDF models, such as Tanzania and Kenya, offer valuable lessons for improving decentralised financing mechanisms. Governments should facilitate knowledge-sharing platforms for countries to share experiences and lessons learned from CDF implementation. Adapting successful allocation and governance models to local contexts can ensure relevance and effectiveness. Working with international organisations to evaluate CDF frameworks and identify best practices can further enhance their impact.

In conclusion, the success of Constituency Development Funds (CDFs) in promoting grassroots development depends on addressing systemic challenges such as corruption, lack of transparency, weak accountability and low community participation. By implementing the recommendations above, policymakers can improve the effectiveness of CDFs and ensure that they become powerful tools for poverty reduction, equitable development and community empowerment. Key reforms include strengthening transparency and accountability, increasing community participation, reducing political interference and building institutional capacity. These measures, combined with equitable allocation mechanisms and sector-specific strategies, can ensure that CDFs deliver sustainable and impactful development outcomes for local communities.

4.4 – Gaps Addressed by the Study

The study comprehensively addresses several critical gaps in the existing literature on CDFs, and provides a detailed and holistic analysis of their implementation in several countries. The study:

A – Provides an In-depth Comparative Analysis of CDF Frameworks: The study analyses CDF frameworks in Tanzania, Uganda, Nigeria, Kenya and Zambia, examining governance structures, allocation mechanisms, successes and challenges. For example, it highlights Tanzania's multi-factor allocation formula, Kenya's equity-based approach and Zambia's recent funding increases, while also noting Uganda's discontinuation of CDFs and Nigeria's reliance

on informal budget allocations. This comparative approach provides a clear understanding of how CDFs operate in different contexts, identifying best practices and common challenges.

B – Analysis of the Political Economy and Institutional Dynamics that Influence CDF Outcomes: The study identifies dynamics such as political interference, patronage networks and the balance of power between national and regional actors. Specific examples, such as the use of CDFs as a political tool in Tanzania and Kenya, and the excessive influence of Members of Parliament (MPs) in Zambia are discussed. This analysis sheds light on how decentralisation and CDFs are often used as strategies to maintain political power, and provides valuable insights into the political and institutional factors that shape CDF implementation. The study recommends streamlining of bureaucratic processes and emphasizing local engagement and ownership.

C – Detailed Sectoral Analysis of the Positive Impact of CDFs: Positive impacts were especially noted in education and health sectors in comparison to others. For example, it notes the significant improvements in education in Kenya and Zambia as a result of CDF investment. This analysis provides a clear understanding of where CDFs have been most effective and identifies sectors that require further attention. By focusing on sector-specific results, the study provides a nuanced perspective on the development impact of CDFs. The study recommends prioritising high-impact sectors such as education and health.

D – Examines the Role of Community Participation and Accountability in CDF Implementation: The study highlights the limited involvement of communities in project identification and monitoring, particularly in Zambia and Tanzania. It highlights the need for greater engagement and provides actionable recommendations, such as establishing community-based committees and launching awareness campaigns, to enhance participation and accountability. These recommendations are evidence-based and tailored to address the systemic issues that hinder effective community participation.

E – Provides Specific, Evidence-based Policy Recommendations: applicable recommendations include strengthening transparency and accountability, enhancing community engagement, improving fund allocation mechanisms, reducing political interference and building institutional capacity. These recommendations are practical and provide policymakers with actionable insights to improve the effectiveness of CDFs.

F – Encourages Equitable Distribution of Resources to Regions: The study addresses regional disparities in resource distribution, highlighting how inequitable allocation formulas and governance structures can undermine the effectiveness of CDFs. It provides examples from Zambia and Kenya, where funding delays and low community participation have left marginalised communities underserved. The study proposes needs-based allocation formulas to promote equitable development and ensure that resources are distributed fairly and effectively.

G – Proposes Use of Technology to Improve CDF Implementation: The study recommends use of technology to track and monitor funds.

By providing a comprehensive and evidence-based analysis, the study makes a significant contribution to the literature on CDFs and provides policymakers with valuable insights to enhance the effectiveness of these funds in promoting grassroots development.

5 – Conclusion

The Constituency Development Fund (CDF) has emerged as an important tool for promoting grassroots development in several African countries, including Tanzania, Uganda, Nigeria, Kenya and Zambia. This study provides a comprehensive comparative analysis of CDF frameworks in these countries, examining their governance structures, allocation mechanisms, successes and challenges. The findings show that while CDFs have the potential to address localised development needs and bridge the gap between national policies and community priorities, their effectiveness is often undermined by systemic issues such as corruption, lack of transparency, weak accountability mechanisms and limited community participation. These challenges highlight the complexity of implementing decentralised financing mechanisms in different political and socio-economic contexts. One of the key strengths of CDFs is their ability to empower local communities and legislators to identify and implement projects that address specific regional challenges. Countries such as Tanzania and Kenya have demonstrated the potential of structured allocation mechanisms, such as multi-factorial formulae and poverty-based indices, to ensure equitable distribution of resources. However, the cancellation of CDFs in Uganda due to mismanagement and reliance on informal budget allocations in Nigeria underscore the importance of robust governance and accountability frameworks. Without these, even well-intentioned initiatives can falter, leading to inefficiencies and a loss of public confidence. The study also highlights the critical role of community participation in the success of CDFs. Limited community involvement in project identification, implementation and monitoring was a recurring theme in all the countries studied. This lack of engagement not only reduces the relevance and sustainability of CDF projects, but also undermines their legitimacy as tools for local development. Strengthening community participation through awareness-raising campaigns, capacity-building initiatives and the establishment of community-based oversight committees is essential to ensure that CDFs are aligned with local needs and priorities. Political and institutional dynamics further complicate the implementation of CDFs. In many cases, CDFs have been used as political tools to maintain power or secure electoral support, rather than as instruments for genuine development. Politicisation of CDFs often leads to inequitable distribution of resources, mismanagement and lack of transparency. Addressing these issues requires institutional reforms, including reducing political interference, establishing independent oversight bodies, and strengthening legal frameworks to penalise misuse of funds. That notwithstanding, the study identifies several good practices that can inform future policy reforms. For example, Tanzania's multi-factor allocation formula and Kenya's dual focus on equity and poverty reduction offer valuable lessons for other countries. Similarly, Zambia's recent efforts to increase CDF allocations and strengthen accountability mechanisms demonstrate the potential for improvement even in challenging contexts. By adopting these good practices and addressing identified systemic issues, policymakers can increase the effectiveness of CDFs and ensure that they deliver sustainable and impactful development outcomes.

5.1 – *Limitations of the Study and Recommendations for Future Research*

First, the reliance on secondary data and existing literature may have limited the depth of insights into specific local contexts. Future studies could benefit from primary data collection, including interviews and surveys with community members, local leaders and policymakers, with the purpose of gaining a more nuanced understanding of the challenges and successes of

CDF implementation. In addition, in-depth case studies that examine the implementation of CDFs at local levels, particularly among marginalized or underserved communities can help provide further context-specific valuable insights.

Secondly, the study focuses on five countries that, while representative of diverse experiences, may not capture the full range of CDF models and challenges across Africa. Expanding the scope to include other countries with CDFs or similar decentralised financing mechanisms could provide a more holistic perspective. Comparative studies involving countries within and outside of Africa could provide broader understanding of the potential and limitations of decentralized financing mechanisms in different political and socio-economic contexts.

Thirdly, future research should explore the role of technology in enhancing transparency and efficiency of CDF implementation. It would be worthwhile to investigate the role of digital platforms in fund tracking, project monitoring and community engagement and accountability.

Finally, longitudinal studies that track the impact of CDFs over time could help assess their long-term sustainability and effectiveness in promoting grassroots development.

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