CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION AND GENERAL ORIENTATION

1.1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The aim of this chapter is to outline the focus of the study. The chapter provides a brief of Malawi’s Decentralisation policy together with a closer look at countries in Africa that have undergone the same process. The second part of the chapter focuses on the problem statement, objectives and significance of the study. The chapter concludes with an outline of the study’s chapters.

Malawi’s decentralisation process has undergone three phases shaped by the objectives of the government in place. During the colonial era, the British, through their policy of indirect rule, established a fairly effective system of local government based on chieftaincy. They devolved administrative, judicial and developmental functions to the chiefs. In addition, through chiefs’ councils formed under the 1933 Native Administrative Ordinance (NAO), the chiefs were given powers to collect revenues and create rules for the administration of their areas. In performing their various duties, the chiefs were, however, directly supervised by the District Commissioners and were therefore accountable to the central government rather than the people they governed (Decentralisation Process In Malawi, 2003:1).

In an attempt to address this problem of accountability, a District Council Act was introduced in 1953. This new Act and further Acts of 1962 introduced elected members, which allowed for more powers and responsibilities to be devolved to the councils. They became local education authorities, highway authorities and public health authorities. The act further provided the councils with additional sources of revenue that allowed them to
finance the additional activities. On the whole, local authorities performed their functions effectively and were highly regarded by the central government and the people in general. The presence of line ministries at district level was minimal (Decentralisation Process in Malawi 2001:3).

At independence, in 1964, the new government (Malawi Congress Party) inherited a well-devolved local government system that did not last long. The powers, functions and responsibilities of local authorities that included local education, roads and public health management, were gradually transferred to line ministries which in turn established regional and district offices alongside the District Councils. During this period, the political environment was characterised by party supremacy, intimidation, centralisation and politicisation of the local structures (Hussein 2003:274). In local authorities, all council chairmen were to be delegates to the Malawi Congress Party’s annual convention (Kaunda 1992:56). In 1967, the government administratively established District Development Committees (DDCs) which had similar mandates to that of the local authorities. This naturally resulted in a scramble for resources with the DDCs receiving a lion’s share of government resources and political support at the expense of the local authorities, who were the legal bodies (Decentralisation Process in Malawi 2001:3-4).

In 1993, the government introduced the district focus for development concept in some districts. In these districts more developmental powers and responsibilities were deconcentrated. Under this strategy, a District Development Planning System (DDPS) and a District Development Fund (DDF) were established to allow districts to prepare and implement their own development projects. It was also a way of strengthening institutions existing at district and village levels to allow for more participation in development programmes. However, the major weakness of this policy was that it entrenched the dual administration at district level, with the District Development Committee as the favoured
institution despite being unrepresentative. Another significant feature of the one party system of government was the role played by the party. The party (MCP) controlled both the central and local government and it handpicked candidates for both parliamentary and local government elections. It also established a structure parallel to those of central and local governments from the village to national level. In short, under the one party rule, the local authorities were weakened through the creation of parallel structures and the transfer of most of the council’s functions and revenue sources to the central government’s line ministries. The central government then practically sidelined councils thereby denying people at the local level an opportunity to participate in decision making on issues that affected them (Decentralisation Process in Malawi 2001:4).

The multiparty era started with a referendum on the introduction of multiparty politics in 1993 and culminated in the first democratic Presidential and Parliamentary election in 1994. The new government (United Democratic Front) immediately ushered in a culture of democracy through national institutions such as the National Assembly. In order to consolidate democracy, the government decided to devolve powers of governance and development to the lower levels so as to bring on board grassroots participation in decision making for the management of their own affairs (Decentralisation Process in Malawi 2001:4). The Decentralisation Policy, finally approved in 1998, devolved powers and functions of governance and development to elected local government units as reflected in the constitution of the country (Decentralisation Policy 1998). Whereas the decentralisation policy sought to create an operational framework for decentralisation in Malawi, the local government act is the legal framework within which the decentralisation policy operates. The decentralisation policy, among other key issues, seeks to create a democratic environment and institutions for governance and development at the local level that will facilitate the participation of those at the grassroots level in the decision making system. It
also provides for the establishment of local governments as the basis and framework for the devolution of functions, responsibilities, powers and resources to district councils. In 2010, parliament made amendments to the Local Government Act. The amendment was an attempt by government to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of local assemblies; and eight amendments were effected, namely:

- changing the name of a Local Government area from Assembly to Council
- including members of parliament as voting members of the Council
- removing the function of policy making from the responsibilities of the Council
- exclude members of parliament and other *ex-officio* members of the Council from appointment of chairman and vice chairman of the Council and further reduce the term of office of chairman and vice chairman from five years to one year which is renewable once
- the appointment of a Chief Executive Officer by a minister
- the approval of the determination of salaries of Council members by a minister
- the reduction of expenditure on the administration of councils through the merging of Town Councils with their respective District Councils (Local Government Amendment Bill 2010).

In addition to the amendment of the bill, parliament also amended section 147 of the constitution to empower the President to decide dates for local government elections. The law initially required the polls to be held in the third week of May in the year following the presidential and parliamentary elections. The policy encompasses a deliberate effort to
ensure citizen participation in the governing process (Local Government Amendment bill 2010).

The notion of decentralisation as a form governance has also been implemented in some African countries like Ghana, Uganda, Zambia, Kenya, Zimbabwe, Botswana, Lesotho, and Tanzania amongst others. However, the success of the decentralised system of governance is varied from country to country due to several factors. Hussein (2003:273) observes that in most Anglophone countries in Africa, local government structures are among other things facing implementation problems such as lack of local autonomy, high dependence on central government policy, shortage of financial resources and poor administrative capacity. In countries like Ghana, Uganda, Zambia and Kenya, decentralisation has been neither a major process of good governance and development nor has it facilitated local participation, accountability and transparency due to centralist tendencies and interference on issues of local institutions by central government officials among other factors. At the same time, in countries like Zimbabwe, Botswana, Lesotho and Tanzania, decentralisation faces challenges due to the inability of local structures to effectively engage in local activities and the tendency to rely on the centre (Hussein 2003:273).

The implementation of decentralisation initiatives in some parts of Africa, have not necessarily promoted the much paraded democratic governance nor have they led to viable participatory approaches to development. This is due to several factors as Kiggudu (2000:102) indicates that the success of decentralisation initiatives depends upon a number of internal and external factors including age, size, nature of tasks, technology, internal management and administrative capacity as well as socio-political and economic factors. The general observation is that decentralisation, where it has been adopted in Africa, has not fully provided the magnetic appeal it was paraded with; that is, solving all governance
issues in the countries. In Malawi, for example, decentralisation is intended to promote participatory planning at sub-district level and representative democracy at the district level through the election of councillors to the District Council. The theory on which this was based is that democratic decentralisation leads to improved service delivery. Pillar four of the government’s Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) is defined as good governance; and democratic decentralisation was seen as a way of achieving this goal (Malawi, Local Development Evaluation Report 2008:13). However, there have been some factors at both the national and local levels that have impeded the smooth implementation of the system, hence the need for a proper analysis on the phenomenon.

1.2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

As discussed earlier, the one party system of government stifled participation and representation. This notion was reversed by the new multiparty system of government by, among other things, adopting a decentralised system of governance where district councils are mandated to ensure local participation and grassroots involvement in governance and development. In terms of conceptual framework, the local government decentralisation policy (1998) outlines a good and supportive system of local participation and representation. However, the realities in local council operations reveal some implementation problems. While the structures of decentralisation are in place and despite the local councils performing its activities in a consultative manner, the involvement of local communities in governance and development at council level still remains a major problem. The local government election that was scheduled for 2005 (to replace old ward councillors) have still not been held as at the time of the study; creating an operational gap as elected local councils are an indispensable condition for democratic decentralisation and an essential institution for good local governance.
1.2. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY
The objectives of the study can be categorized as general and specific as outlined below:

1.2.1. GENERAL OBJECTIVE

The general objective of the study is to analyse local participation in the framework of decentralisation as it is implemented in Lilongwe District Council.

1.2.2. SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES
The key objectives of the study are to:

- assess stakeholders’ general perceptions in relation to decentralisation, local participation and good governance in the local council;

- explore local citizen perceptions of the role as well as the activities of governance and development in relation to participation and representation;

- Provide possible mechanisms to resolve the problems and challenges posed.

1.3. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY
The study is important because, apart from contributing to the academic area of decentralisation and local participation, it also focuses on an in-depth assessment of the issues and factors undermining successful local participation in the local council. The study is thus vital in trying to pinpoint areas and issues that the local authority and local communities need to work upon in order to meet the objectives of the Decentralisation Policy which includes enhancement of local participation in local governance and development. Currently, major studies on decentralisation in Malawi have mainly focussed on the impact of decentralisation on devolved sectors like education decentralisation (Kufaine 2008), local governance (Hussein 2003), party politics (Kayuni 2005), as well as water access and management in local councils (Ferguson and Mulwafu 2004).
In terms of decentralisation in Lilongwe, a study by Nsewa (2005) focussed on a holistic assessment of decentralisation in the local council and concluded that apart from major problems faced within the process, it would be wrong to consider decentralisation as a total failure (Nsewa 2005:110). Apart from these observations, not much has been done to exclusively focus on local participation and representation in the Lilongwe District Council. As already indicated, this study helps to fill the information gap in the decentralisation and participation literature available. As will be discussed below, there is a general observation that although decentralisation does not intrinsically foster democracy, participation and empowerment at the local level; however, where complementary policies and favourable national and local conditions are in place, decentralisation can indeed contribute to the promotion of democracy, participation and empowerment at the local level (Kuliposa 2004:778; Taal 1993:45).

1.4. CHAPTER OUTLINE
The chapter outline of the study is as indicated below:

- **Chapter one – Introduction and General Orientation**

  Chapter one provides a general background and the evolution of decentralisation in Malawi as it has been implemented by the various systems of governments. The chapter also contextualises the focus of the study by addressing the problem statement, objectives and significance of the study.

- **Chapter two – Literature Review**

  This chapter provides the conceptual and theoretical dimensions within which decentralisation, participation and representation are discussed. The chapter investigates the various parameters of decentralisation and participation and relates it to the objectives of the study.
• Chapter three – Research Design and Methodology

This chapter discusses and justifies the research approach and methodology used in the collection of the research data. The chapter also discusses the sample size used, method of data analysis and the instruments used in data collection.

• Chapter four - Presentation and Analysis of the Findings

This chapter discusses the research findings on the assessment of local participation in the decentralisation framework as implemented in Lilongwe District Council. It is in this chapter that the study presents findings from individual interviews and focus group discussions. The findings are aggregated and discussed.

• Chapter five – Conclusions and Recommendations

This chapter recapitulates the findings and several emerging themes from the enquiry. It draws conclusions and recommendations that address problematic issues of local participation in the area under study.

1.4. CONCLUSION
This chapter has detailed the focus of the study. It finds that decentralisation in Malawi is indeed intended to promote participatory planning at sub district level and representative democracy at the district level through the election of councillors at the district council, as it was envisaged that democratic decentralisation would help the country achieve good governance which is one of the key pillars of the Malawi Growth and Development Strategy (MGDS 2006:64). The strategy mentions decentralisation as an important means of improving social service delivery at the local level. However, the chapter has unearthed some implementation problems that have crippled the process of effective local
participation which poses some challenges, hence the need for undertaking the study.
CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. INTRODUCTION
This chapter establishes the general direction and focus of the study in addition to providing a review of the available relevant literature on decentralisation, local participation and representation. Drawing on various studies, the chapter puts together concepts that are crucial to this study such as decentralisation, local participation, representation, local governance and how they are interrelated. The chapter also presents the conceptual and theoretical dimensions of its focus. The chapter also explores the importance of local participation and representation in local governance. Finally, the chapter summarises the effects of good local governance resulting from local participation and representation.

2.2. CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF DECENTRALISATION AND PARTICIPATION

2.2.1. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK
Governments the world over are decentralizing with the intention of empowering local authorities. A survey of literature on decentralisation suggests that the concept has been approached by a variety of intellectual traditions (Wallis 1991:12). Cohen and Peterson (1997:65) observe that disciplinary differences and even language differences have led to a variation in the application of the concept. The word “decentralisation” is more of a semantic umbrella beneath which are gathered many different concepts than it is a precise analytical term (Faguet 1997:45). Decentralisation entails the sharing of central government powers with other institutions, especially those geographically separated or responsible for specific functions, or those given jurisdiction over physical locations (Makumbe 1998:87). Maywood (1983:18) defines decentralisation as the sharing of parts of governmental power by a
central ruling group with other groups, each having authority within a specific area of the state. Fundamental to the process of decentralisation in this context are power, authority and responsibility, which start from the centre and are then diffused to the periphery. However, Rondinelli and Nellis (1989:5) who depart from the spatial aspect of decentralisation as observed above by Mahwood, and in a more developmental sense, define decentralisation as the transfer of responsibilities for planning, management as well as the raising and allocation of resources from the central government and its agencies to field units of the central government, semi-autonomous public authorities, regional authorities or non-governmental, private or voluntary organizations. However, Crook (1998:2) cautions that ‘decentralisation schemes cannot be treated as technically neutral devices which can be ‘implemented’ without constraints, as if they were no existing social context’. There are several social, economic and political factors that affect decentralisation in practice. Therefore, in summation and compounding all the definitions discussed above, in its traditional form, what emerges is the distribution of central government’s political, fiscal and administrative power, authority and responsibility to geographically dispersed, legally autonomous and semi-autonomous bodies of government. The aim is to improve efficiency and effectiveness in service delivery at central and sub national level (Nsewa 2005:23). However, the definitions of decentralisation discussed thus far, elude the necessary component of democracy because the existence of the concept precedes the emergence of democracy as an essential component of the discourse in international development (Blair 1997: 12). At this time, there were no real strides made towards enhancing local participation. Therefore, with an ingredient of democracy, the concept assumes a new meaning of democratic decentralisation which is synonymous with democratic local governance (Work 2002:5).
In its new form, the concept is therefore defined as “a system in which meaningful authority is devolved to local bodies that are accountable and accessible to their citizens who in turn enjoy full human and legal rights in exercising political liberty” (Blair 1997:12). As indicated by Nsewa (2005:25), this definition is currently being espoused by the major world bodies such as the United Nations, World Bank and other international organisations. The study will therefore adopt this notion of decentralisation because it befits the type of reforms Malawi has adopted and the one being implemented in the area under study: Lilongwe District Council. There are three broader types of decentralisation: political, administrative and fiscal, whilst there are four major forms: devolution, delegation, deconcentration and divestment (Work 2002:6). Administrative decentralisation encompasses the transfer of decision making authority, resources and responsibilities, for specific public services from the central government to other levels of government (Stanley 2003:6). Administrative arguments of decentralisation focus on the effects of granting autonomy from central control to local jurisdictions. This autonomy is constituted by general policy-making authority, and personnel control, as well as control over public finances (Rondinelli 1984:23). The amount of administrative decentralisation has a range within a continuum across systems; from those characterized by a low degree of autonomy, to those with a higher degree of autonomy. Some literature has categorized administrative decentralisation by generally using the three terms most commonly labelled as ‘deconcentration’, ‘delegation’ and devolution’ (Rondinelli, 1990:26).

The current approach to decentralisation views these categories as nothing more than points along a continuum of administrative autonomy. Deconcentration is understood as a central government that disperses responsibility for a policy to its field offices. This transfer changes the spatial and geographical distribution of authority, but does not significantly change the autonomy of the entity that receives the authority (Schneider, 1996:88). Under
deconcentration arrangements, the central government retains authority over the field office, and exercises that authority through the hierarchical channels of the central government bureaucracy. Deconcentration allows only moderately more autonomy than centralized systems. On the other hand, delegation transfers policy responsibility to local governments or semi-autonomous organizations that are not controlled by the central government but remain accountable to it (Rondinelli 1990:28). The main difference between deconcentration and delegation is that with delegation the central government exercises its control through a contractual relation that enforces the accountability of local government. This represents a slightly higher level of administrative autonomy of local entities than under deconcentration. Under devolution, the central government allows quasi-autonomous local units of government to exercise power and control over transferred policy. The local unit is only accountable to the central government in so far as the control of government can impose its will by threatening to withhold resources or responsibility from the local unit (Rondinelli 1990:29). The difference between these categories of administrative decentralisation is the relationship between central government and the entity that receives power and resources. Deconcentration involves a bureaucratic hierarchical relationship; delegation involves a contractual relationship; and devolution involves an arm’s length relationship (Schneider 1996:46).

In political decentralisation, political power and authority are transferred to sub national levels of government (Stanley 2003:6). Decentralized political systems are those in which political actors and issues are significant at the local level and are, at least partially, independent from those at the national level (Smith, 1985 56). In summary, Hope (2000 :525) looks at these functions in terms of representation, which refers to the way in which political institutions map the multiplicity of citizen interests onto policy decisions. In order to have an impact on policy, society must be mobilized, organized and articulated through
institutions that carry interests to the state (Berger, 1983:77). Some systems of representation operate through civil society institutions, such as NGOs, social movements, or interest organizations. Other systems of representation such as political parties, aim to bring interests directly into the official political apparatus through elections. Finally, some systems of representation bring interests into direct negotiation with the state bureaucracy as corporatist bargaining (Schneider 1996:89). Under politically decentralized systems, citizens define interests and form identities on the basis of local concerns; organizations such as parties and social movements operate locally and compete over local issues in local elections. Elections are thus held to be the most obvious indicator of representation occurring at different levels (Schneider 2003:96). During the electoral process: the electorate votes, the votes are aggregated, and politicians take power. Local elections indicate that some portion of representative activity is undertaken at the local level, forcing parties to organize for local contests. When competing, candidates make appeals to citizens in local jurisdictions. Citizens may also organize and participate through non-electoral channels, but these are harder to characterize, and probably do not have as direct an impact on representation (Schneider 2003:96). The importance of local elections in the larger national picture can vary but local elections at least increase the likelihood that some political functions will be decentralized. The existence of elections at a local, district and national level is hypothesized as an indicator of political representation. Although there are other political functions, electoral components are the most valid indicators of political decentralisation as they fall into fundamental aspects of political authority. Elections address the issues of representation, which is the primary way in which people gain access to the legislature and executive decentralisation (Schneider 2003:97).
Fiscal decentralisation, on the other hand, is regarded as the most comprehensive form of decentralisation because it is directly linked to budgetary issues. Central to any system of public finance is budgeting, as it comprises the total amount of money that governments put into or take out of an economy, as well as where governments deposit the money and where they take it from. The best indicator for the level of fiscal decentralisation is the share of sub-national expenditure and revenues (Ribort 2002:41). Divestment takes place when planning and administrative responsibility or other public functions are transferred from government to voluntary, private or other non-governmental institutions with clear benefits to, and involvement of, the public (Work 2002:7).

While decentralisation is a generic concept for various forms of structural arrangements in governments and organisations; local participation is multidisciplinary and falls into four major areas of democratic theory, namely political behaviour, community development, citizen action and government initiated citizen action (Hussein 2004:109). Local participation is the active involvement of people at the grassroots level in the choice, execution and evaluation of programmes designed to improve their livelihoods (Roberts, 2004:340). It is thus regarded as a cornerstone in achieving the needed development. Ribort (2002:17) indicates that local participation enables the community to address its needs through self-help projects and to realise grassroots democracy: to ensure fair and equitable distribution of and access to resources; and to obtain maximum utility of local resources for effective community development. Internationally, governments give pre-eminence to participation because ‘it is believed and to help legitimize the planning process and the state as a whole’ (Ribort 2002:12).

The failure of top-down development methods to eradicate poverty and improve the living conditions of people in third world countries has led to keener interest in participatory initiatives to strengthen the power and welfare of deprived groups. Such initiatives rely on
the sharing of power and scarce resources, efforts by social groups to control their own destinies and the opening up of opportunities from below (Ribort 2002: 13). This approach has bolstered community involvement in the design, execution and management of development projects and resource mobilization. As observed by Roberts (2004:340), approaches encouraging genuine local participation continue to have positive impacts on empowerment and poverty alleviation. Local participation can only be effective if it is direct and allows communities ultimate control in deciding their own affairs. Scope must be allowed for the production of new knowledge, the mapping out of new directions and the design of new organizational methods; all of which serve to engender an upward progression from the bottom to the management level (Midgley 1986:8).

2.2.2. THE NEW WAVE OF DECENTRALISATION
The arguments for decentralisation revolve around a wider critique of central state planning which stipulates that large and highly centralised bureaucracies prove to be an incompetent and potentially unhelpful means for amassing wealth and for resource allocation in society (Olowu 1995:88; Nsewa 2005:21). Scholars have put forward several arguments on reasons for the adoption of decentralisation by various countries. Since the turn of the 1960’s, the magnetic appeal of democratic decentralisation as a vehicle for good governance, development and poverty reduction extended its reach to virtually all developing countries with a vision that decentralisation of political responsibilities to local governments would enhance the prospects of sustainable good governance, development and poverty reduction (Chinsinga 2002: 18). This is mainly the case because, it is argued, decentralisation entails at least bringing government closer to the governed in both the spatial and institutional sense (Blair 2000: 23; UNCDF 2002:98). The appeal for decentralisation has been rooted in its potential benefits, among them;
political education, training in political leadership, political stability, political equality, accountability, responsiveness, improved decision making and inter-organisational coordination, as well as the promotion of competition (Kuliposa 2004:768).

Several reasons have been cited by different scholars for the renewed quest for democratic decentralisation. Theorist Olowu (1995:89) cites the failure of centralised models of governance as one of the reasons for adopting decentralisation. Such scholars maintain that centralised systems of governments could not effectively match the complexity of managing the development process; as such, it necessitated the adoption of a system that could easily fit into the development agenda. The other factor alludes to the collapse of state sponsored services, which resulted in donor pressures and conditional ties associated with policies of Structural Adjustments Programmes and other programmes imposed from the outside (World Bank 2000; Buthelezi 2004; Mutidzwa-Mangiza; 2000:24). In most African countries, the adoption of decentralisation has been practised due to a number of reasons. For example, De Muro (1998:67-70) provides some of the reasons for the current wave of decentralisation in Sub-Saharan Africa like political reasons and the need for the maintenance of law and order in countries like Uganda and Burkina Faso; in addition to internal demands for the devolution of power in South Africa. In Malawi, the adoption of decentralisation was, amongst other factors, a result of recommendations from supranational funding organisations; in particular, the United Nations Development Programme (Nsewa 2005:28).

2.2.3. ARGUMENTS FOR DECENTRALISATION AND PARTICIPATION
Decentralisation has been applauded for its potential to facilitate democracy, efficiency and development. In some countries where decentralisation has been successfully implemented, there has been progress in the area of governance. Rondinelli (1983:87)
observes that decentralisation in some countries has increased the access of people in previously neglected rural regions and local communities to central government resources and that it has improved participation and enlarged the capacity of the local administration to put pressure on central government agencies, thus making available to them large quantities of national resources for local development. Decentralisation has caused national development strategies to increasingly take account of planning at the regional level. Apart from governance, decentralisation reforms have also been closely associated with democratisation. This is encapsulated in the idea that decentralisation ‘brings governance closer to the people’. There are a number of connected strands within this line of argument. Firstly, it is argued that local government is more likely to be accountable to its constituency. It is assumed that information flows are better within a geographically more confined area, where people are able to see much quicker whether local authority is attending to the needs of its constituents (Wittenberg 2003:6). Additional levels of government also provide a better opportunity for people to become directly involved in government decision making, through the election of ward councillors at the local level. These additional positions may be a worthwhile training ground for national leadership (Smith 1985:22). The proliferation of such elected structures may induce a culture of political debate and civic mindedness among the communities, which may lead to a more aware and active citizenry which is more capable of enforcing its interests. The hope of decentralisation to locally elected governments is that by narrowing the jurisdiction served by a government, and the scope of public activities for which it is responsible, citizens will find it easier to hold government accountable. Roughly speaking, decentralisation improves outcomes to the extent that physical proximity increases voter information, participation, and monitoring of performance, in addition to narrowing the scope of responsibilities of each tier of government decision makers to the extent that it reduces their ability to shirk on
some responsibilities by performing better on others (Wittenberg 2003:7). Decentralisation to locally elected governments will improve political incentives and service delivery outcomes if voters are better informed and likely to use information about local public goods in their voting decisions for electing local governments, if there is greater social homogeneity and coordination of preferences for local public goods, and if political promises are more credible at local levels (World Bank 2005:13).

The second major theme invoked in arguments around decentralisation is the issue of the efficiency with which services are provided. It is believed that decentralisation reduces transaction costs involved in the provision of services locally. These transaction costs include the delays incurred in negotiating command chains which extend to the national head office. These include lower monitoring costs, if the principals (elected officials) are based in the area, and improved use of local knowledge. Decentralisation brings a closer fit between the preferences of local populations and services rendered, if the decisions are made locally. This avoids the scenario where central governments provide ‘white elephant’ projects to local areas leading to the wastage of scarce resources. Local governments may be more effective at raising revenue, since sub national governments have better information about the tax base. This can be more effectively captured by such structures (Wittenberg 2003:8).

The other major argument for decentralisation has been its potential to foster local development. It has been observed that decentralisation has the potential to empower the poor through good local governance. According to Bonfiglioli (2003:8), empowering the poor entails the elimination of all institutional barriers that inhibit their options and hinder them from taking action to improve their welfare. In addition, empowering the poor also means strengthening the basic principles of good governance by enhancing popular participation, improving efficiency in pro-poor development and promoting democratic
accountability and transparency; decentralisation presents a requisite environment for such developments (Bonfiglioli 2003:8). Moreover, because poverty is linked to powerlessness, injustice and exclusion, empowering people also implies promoting human rights, increasing the breadth of civil society interaction and freedom of association, strengthening the rule of law and unprejudiced administration of justice whilst bestowing more voice and control to the poor over the type, quality, and delivery of services they receive (Wittenberg, 2003:9). Viewed in this way, decentralisation through good local governance is a means to enhance local economic development, local delivery of infrastructure and social services, and local control, access to and use of productive renewable natural resources. Furthermore, decentralisation creates an essential milieu in which true participatory development can emerge. All the ideals embraced in good local governance are those espoused in people-centred (participatory) development (Nsewa 2005:22).

2.2.4. DECENTRALISATION, PARTICIPATION AND DEMOCRACY
There is an assumed link that decentralisation has the potential to foster democracy, participation and empowerment at the local level. Olowu (1997: 108) observed that local governments make relevant contributions to economic development by helping to mobilise resources needed to provide and maintain basic services required by the local community, and that they contribute to efficiency by reflecting the preferences of the local community and facilitate information exchange, services, and innovation. For Smith (1995:188), the relationship between decentralisation and democracy, participation, and empowerment operates along similar lines:

Participation in such institutions is supposed to enhance civic consciousness and political maturity. People learn more quickly when they have to take responsibility for the decisions of local officials...Through experience in local government people learn to choose between priorities and leaders. They gain experience in holding those in office accountable...Such an education should
ultimately enrich government at the centre as better trained politicians emerge from that grassroots. (Smith 1995:188)

By participating in various development committees, citizens provide the necessary input, in the form of labour resources, information, feedback and advice required in the development process (Hussein 2003:110). Participation also generates positive effects on local citizens, by making them politically more conscious of their collective concerns, strengths, vision, and the need to bring about positive change which, in short, constitutes the empowerment process. As earlier argued by Smith (1995:188), participation produces leadership in that the experiences, skills, knowledge and learning gained in local government institutions improve people’s performance in decision making and management. It can therefore be said that participation, enables people to take responsibility, organise self-help initiatives, and negotiate with local governments and other agencies, thereby building and broadening a community’s democratic ethos. Such participation can take four main forms: information sharing, consultation, decision making and initiating action (De Muro, 1998:87). As earlier observed, decentralisation theories demonstrate that it brings government closer to the people, hence allowing them to effectively participate in local governance issues. It is also through the same system of governance that local representation is enhanced through the peoples’ choice of political representatives at the ward level, who then bring the communities’ views and needs to the local councils for attention.

The idea of citizen participation arises from the classical theory of democracy, yet the structure of modern governments is not that of a pure democracy, but that of a republic. Citizens’ interests are to be cared for indirectly by the actions of elected representatives, and the policies they determine are to be implemented by bureaucrats acting in an organizational structure that are the antithesis of democracy (Brynard 1996:34). The role of the state in promoting or delaying local participation has generated different views. Some
argue that state involvement in promoting local participation is desirable, but that mechanisms must be created to protect and support local groups (Midgley et al 1986). According to the theory of analytical Marxism, the state’s attempt to transfer the burden of social service provision to the communities is aimed at raising the state’s functional viability, funding and power. The state demonstrates its meagre interest in poverty alleviation by placing inadequate emphasis on social development (Taal 1993:7). Where there is effective participation, resources and decisions making power are transferred to local officials and elected individuals in villages, communities and countries. In order to avoid elite capture, participation must be linked to increased local accountability and capacity building as this could help maximize the benefits for the poor, improve the efficiency and effectiveness of social service delivery and reduce the costs to the central government (Taal, 1993:9).

Participation can broadly be divided into two main categories; namely, the mere receiving of information by citizens from authorities about proposed actions; and the sharing of power with citizens to shape the final decisions. Participation therefore appears to be an even broader concept than decision making. It starts well before the decisions in question are made and extends well beyond it. Effective local participation is determined to exist when a decision making effort at planning, funding, advocacy or delivery of services directly involves those whom the decisions affect, so the results reflect their concerns (Persons, 1990:119). The rationale of direct local participation usually advocates the public share in making development plans at the formative stage, rather than after officials have become committed to particular choices (Brynard 1996:40). Citizen participation strikes directly at the core of the structuring of the relationship between citizens and their governments. However, Clapper (1996:69-78) cautions that a major problem with citizen participation is the fact that often the goals the participants hope to achieve are not clearly defined. As
such the way in which the results of citizen participation are experienced will be determined by the attitude of the citizens and the particular governmental institution affected.

2.2.5. PROBLEMS OF DECENTRALIZATION AND PARTICIPATION
Just as there are several positive aspects of decentralisation, there are also negative ones which may threaten the attainment of the anticipated benefits if it is not properly implemented. According to Smith (1985:67), decentralisation is inherently divisive and sectionalist in character and in its consequences. It therefore threatens national unity and integration. Further, it is branded as anti-egalitarian because of its design which provides goods and services at a local rather than national level (Nsewa 2005:45). At the local level, decentralisation is criticised as being oligarchic in that it may benefit only a few at the expense of the general population (Makumbe, 1998; World Bank, 2000; Blair 1997; Manor, 1999). Consequently, autocratic governments are therefore, “likely to ensure that decentralised bodies are limited in their autonomy or that they have limited local resources to allocate” or that appointed, rather than elected, officials make final decisions. Viewed as such, it becomes a sheer expansion of the national elite's resource and power base, but of questionable efficacy to the people, thus decentralisation can also become a potent instrument for the central government's control of the public at local level (Makumbe, 1998:11). Decentralisation can also lower the quality of public services. Due to the shortage of appropriately qualified personnel, it may result in the provision of lower quality goods and services at local level than may be obtained at the central level where skilled personnel are more readily available (Makumbe, 1998; World Bank, 2000; Nsewa 2005 :45)). Decentralisation and privatisation of state activities has a tendency to create greater inequalities among communities and regions with different levels of organizational capacity. This opens the door for local elites to play a disproportionate role in the planning and
management of projects. The absence of, or weakness in, supporting institutions (public or private) needed to complement the managerial capacity of local governments, as well as weaknesses in the linkages and interaction between local and central administrations have led to disappointing results from decentralisation in Africa and Asia. Programs are usually justified on grounds of efficiency and administrative effectiveness, but then judged on their political results. Where political aims are important, considerable deviation from best practice is tolerated. Not surprisingly, decentralisation seldom lives up to expectations (Faguet 1997:6).

In the same sense as decentralisation, some analysts have faulted local participation based on several factors. Some have argued that participatory approaches generate poor standards and practice and lead to the abuse or exploitation of the people involved. Clever (2001:36) noted that despite claims that participatory approaches to development improve efficiency and effectiveness, and promote the process of democratisation and empowerment, there is little evidence regarding the effectiveness of participation in ensuring sustainable development and material improvement among poor and marginalized people. This school of thought is shared by Brynard (1996:39) who argues that “oftentimes when a government institution sponsors citizen participation activities, it does so in an effort to achieve its own ends. “ Government will favour citizen participation activities that do not disturb, but rather support government goals. Any participation that threatens to thwart government ideals and transfer authority to citizens is actively discouraged. As such, most citizen participation activities do not necessarily lead to greater participation. Low levels of citizen participation are a reality and, unless people have the necessary motivation and resources to use them, participation will remain low (Reidel 2002:215).
On the part of public officials, local participation may serve as a nuisance factor as it may present a challenge to their expertise. Local participation may come into direct collision with established and inflexible institutional arrangements and work procedures designed for efficiency rather than responsiveness to public preferences (Wamsley 1980:25). A particular drawback to local participation activities is the time and costs that can be accrue. The benefits of any local participation activity may often only be realized in the long term, while the associated cost (such as meeting attendance and personal contacts, in comparison with the forfeiting of personal pleasure and profits) must be sustained immediately. This may lead the citizen to reject local participation, not on the basis of its failure to achieve the desired goals, but because the costs incurred in the achievement of the desired goal may be considered too expensive on the basis of the cost-benefit dilemma (Clapper 1996:68).

2.3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK
The second part of the chapter discusses three theories that are relevant to the understanding of the study. Theory is necessary to research as it helps to reinforce the study and delineate a point of departure. This study uses three theories to explain the dynamics in political and administrative reforms to which decentralisation and participation belong. These are theories of public/rational choice, Arnstein’s ladder of participation and theories of representation.

2.3.1. THE THEORY OF PUBLIC/RATIONAL CHOICE
The theory of public or rational choice is fundamentally an economic theory which is also applied in politics to analyse government behaviour. Hitherto, government was perceived ‘as exogenous to the economy, a benign corrector of market economy when it faltered,’ but after public choice, the position of government in the economy became something to be
explained, not assumed (Tollison 1985:906). Public choice represents the use of standard economic tools (demand and supply) to explain behaviour in non–market environments, such as government. Public choice theory professes to explain and predict the behaviour of political agents (politicians, bureaucrats, voters, and rent seekers) on the supposition that they are instrumentally rational.

The theory assumes that individuals or entities have clear preferences and are capable of choosing them and that they act in their self-interest rather than in the interests of others. Individuals or entities have information about how to maximize their preferences, they are able to analyse the options and choose the course that maximizes their welfare, and they are able to change action when costs and benefits change. According to this assumption, ordinary individuals who have the same self interest and motivations in the political sphere as in the economic sphere are the ones who man the state. The existence of the state thus creates a political market; that is, a market of political favours. The state will redistribute in favour of the interest groups whose support the rulers need the most to remain in power and increase their benefits. Again, public choice assumes that bureaucrats who are the executing agents of political decisions are ordinary individuals who, like everybody else, seek to minimize their utility. Another way that bureaucrats exert power is by being an ‘agenda setter’. These bureaucrats can often lead the system toward the results they prefer by deciding which alternatives and in what sequence business is going to be undertaken.

Therefore, when public choice theory is applied to bureaucracy, it reveals other reasons for being sceptical that the state can efficiently reconcile individuals’ preferences and aggregate their demands for public policies. The theory also assumes that decisions about the supply of public services are not necessarily in the interest of society. The bureaucrats
may subvert those decisions or, at worst, implement them inefficiently and lower the overall standards of living (Nsewa 2005:48). Walsh (1995:16) notes that “the simplest accusation against the public sector is that it is wasteful in the way that it uses resources because politicians and public officials have no incentives to control costs.” In summation, it is the behaviour of public sector bureaucrats which is at the heart of public choice theory. While they are supposed to work in the public interest, putting into practice the policies of government as efficiently and effectively as possible, public choice theorists see bureaucrats as self-interested utility-maximizers, motivated by factors such as: remuneration, prerequisites of the office, public reputation, influence, patronage and the ease of managing the bureau (Niskanen, 1973:67).

Central to all public choice theories is the notion that an official at any level, be it in the public or private sector, operates at least partly in his own self-interest, and some officials are motivated exclusively by their own self-interest. This theory relates to decentralisation reforms that by virtue of their nature tend to shift power, resources and responsibilities from the centre to the periphery. Obviously, there are winners and losers. Competition for survival, power and control of resources ensues between the bureaucrats at the centre and the local elites; and again between the local elites and the local people. The behaviour of politicians and bureaucrats will determine the outcome and success of decentralisation reforms and indeed their efficacy in other expected outcomes such as participation and poverty reduction, which are some of the underlying factors for its adoption. Therefore, it becomes clear in inference to the theory that the fate of the local people in decentralisation reforms is determined and rests on the behaviour of their representatives and how egalitarian the bureaucrats are in delivering social services.
2.3.2. **ARNSTEIN’S LADDER OF PARTICIPATION (1969)**

Participation, by definition, needs to involve more empowerment as represented by the much used and adapted Arnstein’s ladder of participation (1969). The model (Petts 1999:45) shows participation moving more power towards the citizens’ control of the decisions made. The further up the ladder, the more power and control the citizen has. Arnstein described the lack of meaningful participation in policy making in poor urban communities and identified ‘citizen control’ as the proper definition of citizen participation in the planning process. This approach discarded any effort where citizens were not given full authority. Arnstein observed no model city which meets the criteria of citizen control since the final power of approval and accountability rest with the city council. The ladder of participation is a powerful critique of the participation process that gives citizens absolute power. The ladder further embraces the research’s notion that citizen control should be the ultimate goal of local participation. However, the model radically eliminates the important role of officials/planners and assumes that citizen power will result in good planning decisions. District Council officials and other technical sector planners at a district council may bristle any strategy that completely removes them or elected officials from the decision making process.

The tension between the technical planning officials and democratic aspirations is a matter that has to be well managed if effective local participation is to be achieved. Backed by some research carried out by Poortinga and Pidgeon (2003:90), there is a tendency for a greater level of participation to lead to a greater level of trust. Trust, like communication between stakeholders, is a two way process. There can be much distrust of government and statutory agencies and planners. The way the discourse is carried out between the planner and stakeholder public can significantly affect the success of the participation exercise. Communication must be felt to be without coercion (Habermas 1987:78). The
participator may feel that there is little point in taking part if the knowledge and information given by them is not used and valued (Brynard 1996:45). Participators often have useful knowledge and must not be perceived as making irrational decisions. Addressing these problems will help the participator to have more confidence and, as a result, trust in the process. Officials and politicians may not trust the public to come to an acceptable decision. However, they will need local participation to legitimize their decisions, so they will need to engage the citizens. Democracy demands that institutions are responsive to the social and psychological characteristics of its citizens (Clapper 1996:96).

2.3.3. THE NOTION OF REPRESENTATION
Heywood (2002:224) argues that ‘as a political principle, representation is a relationship through which an individual or group stands for, or acts on behalf of a larger people’. Although some problems of representation have been solved in modern democracies through the principle of universal suffrage, Heywood (2002:224) points out that ‘this approach to representation is simplistic’. He goes on to express that by equating representation with elections and voting, ‘ignores more difficult questions about how one person can be said to represent another and what it is that he or she represents’ (Kayuni 2005:20).

Goodwin (1987:198-200) outlines three notions (theories) of representation. The first notion is that ‘a representative can be viewed as a delegate. Who reiterates the views of constituents and expresses no independent opinion.’ The second notion is derived from ‘microcosmic’ theory and ‘each representative is taken to be typical of a class of persons, whose interests he/she automatically promotes’. For example, if the representative is a farmer, he or she will represent issues promoting his/her profession. This theory essentially calls for a wide and diverse cluster of individuals in decision making bodies in order to reflect the views of the wider community. The third theory is that ‘representatives should be
accountable, but independent, acting on behalf of their electors but exercising their judgement'. According to this theory, electors entrust the representative to use his/her superior judgement in order to promote the interests of the 'common good'. However, it is only through 'maximum accountability of the representative to the electorate' that can help 'avoid such representation leading to 'a government divorced from the people'. Heywood (2002:65) describes the notions described above as delegation, resemblance and trusteeship model of representation.

The question of which type of representation should be adopted at the local level is difficult to answer, taking into consideration that decentralisation is intended 'to enhance the opportunities for participation by placing more power and resources at a closer, more familiar and more easily influenced level of government (Kayuni 2005:22). As such, the notion or model that maximizes the idea of representation should be adopted. On the whole, the notion (or combination of notions) that adequately reflects the views, aspirations and desires of the people ideally promotes the values ascribed to local governance. In practice, the idea of representation is debatable and ambiguous because it is fraught with conceptual and empirical inconsistencies. Despite the shortcomings of the cited models they are, in practice, perceived as more relevant and appropriate. However, for effective participation to take place, some more models and structures have to be put in place which gives the people the actual feeling of being part of governance at the local level.

2.4. CONCLUSION
This chapter has established the general direction of the study through a review of the relevant literature. Specifically, the chapter has provided a detailed explanation of concepts that are central to this study such as decentralisation, local participation, representation as
well as local governance and democracy. The review of the literature used in this study has established a clear link between democratic decentralisation and an increase in local participation. It has come forth, from the literature review, that the term democratic decentralisation emphasises the linkages between the state and the people, and consequently those between decentralisation and participation. It refers to the transfer of power and resources to authorities’ representatives, and downwardly accountable to local people. It can be considered an institutional form of participatory development. Decentralisation and participation therefore have a symbiotic relationship.
CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1. INTRODUCTION
Data was collected from the Lilongwe District Council in Malawi. It involved conducting interviews with officials and local communities who are the key stakeholders in the decentralisation framework. The study relies heavily on a qualitative approach and utilizes primary data. The study also used secondary data from previous research reports, government publications, and other periodicals where necessary. A point worth noting is that the study has used village development committees (VDCs) for focus group discussions. These structures, although selected from only two traditional authorities in the district have similar operational mechanisms, compositions and structures in the whole district hence the choice was made randomly using VDCs that are deemed active by the council.

3.2. RESEARCH APPROACH
The study was conducted in the interpretive paradigm, based on the understanding that the interpretive paradigm involves a qualitative approach. The study adopts a qualitative research approach with a purpose to understand the social phenomena from the respondents' and participants' perspective (Macmillan and Schumacher, 2006: 26). The qualitative research method is known for its flexibility in nature. In qualitative research, the researcher becomes the research instrument, meaning that he/she is immersed in the research project (McMillan and Schumacher 2006:26). Based on the arguments above, it is clear that the qualitative approach befits this study because local participation is a phenomenon involving a group of people interacting in their practical social context. The
study has managed to examine the situation, dynamics and effects of such a process as perceived by various stakeholders in the Lilongwe local council.

3.3 CASE STUDY
As mentioned earlier, data was collected from the Lilongwe District Council. A case study was relevant in this research because it is designed to elicit details from the viewpoint of participants by using multiple sources of data (MacMillan and Schumacher, 2006: 316). Yin (1994:3) indicates that case studies are detailed investigations of individuals, groups, institutions or other social units. The researcher conducting a case study attempts to analyse the variables relevant to the subject under investigation. The Lilongwe District Council was thus chosen as a case in point. The choice of the district was based on three main factors; the first being that the district is also the capital city of the country, hence the availability of data that would assist in the research. The second reason is that, being the capital city, it houses government offices including the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development that provides decentralisation policy direction to the District Councils. The third reason is a logistical issue as the researcher resides in the district and is familiar with the operations of the district.

3.4. SAMPLING
MacMillan and Schumacher (2006: 126) describe a sample as the collective, group of subjects or participants from whom the data is collected. Sampling involves the drawing of the subject from the population for data collection. The study adopted purposive sampling which uses the researcher's judgment as to which groups of people are rich in the information to be tested for the purpose of answering the research question.
The research used a purposive sample of village development committees (VDCs) from the two Traditional Areas under study. The choice of VDCs was based on two main factors, the first being the proof of the VDC being active through the production of minutes which were accessed from the District Council data bank. The second was the proximity of the VDCs to the researcher who had to use personal means to travel to the areas concerned. Hence, the time factor and transport costs had an influence on the choice of sites. Consequently, a total of four VDCs, two from each Traditional Authority, were identified and engaged in the study. However, it should be noted that all VDCs in the District Council have a similar set up and operational mechanisms and composition in structure as such a critical examination of the selected VDCs gives a picture of the structures in the Council.

The following participants were selected to ensure that the study would engage with different clusters with rich information of the decentralisation process:

- At the central level, the Director of policy and the monitoring and evaluation officer in the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development. The objective was to find out how and where public participation is placed in the policy planning levels.
- At district level, the District Commissioner; the Director of Planning and Development, and four members of the District Executive Committee. These are the implementers of decentralisation at the grassroots level, hence the need to find the official stand of participation and their preparedness to involve the public on implementation level.
- At the local level, the study used local structures in the decentralisation set up in the form of focus groups. The study used four focus group discussions from two Traditional Authorities, two from each Traditional Authority. Selection of the VDCs was based on evidence of it being active based on minutes submitted to the Council.
Composition of the focus group discussion was thus based on the official membership of a VDC. The selected focus group discussion members were:

1. One elected member from each village within the VDC.
2. Four women representatives nominated by people within the VDC.
3. An elected extension worker.

All in all, there were four focus group discussions conducted at their usual meeting place (the nearest primary school). The office of the District Commissioner assisted in calling for the VDCs in all the scheduled places at a date in a month when they normally meet. As such, the researcher conducted the discussions soon after their scheduled meetings. This helped significantly as there was complete representation at all the scheduled discussions.

3.5. METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION

Data was collected in three ways. First, through focus group discussions with members of the village development committees. As indicated earlier, a total of four VDCs were used as discussion groups. De Vos (2000:287) observes that in cases where the research purports to explore thoughts and feelings, focus group interviews are ideal because they generate detailed information as participants are motivated to talk on the basis of group dynamics. Second, a semi-structured interview was administered to officials at the central and district levels of government. Semi-structured interviews give choice to respondents as the questions are phrased to allow the respondents to elaborate. These are open ended questions but fairly specific in their focus and intent. They allow free flowing engagement which enables a rich and detailed discussion of key elements. This enables the researcher to access specific information in an atmosphere of free interaction with respondents (Macmillan and Schumacher, 2006:427). A total of six officials at various levels were interviewed. The third method was through document search. Documents are records that
organisations keep as a way of preserving records on important issues and for reference and practical use. As such, documents express the organisation’s official perspective on the topic, issue or process. But the researcher does not extract evidence and does not find it easy to determine authenticity and accuracy to identify the content (MacMillan and Schumacher (2006: 428).

The document search involved perusing documents that have information related to decentralisation in Malawi and the Lilongwe District council. The documents that were used are:

- The Constitution of the Republic of Malawi (1995). The constitution helped to provide the study with the legal framework which gives local councils the authority and powers to perform their duties and promote decentralisation and democratic participation which forms the primary focus of the study.

- The Local Government Act (1998). The act helped place the study in context by specifically singling out the importance of local participation in councils. The Local Government Act (1998) helps to build the main objective of the study which is analysing whether the Lilongwe District Council has lived up to the legal requirement of enhancing local participation in the implementation of decentralisation reforms.

- The National Decentralisation Policy (1998). Information from the policy document was vital to the study, as it strengthened the research question in assessing whether the Lilongwe District Council is fully implementing the phenomenon of participation as stipulated in the decentralisation policy document. The policy further provides guidelines which the study used as a yardstick in assessing participation in the Council.
• The Decentralisation Process in Malawi Report (2001). The report gives a historical background of the decentralisation process in Malawi since the colonial era, through the time of the one party state of government to the current multiparty system of government when the decentralisation policy was adopted in 1998. This information is important to the study as it provided in-depth evolution of the phenomenon under study. The historical background was also important as it helped to understand the roots of some current trends in the implementation of decentralisation and participation.

• The Lilongwe District Development Plan (2006). This document provided information on the planning system of the District Council which was ultimately useful in relating to what is happening in practice as the researcher interviewed officials and members of the focus group discussions.

• Lilongwe Social Economic Profile (2006). This profile document provided information on the social economic status of the District Council. The document was important as it helped in understanding the perception of the people in relation to the social economic status of the district. This became very useful in interpreting some of the emerging issues from the interviews.

• Population and Housing Census Report (2008). This document provided official statistical data for the population of people and households in the district. This information helped in the analysis of issues of planning by the Council.

3.6. DATA ANALYSIS
The data was aggregated according to the work places of respondents and categorized in a way that reflects the sum total of the views expressed on matters related to participation.
McMillan and Schumacher (2006: 417) argue that the data to be analysed has to pass through inductive analysis which involves data coding, data categorizing and interpretation before providing an explanation that makes sense. The data of this research was analyzed using grounded theory. According to Merriam (1998: 77), grounded theory involves grouping data into segments and categories which are compared to derive similarities and differences. The analysis seeks to establish patterns in the data and any relationship development developed from such patterns is built into a theory grounded in the data. Cross-case analysis within and between the focus group discussions was used to explore relationships and patterns that emerged from the discussions. The collected data was analyzed manually in order to ascertain participation in the decentralisation framework.

3.7. VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY
Validity is a judgment of appropriateness of a measure. It is important to have validity in relation to instruments used to collect and analyse data (McMillan and Schumacher 2006: 324). This study has tried to describe and justify all the instruments and methods in use in terms of their appropriateness in ensuring the validity of the data collection and analysis. This was also done by conducting a pilot study to test the interview schedule and improve it. Reliability is a measure of consistency, which is the extent to which the results are similar over different forms of the same instrument or occasion of data collection (McMillan and Schumacher, 2006: 183). The researcher tried to ensure that the respondents felt at ease during the interviews and had time to reflect on the questions to ensure that their answers were genuine. Thus, the study tried to employ different approaches to and methods of data collection so as to maximize the reliability and validity of the findings.
3.8. RESEARCH ETHICS
MacMillan and Schumacher (2006: 16) describe ethics as a consideration of fairness, honesty, openness of intent, disclosure of methods, respect of integrity of the individual, individual privacy and informed willingness on the part of the subject to participate voluntarily in the research activity. Since the issue this study investigates might result in some respondents not giving information for fear of reprisal, the researcher was therefore very objective in the approach to the respondents by assuring them of the nature of the research and that the information needed was purely for academic purposes. The letter of authority from The University of Fort Hare to conduct the study assisted in assuring respondents of the importance of the interviews to the research.

3.9. LIMITATIONS
The limitation of the study is that no generalisation can be made. The fact that the case study was only on one district is a limitation because, if this was a fully-fledged project, a much broader area and sample population would have been included in the investigation. The study may suffer from the weakness that interpretive studies are inclined to exhibit, which is the subjective nature of interpretive case study research. The researcher’s use of triangulation at different stages may hopefully have gone a long way towards validating my findings. Accessibility of interviewees in Malawi was a problem because of the interviewees’ busy schedules. The fear of divulging more information was also a problem because some questions touched on the performance of their units/institutions; however, persistent reminders to the interviewees and the personal rapport of the researcher who at one point worked with the Council helped to build trust and overcome these problems.
3.10. CONCLUSION
The chapter has, amongst other things, shown that the study was conducted in an interpretive paradigm as a way of capturing the rich detail of the researched phenomenon which is participation and decentralisation. The significance of the interpretive orientation and qualitative approach has been pointed out. The study has also supported the use of the case study method in the investigation because it helps in understanding the deeper features of a case in a given context. The chapter has also shown that, apart from document analysis, semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions were conducted to gain an understanding of various stakeholders’ perceptions of participation and decentralisation. Data analysis and discussion was done after a thorough understanding of the content of the interviews. The selected themes from the literature were used to summarize and categorize the data collected and to highlight the important features of participation and decentralisation. Ethical considerations were also discussed to ensure that the study was conducted honestly and that respect for people was of prime importance.
CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

4.1. INTRODUCTION
In this chapter, the data that was gathered from the respondents through interviews was analyzed. The qualitative data analysis method was used; the results and opinions used here are from the Ministry officials, District Council officials and community members of the Village Development Committees used for focus group discussions. The names of the respondents are not mentioned to protect their anonymity, as promised. The chapter thus discusses the perception of local participation in the Council. Local participation in communities, the development of good governance and representation as well as the relation between communities and traditional leaders.

4.2. PERCEPTION OF LOCAL PARTICIPATION IN THE COUNCIL
According to respondents at the Council level, communities in the District Council are involved in activities of the Council which, in their opinions, constitute local participation. The respondents noted that the process formulating Council plans for development activities relies heavily on the involvement of the local people at various levels. The Council officials who were interviewed all agreed that, in order to ensure meaningful participation in the development process, efforts are geared towards empowering the local people in areas of identifying their problems, finding ways and solutions to these problems, implementing solutions, evaluating their progress and impact and ultimately feeding this into the aspect of problem identification.

The respondents explained that the District Development Planning System (DDPS) forms an integral part of the participation process and focuses on a systematic bottom-up
approach to development planning and grassroots community participation not only in self-help projects as providers of labour and other community based resources like sand, water, stones and bricks but also in planning and decision making processes. The respondents observed that the implementation of the system begins with the production of the Social Economic Profile (SEP) for the district. This provides the information required and necessary for a situational analysis and the formulation of the District Development Planning Framework (DDPF), which is a comprehensive policy directive and guidance for development in the district. Data for compiling the SEP is derived through the Village Action Plan (VAP) process.

Officials at the Council explained that the VAP involves the process of facilitating development at the grassroots level by allowing members of the community to participate in the analysis of the local situation and develop action plans that serve as a basis for the District Development Plan. The VAP process employs participatory planning approaches in enabling the communities to plan and decide for themselves on the manner of which they intend to develop their area. The officials further noted that all project proposals have to be appraised (desk and field) by the District Executive Committee (DEC) with the help of the Area Executive Committee (AEC) and then consolidated into the District Development Plan. As such, the Lilongwe District Development Plan (DDP) serves as a blueprint and reference for implementing and monitoring activities and the utilization of funds in the district. The respondents further noted that the basic features of the DDP is that it is district focussed, people centred, bottom-up approach which emphasises participation in that it provides the opportunity for local people to be involved in all facets of the development process, from needs assessment to project implementation, monitoring and evaluation.
According to the Lilongwe District Development Plan, the council has seven committees namely; finance, development, health and environment, education, human resources and public works which are directly linked to activities happening in the Council. It was also found that there are many provisions in the 1998 local government act, which have a major bearing on the implementation of community projects. Communities, Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs), Community Based Organisations (CBOs) and various agencies involved in development work are expected to use the 1998 local government act, as a guide and framework for action.

In addition to these committees, council is empowered to establish any others at a local government area level. In line with this mandate, the Lilongwe District Council has established a District Executive Committee (DEC), Area Development Committees (ADCs), Area Executive Committees (AECs) and Village Development Committees (VDCs). The District Executive Committee (DEC) is a technical and advisory committee to the Council and is composed of members drawn from government line ministries, statutory corporations, Non Government Organisations (NGOs) and Faith Based Organisations (FBOs) working in the district. This committee is chaired by the District Commissioner with the Director of Planning and Development as its Secretary.

Below this committee is the Area Development Committee (ADC), which is a representative body of all Village Development Committees (VDCs) under the jurisdiction of the Traditional Authority (TA). Membership of the ADC is comprised of ward councillors from the TA’s area of influence, representatives of religious groups, youth and women groups, and the business community. It is chaired by an elected person within the members, with the Traditional Authority playing an advisory role. Consequently, Lilongwe District Council has
Area Development Committees. On the other hand, an Area Executive Committee is a technical and advisory committee to the Area Development Committee. It comprises of all extension workers of government ministries, non-governmental organisations and statutory corporations working within the jurisdiction of the Traditional Authority. At the very local level, there is a Village Development Committee (VDC), which is a representative body in the local setting. It is the most important local structure in the planning system of the Council as it is the committee closest to the people at the grassroots level. The committee facilitates planning and development at the community level.

The operational framework for decentralisation in Malawi, as stipulated in the Decentralisation Policy (1998), clearly places the election and involvement of ward councillors as crucial in political participation. Their absence in the council operation system has been a major concern to many commentators and the society at large. However, an official at the Ministry Headquarters clarified the government’s position on the matter by stating that Government has always wanted to have councillors in the councils, but there have been some justified reasons for their absence. The official noted that in the year 2004, as the term of the councillors were coming to an end, government had proposed for an amendment bill to parliament for tripartite elections, thus calling for Presidential, Parliamentary and Local Council elections to be held together. The bill was defeated in Parliament by the opposition parties. This then meant holding local council polls in 2005. However, in that particular year, the country faced an acute shortage of maize grain due to drought. Consequently, Parliament approved the re-allocation of resources; some of which was meant for the local polls in order to purchase maize grain to avert hunger, the researcher observed.
The researcher further observed that the Ministry in 2006/07 drafted another bill seeking Parliament’s approval to hold the elections in November; however, the bill was never discussed in Parliament. In light of these events, government was now focussed on ways of improving the efficiency and capacity of councillors once they will be in place. A number of consultations on the matter have led to the amendment bill tabled in Parliament in 2010. However, government is committed to hold the elections in the year 2011.

According to the decentralisation policy, full council shall among other members comprise of elected officials (ward councillors) who have voting powers as being the legally mandated members to transact council business. Their absence in the district council is a cause of concern to council operations. An official at the Council commented that lack of ward councillors in the council is a major setback to the achievement of full representation of the people at the grassroots level. This is so because the Council, in that context, lacks the legal mandate. However, in terms of operations there is a committee formed through the Ministry’s directive, and it is this committee which has been transacting council business in the absence of the full Council.

As such, the failure of governments to satisfy the people’s needs and choices can result in dissatisfaction and a setback to the decentralisation framework. This observation is also clarified by Brynard (1989:37) who points out that it is often that potential participants are not provided with the correct or enough information to participate intelligently and optimally. As such, meaningful participation in public management requires that the public be well informed about participation and government issues, problems and strategies, hence the need for a transparent government.
From the perspective of the respondents at the Council, it transpires that participation was understood to mean the communities’ involvement in the planning, implementation and ownership of projects initiated by both the council and other Non State actors. According to the respondents at the council, it was observed that the council is currently implementing several development projects through the Local Development Fund (LDF) and the Malawi Social Action Fund (MASAF).

As contained in the Lilongwe Socio Economic Profile, MASAF has introduced new funding mechanisms to communities, which is part of the District Participatory Planning System (DPPS) and influences it to take on board participatory approaches. In particular, it is critical that communities are able to identify their needs without undue influence by the source of funding. It is for this reason that an open-ended participatory rural appraisal (O-PRA) was introduced so that communities could articulate their needs without the influence of funds. The open-ended participatory rural appraisal require that various participatory rural appraisal instruments used by donors, NGOs, line ministries, and the MASAF are harmonized to produce a common approach for use by the District planning office. Through MASAF, communities have been able to implement small discrete community sub projects in order to increase service coverage in areas of health, water, education and village natural resources such as woodlots.

The Socio Economic Profile further outlines that, through MASAF projects, the Council has been an agent for strengthening and advocating for a participatory planning approach to development. MASAF has become an important mechanism for bringing communities into mainstream development on a large scale. The process adopted by MASAF is aimed at empowering communities so that they become better partners in the delivery of assets.
meant to improve access to services in the district. Crucial to council officials was the communities’ participation in Village Action Plans which is the starting point in the formulation of the district development plan and the participatory rural appraisals for the various projects. There was a feeling that communities perceive development as a government aspect as evidenced through cases of vandalism of some infrastructure and theft of materials. Empowerment of local structures was another major concern. The VDCs’ term of office is three years, hence the need to continuously train new members, which the council cannot afford due to financial constraints. As a result, some committee members do not know their roles which, in turn, results in inefficiency.

Based on the issues raised, the researcher observed that at a policy and implementation level, there exists a strong indication of the willingness to enhance local participation in the operations of the Council. There were some levels of satisfaction, on the part of officials, that through the planning system the communities are involved in local governance. The fact that the system has a bottom-up approach makes officials feel that decentralisation is in course. However, the researcher observed that there have been some external factors that have hindered the smooth implementation of effectively encompassing local participation in the decentralisation framework which has to be worked out in order to achieve maximum participation. Arguing from the trends cited in the study, the researcher agrees with the observation by Crook (2002:2) who cautions that “decentralisation schemes cannot be treated as technically neutral devices which can be implemented without constraints as if there were no pre-existing social context”. In real experience there are other factors in the social, political and economical perspective that have to be considered in the whole scenario. As in this case, failure to hold local elections because of external
factors poses a big challenge to government’s commitment to fully implement the decentralisation programme.

4.3. PERCEPTION OF LOCAL PARTICIPATION IN COMMUNITIES
Decentralisation in the Lilongwe District Council is intended to promote participatory planning at sub-district level and representative democracy at the district level through the election of councillors to the Council. The National Decentralisation Policy 1998 (section 9.1), an operational framework for decentralisation in Malawi, captures the phenomenon of participation as follows:

’In the course of their development work the councils are required to provide for local people’s (communities’) participation’.

According to the respondents in the focus group discussions, participation is mostly construed as involvement in self help projects, a phenomenon reminiscent of the old one party Malawi Congress Party (MCP) regime wherein people were forced to engage in self help projects. The focus group discussions noted that participation is often times initiated by either the village head or political leaders mobilizing the communities to take part in specific community initiated projects. Most of the time, the communities’ involvement comes in the form of contributing to locally available project materials like sand, moulding bricks, collecting stones and any form of labour that may be required. In such situations, local leaders play a crucial role in ensuring that all members in their jurisdiction take part in various activities on the development agenda. Upon failure to do so, local leaders can effect punishment for non compliance in involvement in community activities. In order to instil a sense of ownership to community projects, the District Council enforces a 10% mandatory contribution from communities for all projects implemented in their local areas. On the other hand, political participation takes the form of communities taking part in voting for leaders of their choice at parliamentary and local council elections.
However, as indicated earlier, local council elections in the district were last held in the year 2000, hence the people have had no chance to exercise their democratic right of representation in the council. The respondents in focus group discussions observed that effective participation in council activities can only be achieved if they have a legally mandated representative in council, a phenomena which has been missed for the past years hence the general feeling that there is no genuine representation. This was observed by respondents at a community discussion who make it clear that it is difficult to talk of participation when there are no ward councillors in place. The respondents in the focus group discussions further noted that government has often times articulated the need to enhance participation, but has practically failed to live up to the expected principles of decentralisation. A focus group discussion in TA Chadza specifically noted that:

When the notion of decentralisation was first being introduced, government went out preaching for total representation through the ward councillors, but we don’t know what has happened of late. There are no ward councillors in place but Councils are still operating, as to how? We don’t have an answer because government itself seems not to have a clear answer as well

This scenario defeats the notion of representation as outlined in the decentralisation policy (1998: cap 4) that the new local government system will be made up of District Councils that will have the power to create wards for the purpose of facilitating participation of the people in the Council’s decision making. In democratic decentralisation, the issue of representation is a pillar for decentralisation. In some cases, participation is regarded as synonymous with consultation. Equally, the rhetoric and conceptualisation of participation by both district and central level officials is limited to development projects.
According to respondents in the focus group discussions, communities have mixed reactions to the promotion of good local governance, which creates a picture that the council has at times failed to make strides in promoting effective local representation. This notion contradicts the Decentralisation Policy objectives which, among other aspects, seek to create a democratic environment and institutions in Malawi for governance and development at the local level which will facilitate the participation of those at the grassroots level in decision-making (Decentralisation Policy 1998: cap 3; A).

According to the view of the respondents in the community focus group discussions, political leaders, who are deemed representatives of the people, fail their duty by not frequently conducting meetings to listen to their concerns. One focus group discussion in TA Mtema, observed that party politics in the area becomes vibrant only towards the elections, thereafter, political leaders almost hibernate only to resurface when launching a particular development project with a sponsor or council officials. Similarly, it transpired from the interviews that members of the development structures do not always make themselves available for involvement in council activities as, most of the time, they are found trapped in personal commitments for their livelihood.

These findings from the respondents in the focus group discussions are in agreement with the observation made in the literature review, on the problems of participation that a particular drawback to local participation activities is time and costs that can be accrued. The benefits of any local participation activity may often only be realized in the long term, while the associated cost (such as meeting attendance and personal contacts, in comparison with forfeiting personal pleasure and profits) must be sustained immediately. This may lead the citizen to reject local participation not on the basis of its failure to achieve
the desired goals, but because the costs incurred in the achievement of the desired goal may be considered too expensive on the basis of the cost-benefit dilemma (Clapper 1996:68).

Based on the findings from the interviews in the focus group discussions, it can be deduced that communities have indeed grasped some fundamental aspects of decentralisation and participation. However, failure by government on a larger scale to fulfil its obligations in implementing fundamental aspects of democratic decentralisation by not holding local government elections, and the consequent failure of the Council to implement some planned projects in their respective areas, has been a major setback in effective local participation. The researcher also noted that there was willingness on the part of the communities to be totally involved in Council activities but this has been affected by the nature of the working relationship that exists between Council officials and the communities.

4.4. PEOPLE’S GENERAL PERCEPTION IN RELATION TO GOOD GOVERNANCE, DEVELOPMENT AND REPRESENTATION
The participants in the focus group discussions were also given statements to which they were supposed to give a response of agreement or disagreement. The statements were meant to assess the extent of the people’s general perception in relation to good governance, development and representation in the local council. After lengthy discussions in all focus group discussions (in relation to good governance) the respondents showed that they do not rate their Councils or their political representatives (Members of Parliament) highly. Amongst the reasons, it transpired that both political representatives and Councils have, in most cases, failed to deliver to the people’s expectations on various development and social works. Taking into consideration the fact that representation and participation form an integral part of good governance, it can be said that political representatives and
Council have not lived up to the expectations of the people as far as good governance is concerned. As pointed out, the Decentralisation Policy (1998) sets out four objectives; namely, creating a democratic environment and institutions for governance and development, eliminating dual administration at the district level, mobilizing the masses for socioeconomic development and promoting accountability and good governance at the local level. The findings, however, show that to some extent the promotion of accountability and good governance at the local level have met some shortfalls in relation to a focus on local issues and local people as well as in the flow of information on policy between Council, political representatives and local communities. This was mainly attributed to the legitimacy crisis in local governance. According to the respondents, resources are distributed without meaningful input and checks from the people.

4.5. PARTICIPATION AND LOCAL DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTIONS
According to the respondents who are also members of the development committees, these committees have not been very successful in facilitating participation as intended. Evidence reveals that although the committees do exist in some areas, their impact in fostering development has not been much. The inactivity of the development committees is attributed to several factors. The first reason is that the Council only remembers the committees when it is engaged in an activity involving them like the participatory rural appraisals for Village Action Plans; thereafter they become dormant. With this scenario, it is up to other user committees such as the Village Natural Resource Management Committees (VNRMC), Village AIDS Committees and Village Health and Water Committees just to mention a few that are more active in the implementation of various development initiatives. For instance, it transpired from the study that the last time the VDCs were trained by the Council was in 2001, at a time the Council wanted Village Action Plans (VAPs).
Another reason is that the VDCs themselves lack the motivation to meet on their own, because they are more like development committees needed only when there is a development agenda at hand. As such, members are often busy with personal endeavours which are geared towards improving their livelihoods. The respondents also noted Donor or NGO-funded projects as another factor that has weakened the development structures. These partners in development, on most occasions, go straight to the people. They identify the projects they want initiated and form their own parallel committees to administer their projects. Most of the time, such projects come with promises of incentives like food, fertilizer or money. This has tended to create competition for scarce resources and authority resulting in increasing conflict and overlap. As a result, it becomes difficult for the committees to coordinate activities. Development actors implement their projects independent of each other and, in the process, create several user committees which, on their own, do not coordinate processes although their activities do have some mutual impact.

The responses from the Council officials interviewed on the aspect of lack of coordination claimed that the Council is aware of the problem. Respondents explained that it is the mandate of the District Council to facilitate development in the district. Through the District Executive Committee, the Council coordinates development activities. However, it was evident from the responses that the vibrancy of the DEC is dependent on the whims of the Council to make them effective because it is the Council that funds the operations of the District Executive Committee. In most cases, Council has failed to effectively fund the DEC therefore crippling its activities in the process.
From the views of the respondents from the Council and the communities, it was apparent that the user committees are more efficient and seen as convenient structures for implementing development projects because they are easy to form and manage. As a result, NGOs and other developmental actors find it more convenient to form single purpose committees to implement their projects. This has a damaging impact on the formal sub district structures such as VDCs and ADCs. The proliferation of user committees has greatly affected popular local participation, rendering it less effective in some projects. The user committees have, in most cases, enjoyed capacity building in the form of training in project management for various development projects. These resources could have been more productive if they were channelled towards the formal development structures because the user committees are single purpose committees with benefits which are usually short term; as such, members are more interested in reaping the benefits in the immediate term. The user committees have also increased the operational costs of the communities in participating. People spend much time attending meetings, visiting different offices which involve travelling to and fro, hence, incurring costs in cash and time.

4.6. TREND IN THE LEVEL OF LOCAL PARTICIPATION SINCE 2005 TO THE TIME OF THE STUDY
Officials at the District Council were asked the question ‘Has local participation increased or decreased over the past five years? What can be the contributing factors to the increase or decrease?’ According to these officials, levels of participation have relatively increased with time due to a number of factors. The respondents cited the increased numbers of NGOs and other development partners who have been working in the district at large and the area of study in particular. Such NGOs conduct training programmes with the guidance of the Council and, as such, communities have come to appreciate the goodness of being involved in community activities and community responsibility.
The officials, however, observed that political parties have greatly affected the zeal for communities to be actively involved in community participation. One official noted that during the one party rule, people were not divided along party lines, in which case the local party leader could easily mobilise people towards involvement whenever there was a community project. According to the Officials, during the one party rule people, through the local party leadership, could voluntarily do such works as clearing roads and paths without necessarily filling in forms or demanding help from the government. However, with the advent of the multi party system, people have tended to adopt the attitude that government will do everything for them. Responding to the same questions, one focus group discussion explained that the moment a political party campaigns on community initiative or self help, it is likely lose support, while those that promise free hand outs will gain popularity as they are regarded as saviours for their immediate needs.

According to the Council officials, mostly party representatives in the Council (MPs) want decisions made in the Council meetings to be biased towards their political party policies as a way of gaining popularity at the expense of community needs. Political parties encourage giving handouts to the people as a way of enticing voters, thus killing the spirit of true participation. Sometimes communities are discouraged from participating in community activities because of the frustrations from the perceived bias of chiefs on the distribution of free government supplies. According to one focus group discussion, those households which did not access free government handouts do not want to participate in any community work, because they feel sidelined and neglected.
Although, the programme for distributing free agriculture inputs is a government programme targeting underprivileged households, it is the chiefs who play a major role in identifying the underprivileged household hence it is prone to abuse and nepotism. The researcher noted that the advent of democracy brought competition among political parties which has resulted in political parties adopting a soft approach towards people on order to gain support at the expense of instilling the self help attitude which was there in the one party rule. At the same time, the spirit of giving handouts by either political parties or other stakeholders has resulted in communities wanting immediate incentives from the work they do, hence affecting the spirit of participation.

4.7. PARTICIPATION VERSUS THE ROLE OF TRADITIONAL LEADERS
According to the respondents, at both the Council level and the focus group discussions, participation has also been affected by other players like the relationship between traditional leaders and the people themselves. In the local setting in Lilongwe District, traditional leaders are hereditary chiefs whose leadership is endorsed by clans and fall under the office of the District Commissioner, but they are crowned by the powers of the President. According to the respondents in the focus group discussions, there was a general feeling of resentment towards the leadership styles of the Traditional leaders which participants described as having autocratic tendencies.

Respondents noted that Traditional leaders are more powerful because they have the power to fire and install new chiefs downwards in their area of jurisdiction. In such a set up, policies and decisions are passed down in a top-down manner. The relationship between TA and a Group Village Headman takes the form of a master-servant and this attitude passes downwards to the village headmen who, in turn, rule the people in the manner of an
autocratic grip. Ironically, it is the same monolithic autocratic institutions that local democratic institutions are subjected to in order to promote participatory development.

From the discussion above, it transpires that the concept of participation in the Council is closely associated with the development planning and implementation of such projects. In some aspects, there have been successes in achieving the intended objective. Nevertheless, local participation has not been institutionalised to become a day-to-day operation of communal activities. The sub district local structures that were designed to spearhead participation have not performed to the expected standards. There are fragmented development efforts that are, as a result of the sprouting user committees, an element that the decentralisation policy sought to abolish. In this aspect, local participation is not coordinated and therefore less effective in implementation and practice. Political participation through the choice of representatives in the local Council has been stifled, hence destroying the main building pillar of democratic decentralisation.

It can therefore be deduced that although participation has increased with the adoption of decentralisation, it has not been effectively supported to adequately empower the local people. Therefore, from the data and the discussion thereof, it can be concluded that in terms of facilitating development planning, decentralisation has indeed managed to incorporate participatory planning. In order for participation to be entrenched, it should go beyond development planning and encompass all communal decision making structures and processes.
4.8. CONCLUSION
Based on the study, it is apparent that the Ministry of Local Government remains committed to ensuring that the decentralisation policy espoused in 1998 becomes a pillar of district administration as articulated in the Local Government Act. Implementation of the policy has, however, been faced with obvious problems. This chapter points out the problems of lack of legitimate representatives of the people (ward councillors), lack of adequate financial resources to effectively implement appraised projects, and coordination hiccups. In almost all focus group discussions there emerged a general perception of growing discontent due to unfulfilled project promises from both political leaders and Council officials. Building trust and giving reliable feedback emerged as another key issue among the communities. Petts (1997:45) argues that officials need to accept that local people can be well informed, and that local communities must also feel that experts (officials) are competent and seen to be competent.

The process of devolving functions and powers to the Councils and ultimately to structures at the local level is the ideal framework in the theory of decentralisation. However, the many obstacles cited above in the implementation of decentralisation and local participation in particular have revealed theoretical problems as far as decentralisation and local participation is concerned. As defined in Chapter Two, decentralisation refers to a system in which decision making power and resources are devolved to local governments that have a constitutionally defined area of autonomous action and are accountable administratively to national government and, democratically, to local constituencies through locally elected councillors.

This is in contrast to the current set up where de-concentration seems to be the system under practice. De-concentration, as earlier discussed, is a process in which decision making power and resources are devolved to local units within the central government
bureaucracy that are accountable upwards to their ministries. This does not mean that local development is not taking place in Lilongwe District Council. The evidence gathered by the study shows that there has actually been an upturn in development in the Council in past years and is continuously progressing.

However, the point the study attempts to unveil is that development taking place in the council is as a result of decision making processes within the Council with a degree of consultation with the development structures below the district council; but, without the involvement of democratically elected representatives at the local level. Democratic participation through Councils and through local participation processes is a fundamental underpinning of the Local Government Act. The hypothesis underlying the implementation of decentralisation in Malawi was that decentralisation of a form that enables communities to participate (through their democratically elected representatives and through direct participation in local planning processes) in the decision making, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of development, leads to the delivery of services that is more relevant to their needs and is more cost effective. At the time of the study, it could be said that the process in Lilongwe District Council is following a trend of de-concentration
CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1. INTRODUCTION
The main aim of this chapter is to summarize the major aspects discussed in the study and suggest some conclusions. The study has analyzed how the phenomenon of local participation has been exploited in the implementation of decentralisation in Lilongwe District Council. The chapter thus places local participation and decentralisation in broader contexts in order to properly interpret the meaning of the results of the study. Secondly, the chapter proposes recommendations based on the findings of the study and puts forward a tentative model for effective local participation.

5.2. CONCLUSIONS
In Chapter One of the study, it was observed that decentralisation in Malawi was indeed intended to promote participatory planning at the sub district level and representative democracy at the district level through the election of councillors at the district council. According to the MGDS (2000), the adoption of decentralisation reforms was envisaged as a vehicle towards achieving effective social service delivery and the promotion of representative democracy which would ultimately lead to good local governance. However, some implementation problems and mishaps in coordination have triggered some challenging questions on the effectiveness of the decentralisation programme in relation to local participation. Failure to hold local government elections removed the main pillar of local democracy and an essential condition of good local governance. As such, the study was undertaken with the view of assessing the phenomenon of local participation in the Lilongwe District Council with a critical focus on the general perception of stakeholders and local citizens in relation to participation, representation and good governance in the council.
Accordingly, the findings of the study have indeed brought to light some implementation problems of decentralisation and participation as outlined in the problem statement pertaining to the study. The literature review, in Chapter Two of the study, covered the contextual and theoretical aspects of decentralisation and participation with the view of lending a general framework and focus to the study. The study looked at three main forms of decentralisation, namely: Administrative, Political and Fiscal decentralisation as a basis for assessing local participation. The study used qualitative tools of data collection and analysis which employed grounded theory. The methods of data collection contained in Chapter Three include the use of semi structured interviews and focus group discussions. Chapter Four of the study has shown that, to some extent, decentralisation reforms in the Council have indeed enhanced local participation in a way that it has strengthened participatory planning at the local level. The study has, however, shown that although participation has increased in the council it has, in practice, not been effectively supported to empower the local people. The vacuum created due to the lack of councillors has given way to more dissatisfaction on the part of the people as it smacks of government’s non commitment to fully support the decentralisation reforms.

5.3. RECOMMENDATIONS
This part of the chapter offers recommendations arising from the critical analysis of issues of local participation and decentralisation in the Lilongwe District Council. The study makes recommendations that are based on a model of local governance participation adapted from Kayuni (2006). According to this model, effective local participation can be achieved based on the following factors: Adherence to legal and policy framework of decentralisation; Functioning development implementation structures; clearly defined roles and responsibilities; and Bottom-up Participatory planning. These would ultimately lead to good local governance.
In light of this model, viz-a-vis the study findings, the following recommendations have been drawn up:

a) As indicated in the research findings, sub district structures (VDCs) have primarily become developmental forums whose need arises when there is a development agenda to be addressed within the area. As such their effectiveness is driven by the availability of funds from the council or developmental partners and is measured by their ability to mobilize local resources for projects. However, the normal day-to-day decision making process remains less participatory. It is the recommendation of this study that, in order to increase its efficacy, participation should be institutionalised and VDCs made to be in the forefront for forums advocating community needs, interests and aspirations. Communities should be given space through community forums where issues affecting their welfare should be articulated in a free atmosphere.

b) The study has shown that although some NGOs use the existing local structures, there were others that bypass the existing structures and create their own committees to implement their projects. This approach creates confusion and conflict at the local level. The decentralisation policy envisaged a strong partnership between the public sector, private sector institutions and civil society. This can be rectified by the Council strengthening the District Executive Committee with financial resources so that it efficiently coordinates district development programmes. As such, the Council should always set aside funds and a budget for DEC activities and adhere to the budget implementation so that the Committee fully executes its mandate of monitoring and coordinating development activities in the Council.

c) The study has shown that participation in the Council entails that communities be allowed to decide the type of projects that have to be implemented and that they take
part in the implementation thereof. The study therefore recommends that the mandate of the development forums’ VDCs should be revisited so that they encompass the role of lobbying for development and initiating various actions and activities that would benefit the communities. To achieve this, the VDCs should be well trained in community and social mobilisation so that they become a hub of social and economic activities in their areas.

d) There has been significant advocacy for decentralisation which has caused communities to demand essential services. A high level of expectation is created through the planning process, and when there are no results in terms of implementing the planned projects for years after the process, the structures and the process lose credibility. As such, the study recommends to Council and the funding agencies that budgetary allocations to various areas, as demarcated by the ADCs, should be well clarified and presented to the committees so that they relate the funds allocated to their area to the type of developmental activity the area wants to undertake. This would help the committees understand the strategic and funding constraints and, in turn, help them make decisions within these constraints.

e) The study observed that there were some elements of dissatisfaction between communities and traditional leaders. Some conflict was reported to have existed between MPs and councillors when they were available; both of whom were competing for community favour. The study therefore recommends that the parent Ministry of Local Government and District Administration should embark on a massive awareness and sensitization campaign within communities, civic educating them on the roles and responsibilities of the various stakeholders in the decentralisation framework.
Figure 1. Proposed model for effective local participation in decentralisation that leads to good governance of local councils.

(Source: adapted from Kayuni: 2006)
REFERENCES


Goodwin, B. 1987. *Using Political Ideas.* Chichester: John Willey and Sons


ANNEXURES

APPENDIX 1: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

This interview schedule is intended for Officials at the National level (Ministry Headquarters), District Council Officials and focus groups.

LIST OF INTERVIEWEES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NO.</th>
<th>INTERVIEWEE</th>
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<td>1</td>
<td>Deputy Director of Local Government Services</td>
<td>Ministry Headquarters</td>
<td>- Origin, Purpose and forms of decentralisation.</td>
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<td>- Trends in decentralisation implementation.</td>
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<td>- Current status and way forward.</td>
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<td>- Role of Council in Decentralisation Policy implementation.</td>
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<td>- Capacity building in local communities.</td>
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<td>- Role of communities in project implementation, monitoring and ownership.</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>District Executive Committee (three members)</td>
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<td>- DEC’s role in participatory planning.</td>
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<td>- Local community’s involvement in needs</td>
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| 5 | Village Development Committees (Four Focus Group Discussions) | T/A MTEMA - Mzumazi VDC - Chitululu VDC 
T/A CHADZA - Mnongwa VDC - Chikanga VDC | - Knowledge of Decentralisation. 
- Community’s role in decentralisation. 
- Relationship with elected representatives (Formal i.e., councillors, Members of Parliament and informal i.e. Project Management Committees). 
- Relationship with CBO’s and NGO’s. 
- Participatory methods. 
- General perception of participation. | identification and project implementation. 
- Community Action Plans. |
Document analysis involves the review and analysis of official documents that are useful in terms of the information and themes the research is investigating. The documents included policy documents, circulars and reports.

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<td>- Legal framework -Decentralisation process -Roles and functions of development committees -Local council structures -Amendments to the act</td>
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<td>Reports</td>
<td>Ministry Headquarters -District Council</td>
<td>-Evaluation Reports and Appraisals -ADC meeting minutes</td>
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<td>-Decentralisation process in Malawi (2001)</td>
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APPENDIX 3: GUIDE INDIVIDUAL QUESTIONS WITH OFFICIALS

A. Ministry Headquarters

Guide for Deputy Director of Local Government

1. Provide an overview of the decentralisation process in Malawi?
2. What is the theoretical framework of decentralisation in relation to participation and representation?
3. How has government incorporated participatory mechanisms in decentralisation planning?
4. What are the main challenges for District Councils in assuming their efficiency in implementing decentralisation and participatory approaches?
5. How has the Ministry supported decentralisation and participation in the Council?
6. How has government dealt with the issue of lack of councillors in Councils?
7. How does the Ministry monitor participation in Councils?
8. What have been learning moments in the exercise so far?
9. Has decentralisation changed the scope of participation in the Councils?
10. What factors have undermined the implementation of participation processes?

B. LILONGWE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Guide for District Commissioner

1. How is the Council implementing decentralisation in general and participation in particular?
2. How does Council incorporate the outcomes of public participation exercises?
3. What constitutes local participation in the council?
4. What are communities’ roles in participatory planning?
5. How is coordination fostered with other development partners?
6. How does the Council budget reflect decentralisation planning?
7. To what extent does party politics influence participation in the communities?
8. How does the District Council link with the communities?
9. Elaborate on the project cycle of the District Council and how feedback given is to communities?
10. What have been the challenges and successes in decentralisation implementation and participation?

C. Guide for Director of Planning and Development

In order to get information on the planning, implementation and monitoring of decentralisation activities and projects, the following guide questions were asked:

1. How are projects planned at the district level?
2. What are the roles of the officials/communities in initiating participatory planning?
3. What are the reporting procedures on projects and activities?
4. What is the involvement of local communities in the Council operation?
5. How are decisions on projects made?
5. What type of training do the communities get?
6. How are development committees formed?
7. What are the main challenges and successes so far in initiating participation in the council?
8. How is the district development plan formulated?
9. How is performance of communities rated?
10. How often do officials interact with communities on official matters?

D. Guide for District Executive Committee (4) members
1. What are the officials' roles in facilitating participatory planning?
2. How do they initiate participatory approaches?
3. How do the various sectors coordinate planning?
4. What is the DEC versus Community relationship?
5. What is their involvement in development committee operations VDCs, ADC, AEC?
6. How are community issues of concern addressed at the Council level?
7. What is the community’s role in participatory planning?
8. What are the current challenges in initiating participatory approaches?
9. Have decentralisation trends enhanced participation?

E. Guide Questions for Focus Group Discussions with Village Development Committees
1. What is their ordinary understanding of decentralisation and participation?
2. How do development committees enhance participation in development and governance issues?
4. What is the relationship between VDCs and council officials/elected officials (MPs), Traditional leaders as far as development is concerned?
5. What is their involvement in the planning, implementation and ownership of projects?
6. Are the VDCs fully equipped to perform their duties with efficiency?
   - What form of training do communities receive in enhancing participation?
   - How are they supervised?
   - What are some factors that affect their operations?
7. Does the public have a strong desire to participate in the decision making activities of the Council?
   - How do communities make their wishes and needs known?
- Do communities accept the committees as representing their needs and concerns?
- Is representing community views to the Council a form of participation?

9. What are the challenges they face in their involvement in Council activities?

10. What has been the success and problems of participation through the VDCs?

11. How has the absence of councillors affected the levels of development?

12. Over the past years (since councillors were not available), how has participation levels been affected and why?

11. Does the Council encourage the formation of participation forums?
### APPENDIX 4: DISTRIBUTION OF VDCS BY TA

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APPENDIX 5: NUMBER OF VILLAGE DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEES IN THE AREA OF STUDY: (ONE) TA CHADZA

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APPENDIX 6:  NUMBER OF VILLAGE DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEES IN THE AREA OF STUDY (TWO) TA MTEMA

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APPENDIX 7: POLITICAL REPRESENTATIONS AT PARLIAMENTARY LEVEL
(2009 PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS)

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