

Development planning practices in Zambia: Implications for national development

Sitali Wamundila^{1*}
Christine Wamunyima Kanyengo²
Austin Mwange³

^{1*}sitaliw@unza.ac.zm

¹<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2167-7873>

²<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4249-1859>

³<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8568-3063>

^{1,2,3}The University of Zambia

<https://doi.org/10.51867/ajernet.7.1.129>

ABSTRACT

Every nation aspires to attain the status of a developed country, and the effectiveness of development planning is widely regarded as a principal determinant of differential development outcomes across nations. Since independence in 1964, Zambia has pursued national development through successive development plans; yet, after more than six decades, the country remains classified as a developing nation. This study critically examines the current state of development planning practices in Zambia and their implications for national development. Grounded in a quantitative survey methodology, data were collected from 100 professional planners drawn from a population of 125 attendees at the 9th Conference of Planners convened by the Zambia Institute of Planners in Livingstone. Questionnaires were administered to all 125 conference attendees. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics, comprising frequency distributions and percentage tabulations, processed through the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Findings reveal a bifurcated reality: on the positive side, Zambia exhibits a mature development planning culture characterised by qualified planners, multi-level institutional participation, and broad alignment of national development plans with global development frameworks, including the Sustainable Development Goals. On the deficit side, the study uncovers persistent and systemic weaknesses: an inadequate and poorly understood planning process, limited access to reliable information for plan content, insufficient mastery of planning tools and techniques, weak resource support, deficient monitoring and evaluation frameworks, and fragile governance of the development planning function. These structural deficits, cumulatively, help explain why Zambia has not translated planning effort into substantive development progress. The study advances targeted policy recommendations covering governance reform, capacity building, information infrastructure, and resource allocation.

Keywords: Development Planning, National Development, Planning Governance, Planning Capacity, Zambia

I. INTRODUCTION

Every nation in the world strives to achieve the status of a developed country (Onyeaghalaji & Igberaese, 2010; Todaro & Smith, 2011; Nwokwu & Ndukwe, 2021). The extent to which development planning is applied to national development efforts is widely argued to account for the differential trajectories in national development status attained across countries (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs [UNDESA], 1966; Gumede, 2009; Chimhowu et al., 2019; Turner & Wangchuk, 2025). Most developed nations were early adopters of structured development planning, a fact that compels any serious advocate of national development to examine how effective planning can secure a nation's development agenda (Chimhowu et al., 2019; Turner & Wangchuk, 2025).

Since independence in 1964, Zambia has been actively involved in development planning. Sambumbu and Okanga (2016, p. 7) define a national development plan as a "country's strategic framework that outlines critical goals and objectives that must be effectively accomplished to enable a country attain the desired state of performance." Zambia formalised this commitment in 2006 with the launch of Vision 2030, a long-term development blueprint currently being operationalised through the 8th National Development Plan (8NDP), covering the period 2022 to 2026. In crafting successive plans, the country has aligned itself with global development frameworks, including the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Republic of Zambia, 2006, 2014, 2017; Turner & Wangchuk, 2025).

Notwithstanding these sustained planning efforts, Zambia's development outcomes remain underwhelming. Jales (2017) observes that despite substantial economic growth during the 2003 to 2011 commodity boom, Zambia failed to reduce poverty, income inequality deepened, and undernourishment reached record levels. These outcomes are

inextricably linked to institutional and policy gaps that prevented the benefits of growth from reaching the majority of the population. Other scholars and development practitioners attribute the country's underdevelopment to inadequate infrastructure, a poorly skilled labour force, energy deficits, and weak institutional and governance frameworks (Sambumbu & Okanga, 2016; Turner & Wangchuk, 2025). Hadingham (2003) further argues that the dominant influence on planning systems in developing countries, namely the shift towards decentralisation, has often proceeded without commensurate strengthening of planning machinery.

These persistent development failures, despite decades of planning, create a compelling basis for an empirical investigation into the actual state of development planning practices in Zambia. While prior studies have focused narrowly on development alignment, monitoring and evaluation, and funding mechanisms (Japan International Cooperation Agency [JICA], 2007; Kanyamuna et al., 2020, 2023; Zulu et al., 2023), a comprehensive examination of all essential tenets of development planning practice has remained absent from the literature. This study addresses that gap.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Zambia's persistent underdevelopment after more than six decades of independence, despite continuous engagement in national development planning, presents a paradox that demands scholarly explanation. The country has implemented eleven national development plans since 1966, aligned successive plans with global development frameworks, and maintained an institutionalised planning function. Yet poverty remains pervasive, structural inequality persists, and the country continues to be classified as a developing nation.

Existing studies on Zambia's planning system have examined specific dimensions, notably monitoring and evaluation (Kanyamuna et al., 2020, 2023), plan alignment (Zulu et al., 2023), and decentralisation (Banda et al., 2022), but no study has comprehensively assessed the full architecture of development planning practices across all key tenets simultaneously. Critical questions about process integrity, content quality, tool sophistication, resource enablement, and governance of the planning function remain empirically underexplored. This absence of a comprehensive empirical baseline means that policy interventions to improve Zambia's development outcomes lack an evidence-grounded diagnostic of what is working and what is structurally failing in the planning system. The present study addresses this gap by providing the first holistic empirical assessment of development planning practices in Zambia, with direct implications for understanding why the country's development aspirations have not been realised.

1.2 Research Objectives

- i. To assess the level of participation of planners across different tiers of the national development planning system in Zambia.
- ii. To examine the process followed in the preparation and approval of national development plans.
- iii. To evaluate the content of national development plans in terms of their coverage of dimensions of development and use of information sources.
- iv. To determine the tools and techniques employed by planners in the crafting and implementation of development plans.
- v. To assess the availability and adequacy of enablers, including financial, human, physical, and informational resources, for development planning and implementation.
- vi. To evaluate monitoring and evaluation frameworks applied to track the implementation performance of national development plans.
- vii. To appraise the governance and management architecture for national development planning in Zambia, including its legislative, institutional, and structural dimensions.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Framework: Development Planning as an Instrument of National Development

The theoretical foundation of this study is anchored in the development planning literature, which positions systematic national planning as the bedrock of sustainable development. The UNDESA (1966, p. iv) established the foundational argument that achieving national objectives in economic and social fields is best secured through "comprehensive and integrated planning" that incorporates long-range objectives, public investment programmes, policy measures to stimulate production, sectoral and regional programmes, and robust administrative machinery for information gathering, policy formulation, and progress evaluation.

This foundational argument has been sustained across decades of scholarship. Nwokwu and Ndukwe (2021, p. 29) characterise development planning as a tool to "harness all available human, material, physical, financial and technological resources at the disposal of a given country so as to guarantee overall development in all facets of the economy." More succinctly, Gumede (2009, p. 4) contends that "efficient planning has been the bedrock of achieving

development objectives in many successful developing countries," while Harrison (2023) documents the global resurgence of national development planning as countries recognise its indispensability for navigating complex development challenges.

Development scholars Todaro and Smith (2011, p. 16) further emphasise that development is fundamentally "a multidimensional process involving major changes in social structures, popular attitudes, and national institutions, as well as the acceleration of economic growth, the reduction of inequality and the eradication of poverty." This multidimensional conceptualisation is theoretically significant for the present study, as it implies that effective development planning must encompass economic, social, political, environmental, and cultural dimensions, and not merely macroeconomic indices (Sapru, 1994). Effective national development planning must be anchored on a comprehensive framework comprising governance and management, participatory processes, content adequacy, tool sophistication, resource enablement, and monitoring and evaluation (Gumede, 2009; UNDESA, 1966; Turner & Wangchuk, 2025).

2.2 Empirical Review

2.2.1 Levels of Participation in National Development Planning

National development planning operates hierarchically across global, continental, national, sub-national, sectoral, and local levels, with each tier producing plans that are nested within and aligned to higher-level plans (Dimitriou & Thompson, 2007; United Nations Human Settlements Programme [UN-Habitat], 2016). Local development planning addresses specific needs of municipalities or communities and is implemented by local governments (Carlsen & Nazal, 2008; Chilufya, 2023; Kismana & Tasar, 2014). Sub-national planning covers broader geographic units, addressing regional challenges while aligning with national objectives (Erlina et al., 2020). Sectoral planning produces sector-specific plans covering education, health, agriculture, and infrastructure, implemented by respective ministries (Kostka, 2012; World Bank, 2002). At the apex, national development plans provide the comprehensive framework encompassing all other plan levels, implemented by national authorities in collaboration with regional, local, and sectoral agencies (UNDESA, 1966).

These levels are interconnected through alignment (each plan aligns with higher-level plans), nesting (local plans are embedded within provincial plans, which are nested within national plans), sectoral integration (sector plans are integrated into national plans), and an implementation hierarchy flowing from national to regional to local authorities (Chilufya, 2023; Harrison, 2023). At the global level, national plans increasingly domesticate global development frameworks, most notably the SDGs, embedding global targets within locally generated priorities (Chimhowu et al., 2019; Royo et al., 2022; Turner & Wangchuk, 2025).

2.2.2 National Development Planning Process

The development planning process is conceptualised as a continuous, cyclical activity with defined stages from inception to implementation, monitoring, and evaluation (Zulu et al., 2023). Two dominant approaches characterise this process: the bottom-up approach, in which development priorities originate from local levels and cascade upward to form national priorities; and the top-down approach, in which national priorities cascade downward to ward-level plans (Hadingham, 2003; Sambumbu & Okanga, 2016; Turner & Wangchuk, 2025). Sambumbu and Okanga (2016, p. 875) describe the top-down approach as one that "dictates policy statements to the lower structures," while the bottom-up approach "uses a consultative process in which policy formulation and implementation emanates from the larger population and flows upwards." In practice, most well-functioning planning systems blend both approaches, balancing national priorities with community-level needs and realities.

2.2.3 Content of National Development Plans

The content of a national development plan comprises the information that informs situation analysis, the goals and objectives that emerge from priority setting, and the resource allocation mechanisms required for implementation (OECD, 2020; Turner & Wangchuk, 2025). In terms of coverage, development plans must address multiple dimensions of development, including economic, social, environmental, political, and cultural dimensions, as well as the national resources required to pursue them (Nwokwu & Ndukwe, 2021; Sapru, 1994). Setting development priorities follows a systematic process involving situational analysis, stakeholder engagement, alignment with international commitments such as the SDGs, and the application of prioritisation criteria such as impact, feasibility, urgency, and cost-effectiveness (Basheer et al., 2022; Fukuda-Parr, 2022; Gumede, 2009; Göçoğlu et al., 2025). Reliable content for development plans is generated from diverse institutional sources whose data, research, and policy analysis provide the evidence base for planning decisions (DeLuca, 2017; OECD, 2020; Rasmussen, 2001).

2.2.4 Tools and Techniques for National Development Planning

Effective development planning requires the deployment of a diverse toolkit at different stages of the planning cycle. For situation analysis, tools include SWOT analysis, PESTLE analysis, and trend analysis (Sambumbu & Okanga, 2016). Stakeholder engagement employs participatory rural appraisal (PRA), stakeholder analysis matrices, and citizen engagement platforms (Petkovic et al., 2023). Goal setting is facilitated by SMART frameworks, backward mapping, and theories of change (Republic of Uganda, 2020). Prioritisation tools include cost-benefit analysis, multi-criteria decision analysis (MCDA), and Pareto analysis (Asian Development Bank, 2013; Chaube et al., 2024). Implementation and monitoring rely on logic models, results-based management (RBM) frameworks, and monitoring and evaluation systems (Kusek & Rist, 2004; Örtengren, 2016; United Nations Children's Fund [UNICEF], 2017). Data analysis and visualisation are supported by geographic information systems (GIS), statistical software, and data dashboards (Attah et al., 2024; Ki, 2018; Srivastava, 2023). The comprehensiveness of a country's planning toolkit significantly determines the quality, rigour, and implementation capacity of its development plans.

2.2.5 Enablers for Development Planning and Implementation

Enablers are the conditions, including institutional, human, financial, technological, and cultural factors, that facilitate the smooth execution of development planning and implementation. Gumede (2009) and Turner and Wangchuk (2025) identify leadership and management, institutional capacity, financial resources, physical infrastructure, information systems, cultural alignment, flexibility, results orientation, transparency, and sustainability as the core enablers of effective development planning. Gumede (2009, p. 4) emphasises that "effective coordination and integration of development policies, whether fiscal, monetary or social, across government" is essential. In successful developmental states, sector-based plans are vetted for quality, relevance, and fit within the overall development framework before implementation commences, a standard that requires both enabling resources and capable institutions to achieve.

2.2.6 Monitoring and Evaluation of National Development Plans

Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) constitute the quality assurance mechanism of development planning. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2009, p. 8) defines monitoring as "the continuous collection of information that enables stakeholders to track whether an intervention is achieving set objectives," and evaluation as "a systematic collection and analysis of information from either completed or ongoing activities, at a specific point in time, to determine the extent to which they are achieving stated objectives." Effective M&E frameworks encompass annual work plans, progress reporting structures, management review committees, and robust data systems to support performance tracking (Food and Agriculture Organization & United Nations Development Programme [FAO & UNDP], 2019; Kanyamuna et al., 2020). The growing global demand for governments to demonstrate results, rather than merely expenditure, has intensified pressure for robust national M&E systems (Kanyamuna et al., 2020).

2.2.7 Development Planning in Zambia: Historical Context

Development planning in Zambia has been a continuous practice since independence in 1964. A total of eleven national development plans have been developed and implemented, including a long-term Vision 2030 (2006), a transitional plan (2002 to 2005), and successive five-year plans from the 1st NDP (1966) through the 8th NDP (2022 to 2026) (Republic of Zambia, 2002, 2006, 2011, 2014, 2017, 2022). Throughout this planning history, persistent challenges have been documented: inadequate planning machinery, lack of planning data and information, poor monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, ever-changing institutional arrangements responsible for planning, and insufficient coverage of development dimensions in plan content (Republic of Zambia, 1996, 2002, 2006; Kanyamuna et al., 2023).

Sapru (1994, p. 6) argued that "development should not be discussed in terms of economic development alone... it is a complex phenomenon comprising many dimensions, social, political, economic, administrative and cultural." Table 1 provides a review of Zambia's national development plans and the dimensions of development they have historically encompassed, revealing a dominant pattern of functional-based strategic objectives that do not comprehensively cover all dimensions of national development.

Table 1

NDP	Economic	Social	Political	Environmental	Admin.	Cultural	Industrial	Technological	Human
1st NDP (1966)	✓	✓			✓				
2nd NDP (1972)	✓	✓	✓		✓				
3rd NDP (1979)	✓	✓			✓		✓		
4th NDP (1989)	✓	✓			✓				
TNDP (2002)	✓	✓	✓		✓				✓
5th NDP (2006)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
6th NDP (2011)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
R6th NDP (2013)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
7th NDP (2017)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
8th NDP (2022)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Dimensions of Development in Zambia's National Development Plans

Note: ✓ = dimension included. Source: Analysis of Republic of Zambia National Development Plans (1966–2022).

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study adopted a quantitative research design using a cross-sectional survey strategy. The quantitative approach was selected for its capacity to generate systematic, generalisable evidence on the state of development planning practices across multiple institutional contexts, a design consistent with studies assessing organisational and institutional practices across public sector environments (Kanyamuna et al., 2020; Zulu et al., 2023).

3.2 Population and Sampling

The study population comprised professional planners working in public sector institutions, including main civil service ministries, statutory bodies, parastatals, provincial administration offices, district administration offices, and local authorities (councils), across Zambia. Rather than employing a probabilistic sampling frame across geographically dispersed institutions, the study capitalised on a purposive convenience sample of planners convened at a single national professional gathering: the 9th Annual Conference of Planners organised by the Zambia Institute of Planners in Livingstone.

Questionnaires were administered to all 125 conference attendees, of whom 100 returned completed instruments, yielding a response rate of 80 per cent. This response rate meets the threshold considered acceptable for survey-based research (Creswell, 2014). It must be acknowledged, however, that this sample carries a potential limitation: planners with institutional support and resources sufficient to attend a national conference may over-represent better-resourced planning environments, potentially understating challenges faced by planners in under-resourced districts and provinces.

3.3 Data Collection Instrument

A structured questionnaire was the sole data collection instrument. The instrument was organised around eight thematic dimensions corresponding to the study's research objectives: background profile of planners; level of participation in development planning; process followed in plan preparation; content in development plans; tools used in planning; enablers for planning and implementation; monitoring and evaluation of plans; and governance and management of planning. Items employed a combination of categorical, frequency, and five-point Likert-scale (Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree) response formats. The questionnaire was pre-tested prior to the main data collection to ensure clarity, completeness, and face validity.

3.4 Data Analysis

Data were analysed using descriptive statistics, comprising frequency distributions and percentage tabulations, processed through the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Findings were systematically triangulated against relevant policy documents, including the 7th and 8th National Development Plans, the National Planning and Budgeting Policy, and the National Monitoring and Evaluation Policy, to validate and contextualise survey responses against actual planning practice.

IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

4.1 Profile of Respondents

Background profile data were collected to characterise the planning environment and validate the representativeness of the survey sample. Table 2 presents the profile of respondents across gender, age, educational qualifications, institutional affiliation, position held, work experience, and national development plans participated in.

Table 2

Background Profile of Planners

Gender	Frequency (%)
Male	64%
Female	36%
Age Group	
25–30 years	8%
31–36 years	27%
37–41 years	27%
42–46 years	10%
47+ years	28%
Highest Qualifications	
Bachelor's Degree	35%
Master's Degree	48%
Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)	17%
Institutional Affiliation	
Main Civil Service (Ministries)	28%
Statutory Bodies	18%
Parastatals	5%
Provincial Administration Offices	7%
District Administration Offices	5%
Local Councils	37%
Position Held	
Director (Planning)	16%
Assistant Director (Planning)	10%
Senior Planner	26%
Planner	48%
Work Experience	
1–4 years	16%
5–10 years	21%
11–15 years	23%
16+ years	40%
National Development Plans Participated In	
Vision 2030	6%
6th National Development Plan	17%
7th National Development Plan	45%
8th National Development Plan	32%

The profile data affirm the availability of a credible planning environment characterised by balanced gender representation (64% male, 36% female), a predominantly youthful workforce (54% aged 31 to 41 years), high educational qualifications (65% holding postgraduate degrees including 17% with PhDs), and broad institutional coverage across national, sub-national, and local government levels. The majority of respondents (63%) possessed more than 10 years of professional planning experience, and all occupied substantive planning positions from Planner to Director of Planning. These characteristics are consistent with the profile of a mature planning workforce and align with global best practices for development planning (Aliyu et al., 2021; Zulu et al., 2023).

However, the distribution of plan participation reveals a significant concern: only 6% had participated in crafting Vision 2030, and 17% in the 6th NDP. The majority of respondents' planning experience was concentrated in the 7th NDP (45%) and 8th NDP (32%), suggesting limited institutional memory and continuity in the planning function. This

configuration has serious implications for consistency in priority-setting, learning from past plans, and effective implementation (Adams, 2002; Hadingham, 2003; Gumede, 2009).

4.2 Level of Participation in National Development Planning

Respondents were asked to indicate the level(s) of the planning system at which they had participated. Multiple responses were permitted. Table 3 presents the distribution of planning participation across levels.

Table 3

Level of Participation in National Development Planning

Planning Level	Frequency (n)
National	14
Sector	12
Institutional (Ministry, Statutory, Parastatal)	25
Provincial	32
District	37
Local	18

The distribution of planning participation across all levels confirms multi-tier engagement in development planning, which is consistent with the principles of hierarchical and inclusive planning (Zulu et al., 2023). The concentration of participation at the district (37) and institutional (25) levels, compared with national (14) and sector (12) levels, suggests that the bulk of planning experience among the surveyed workforce resides at the implementation tiers rather than at the strategic planning apex. This configuration could limit the quality of top-level planning if not addressed through deliberate career development and rotation policies.

4.3 Planning Process

Respondents were asked to characterise the planning process, and findings revealed a notably fragmented understanding. Approximately 31% described the process as bottom-up, 35% as top-down, while 12% expressed uncertainty and 22% did not respond. This mixed distribution suggests either that both approaches are genuinely employed at different tiers, or, more troublingly, that many planners lack a clear and shared understanding of the process governing plan preparation. A five-item Likert-scale assessment found that the majority agreed that priorities from wards are incorporated into district plans, district priorities into provincial plans, and provincial priorities into national plans, implying a bottom-up orientation.

A validation of implementation planning further revealed that implementation plans for the 8th NDP, the 8th NDP provincial plans, and district development plans were generally developed after the respective parent development plans were approved. The 8th NDP Implementation Plan (Republic of Zambia, 2023) was not published until 2023, a full year after the 8th NDP was approved in 2022. This timeline represents a structural deficiency: it implies that activities planned for Year One of the 8th NDP (2022) could not be systematically implemented, as no operationalised action plan existed. Best practice requires that a development plan and its implementation plan be developed concurrently and approved together to enable seamless execution from the first day of the plan period (Kanyamuna et al., 2023; Gumede, 2009). This finding replicates the systemic inconsistencies identified by Kanyamuna et al. (2023, p. 403), who noted "serious practical gaps with regard to formulation and actual execution" of Zambia's planning architecture.

4.4 Content of National Development Plans

Regarding the principles used to derive content in national development plans, 76% of respondents believed that both functional-based (development dimensions) and resource-based (national resources) principles were applied. However, a close examination of Zambia's NDPs from 1966 to 2022 (Table 1) reveals that strategic development objectives have predominantly been functional and have historically not encompassed all dimensions of development, with comprehensive multi-dimensional coverage emerging only in the more recent 7th and 8th NDPs. This divergence between respondent perceptions and documented practice suggests limited awareness among planners of the actual content architecture of national plans, a significant capacity gap.

On information access, the majority of respondents disagreed that there is an easy source of information for informing plan content. This finding stands in stark contrast to the acknowledged availability of global and national data repositories from institutions such as UNDP, the World Bank, IMF, WHO, FAO, and Zambia's own Central Statistics Office (DeLuca, 2017; OECD, 2020). This disconnect may reflect inadequate information infrastructure at the national level, lack of effective information management policies, or insufficient digital access to available data systems, all of which impair evidence-based planning. Notably, Zambia currently lacks a national information management policy and

does not yet have a national library, both of which would significantly strengthen information access for planning purposes. Positively, respondents firmly agreed that national development plans were developed in alignment with global development strategies, particularly the SDGs, consistent with Chimhowu et al.'s (2019) observation that the SDGs have catalysed a new generation of locally generated, nationally driven development plans across United Nations member states.

4.5 Planning Tools and Techniques

Table 4 presents the planning tools that respondents reported knowledge of and use in development planning.

Table 4

Planning Tools Used in National Development Planning

Planning Tool / Technique	Count (n = 100)
SWOT Analysis	49
PESTLE Analysis	37
Scenario Analysis	13
Cost-Benefit Analysis	12
Problem Tree Analysis	10
Stakeholder Analysis	9
Balanced Scorecard	5
Needs Assessment	3
Other (Bottleneck Analysis, Mind Mapping, GIS)	4

Respondents demonstrated familiarity with a narrow range of primarily situation-analysis tools, particularly SWOT (49) and PESTLE (37). This level of awareness, while indicative of foundational planning competency, is significantly limited when assessed against the full arsenal of tools required for effective planning. Critically absent from responses were stakeholder engagement tools such as participatory rural appraisal and citizen engagement platforms; goal-setting tools such as backward mapping and theory of change; implementation and monitoring frameworks including logic models, results-based management systems, and M&E toolkits (Kusek & Rist, 2004; Örtengren, 2016; United Nations Children's Fund [UNICEF], 2017); and advanced data analysis and visualisation tools including GIS, data dashboards, and statistical software (Attah et al., 2024; Ki, 2018; Srivastava, 2023). This absence has direct negative implications for the quality, rigour, and implementability of development plans produced in Zambia.

4.6 Enablers for Planning and Implementation

Table 5 presents respondents' assessments of the availability of key enablers for development planning and implementation.

Table 5

Enablers for Development Planning and Implementation (Likert Scale Responses, n = 100)

Enabler Statement	SD	D	N	A	SA
Adequate information resources are used by planners in developing plans	0%	26%	34%	32%	8%
There is easy access to information resources for plan development	4%	42%	20%	30%	4%
There are adequate, skilled, and capable staff to develop plans	2%	8%	30%	50%	10%
Governance structures and processes for managing plans are adequate	0%	24%	24%	48%	4%
There is management commitment to planning and implementation	2%	14%	36%	40%	8%
There are adequate financial resources to support planning	24%	44%	20%	10%	2%
There are adequate physical resources (infrastructure, equipment)	10%	44%	22%	22%	2%

Note: SD = Strongly Disagree; D = Disagree; N = Neutral; A = Agree; SA = Strongly Agree. Source: Primary data (2024).

The findings reveal a bifurcated enablement environment. Human capital and governance are considered adequate: 60% of respondents agreed that planners possess adequate skills and capabilities, and 52% affirmed adequate governance structures. However, informational, financial, and physical resources are critically deficient: 66% disagreed or strongly disagreed that adequate financial resources exist for planning and implementation, and 54% similarly disagreed regarding physical resources. Information access was also rated poorly, with 46% disagreeing that adequate information resources are available. Management commitment exhibited ambivalence, with a combined 48% expressing neutrality or disagreement. These findings are consistent with those of Kanyamuna et al. (2023) and suggest that

Zambia's planning system is institutionally structured but structurally under-resourced, a condition that severely constrains effective plan development and implementation.

4.7 Monitoring and Evaluation of Development Plans

Monitoring and evaluation findings were generally more positive than other dimensions assessed. The majority of respondents agreed or strongly agreed on the availability of M&E policies (50%), M&E strategies (52%), annual work plans (80%), performance reporting structures (60%), and management review committees (70%). These findings align with the FAO and UNDP (2019) observation that M&E systems are increasingly embedded in national planning and budgeting processes in Africa. However, a critical caveat is warranted: the National Assembly of Zambia's Committee on Cabinet Affairs conducted an investigation into the implementation of the National M&E Policy and found it significantly inadequate, ultimately recommending a review of the policy and the enactment of legislation to strengthen its implementation (National Assembly of Zambia, 2023). This suggests that while formal M&E structures appear to exist on paper, their practical effectiveness in tracking plan implementation, ensuring course correction, and generating accountability remains substantially inadequate. This gap between the existence of M&E structures and their effective operationalisation is a recurring theme in Zambia's planning experience (Kanyamuna et al., 2020).

4.8 Governance and Management of Development Planning

The findings on planning governance and management were mixed. On the positive side, respondents broadly agreed on the adequacy of planning laws (56%), the existence of a national planning and budgeting policy (62%), the presence of planning guidelines and standards (72%), the use of systems to monitor plan implementation (52%), and the embedding of development plan content in institutional and functional strategic plans (50% and 52% respectively). Sixty-four per cent also confirmed the existence of designated positions in organisational structures for managing development plans. However, significant structural weaknesses were identified: 48% disagreed or strongly disagreed that structures with adequate positions exist at the Ministry of Finance, provincial, and district offices for managing national development plans; and 42% expressed disagreement or uncertainty about whether those designated positions were actually filled. These gaps are significant, as they imply that planning governance exists at the policy and legislative level but is not consistently operationalised at the institutional level, particularly at sub-national tiers where plan implementation is most dependent on staffed structures (Kanyamuna et al., 2023). This observation validates the argument by Kanyamuna et al. (2023, p. 409) that "Zambia's frameworks for planning, budgeting, monitoring and evaluation would require restructuring to remove redundancies, repetitions and unnecessary bureaucracies" and that plans at provincial and district levels remain "weak and fragmented."

V. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

This study set out to investigate the fundamental question of why Zambia has remained a developing country despite more than six decades of continuous engagement in national development planning. The investigation, conducted through a comprehensive empirical assessment of seven key tenets of development planning practice, yields a nuanced verdict: Zambia possesses the foundational elements of a functioning planning culture, but systemic weaknesses in process, content, tools, resources, and governance collectively prevent this culture from translating into transformative development outcomes. On the positive side, Zambia has sustained a development planning tradition anchored by qualified and experienced planners, multi-level institutional participation, alignment of plans with global development frameworks, and established legal and policy governance structures. These constitute genuine institutional assets that should not be discounted.

On the deficit side, however, the study identifies a constellation of structural failures: the planning process is inadequately understood and inconsistently applied, with implementation plans habitually lagging behind parent plans; plan content does not comprehensively cover all dimensions of development; access to information for evidence-based planning is constrained by weak information infrastructure; planners' tool repertoire is narrow and insufficient for complex planning tasks; financial and physical resources for planning are critically inadequate; management commitment to the planning function is ambivalent; and the governance architecture, while legally established, is understaffed and operationally fragmented at sub-national levels. Collectively, these deficits explain why, as successive presidents have observed from Kaunda (1966) to Mwanawasa (2002, 2006), Zambia's planning machinery remains inadequate to the task of driving sustained national development.

5.2 Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are advanced to policy makers, planning practitioners, and development partners with an interest in strengthening Zambia's development planning system. The

Government of Zambia should undertake a fundamental reorganisation of the national development planning function to establish a stable, dedicated, and adequately resourced planning institution. The current oscillation between housing the planning function within a Ministry of National Development Planning and situating it as a department under the Ministry of Finance undermines institutional continuity, expertise accumulation, and the strategic visibility of planning. A dedicated national planning commission or ministry should be established with a clear legislative mandate, sufficient staffing at national, provincial, and district levels, and explicit accountability for plan development and implementation outcomes. The legislative and policy framework governing planning should be strengthened, including the enactment of law to mandate monitoring and evaluation of development plan implementation, a measure recommended by the National Assembly of Zambia but yet to be enacted.

An urgent, structured capacity-building programme is required to equip Zambian planners with a comprehensive command of development planning, including deep understanding of planning processes (bottom-up and top-down), the full repertoire of planning tools and techniques across all stages of the planning cycle, evidence-based plan crafting, and performance monitoring and reporting. Planners across all levels should be exposed to advanced tools including results-based management frameworks, theory of change, multi-criteria decision analysis, GIS-based data analysis, and modern M&E systems. Capacity building should also address institutional memory by ensuring cross-generational transfer of planning expertise and institutional knowledge across successive plan cycles.

The availability of reliable, accessible, and comprehensive information is a foundational prerequisite for quality development planning. Zambia must urgently establish a national information management policy and invest in an information infrastructure, including a national library, a national data portal, and strengthened National Statistics Office capacity, that enables planners at all levels to access timely and relevant data, research, and policy analysis. Collaboration with international agencies including UNDP, the World Bank, and the Economic Commission for Africa should be formalised to ensure systematic access to global datasets and development intelligence. The development planning function must be properly resourced, with adequate financial allocations, human capital, physical infrastructure, and technological tools, if it is to deliver quality plans and effective implementation. Development plans and their implementation plans must be developed concurrently and approved together, eliminating the structural time-lag that currently delays Year-One implementation. The Government should review budget allocations to planning institutions at national, provincial, and district levels to ensure that resources match the requirements of the planning mandate.

REFERENCES

- Adams, D. (2002). *Education and national development: Priorities, policies, and planning*. Asian Development Bank.
- Aliyu, M. A., Msughter, A. E., & Nneka, A. Q. (2021). Comparative study of national development plans in Nigeria and India: Media dimension. *SIASAT*, 8(4), 202–212.
- Asian Development Bank. (2013). *Cost-benefit analysis for development: A practical guide*. Asian Development Bank.
- Attah, U. R., Garba, P. M. B., Gil-Ozoudeh, I., & Iwuanyanwu, O. (2024). Leveraging geographic information systems and data analytics for enhanced public sector decision-making and urban planning. *Magna Scientia Advanced Research and Reviews*, 12(2), 152–163.
- Banda, B., van Niekerk, D., Nemakonde, L., & Granvorka, C. (2022). Integrated development planning in Zambia: Ideological lens, theoretical underpinnings, current practices, views of the planners. *Development Southern Africa*, 39(3), 338–353.
- Basheer, M., Nechifor, V., Calzadilla, A., Ringler, C., Hulme, D., & Harou, J. J. (2022). Balancing national economic policy outcomes for sustainable development. *Nature Communications*, 13, 4779. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41467-022-32415-9>
- Carlsen, J., & Nazal, S. (2008). *The district development programme in Tanzania (DDP) (Sida Evaluation 2008:55)*. Sida.
- Chaube, S., Pant, S., Kumar, A., Uniyal, S., Singh, K. M., Kotecha, K., & Kumar, A. (2024). An overview of multi-criteria decision analysis and the applications of AHP and TOPSIS methods. *International Journal of Mathematical, Engineering and Management Sciences*, 9(3), 581–615.
- Chilufya, B. L. (2023). *The resourcing of Ward Development Committees (WDCs) and its impact on the effectiveness in executing their functions*. Local Government Association of Zambia. https://caritazambia.org/phocadownload/policy_briefs/Policy-Brief-Paper-on-Resourcing-WDCs.pdf
- Chimhowu, A. O., Hulme, D., & Munro, T. L. (2019). The ‘new’ national development planning and global development goals: Processes and partnerships. *World Development*, 120, 76–89. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2019.03.013>
- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.

- DeLuca, L. (2017). United Nations: Online data repositories and resources. *College & Research Libraries News*, 78(1), 41–45.
- Dimitriou, H. T., & Thompson, R. (Eds.). (2007). *Strategic planning for regional development in the UK* (1st ed.). Routledge.
- Erlina, M. A., Kesuma, I. S., Muda, I., & Erwin, K. (2020). Regional development planning in North Sumatera: The effect of conflict of interest. *International Journal of Innovation, Creativity and Change*, 11(1), 666–685.
- Food and Agriculture Organization & United Nations Development Programme. (2019). *Integrating agriculture into national adaptation plans*. FAO/UNDP.
- Fukuda-Parr, S. (2022). Sustainable development goals (SDGs) and the promise of a transformative agenda. *CDP Policy Review Series*. United Nations Committee for Development Policy.
- Göçoğlu, V., Düzsöz, E., & Demirko, A. (2025). Challenges and priorities in achieving the sustainable development goals: A multi-scaled global analysis. *Sustainable Development*, 33, 6247–6259.
- Gumede, W. (2009). *Comparative development planning (Development Planning Division Working Paper Series No. 8)*. Development Bank of Southern Africa.
- Hadingham, T. (2003). Decentralisation and development planning: Some practical considerations. *International Labour Organization*.
- Harrison, T. (2023). *The resurgence of national development planning and the challenge of alignment*. Overseas Development Institute.
- Jales, M. (2017). *The missing link between economic growth and development: The case of copper-dependent Zambia*. United Nations Conference on Trade and Development.
- Japan International Cooperation Agency. (2007). *A review of the FNDP, PDP and DDP development processes*. Institute for International Cooperation.
- Kanyamuna, V., Katowa, T., Mubita, A., Kanenga, H., Simui, F., & Kotze, D. A. (2020). Analysis of structural and organisational arrangements of monitoring and evaluation status for the public sector in Zambia. *Advances in Social Sciences Research Journal*, 7(6), 504–527.
- Kanyamuna, V., Siamabele, B., Phiri, M., Mubita, A., & Kalonje, V. (2023). Planning, monitoring and evaluation arrangements in Zambia's public sector: Shifting sands or a solid rock? *Advances in Social Sciences Research Journal*, 10(11), 382–413.
- Ki, J. (2018). Geographic information system and big data visualization. In *IntechOpen*. <https://doi.org/10.5772/intechopen.82052>
- Kismana, A. Z., & Tasar, I. (2014). The key elements of local development. *Procedia Economics and Finance*, 15, 1689–1696.
- Kostka, G. (2012). Environmental protection bureau leadership at the provincial level in China: Examining diverging career backgrounds and implications for environmental governance. *Journal of Environmental Policy and Planning*, 16(1), 41–57.
- Kusek, J. Z., & Rist, R. C. (2004). *Ten steps to a results-based monitoring and evaluation system: A handbook for development practitioners*. World Bank.
- National Assembly of Zambia. (2023). *Report of the Committee on Cabinet Affairs on the implementation of the National Monitoring and Evaluation Policy in Zambia*. Republic of Zambia.
- Nwokwu, P. M., & Ndukwe, C. (2021). Development plans as veritable tools for national development: Evidence from Nigeria. *International Journal of Business and Management Invention*, 10(9), 28–37.
- OECD. (2020). *Key trends in development co-operation for national data and statistical systems (OECD Development Co-operation Policy Papers No. 31)*. OECD Publishing.
- Onyeaghalaji, N. M., & Igberaese, E. D. (2010). Knowledge management and capacity building for sustainable development in Africa. *Journal of Sustainable Development in Africa*, 12(2), 268–283.
- Örtengren, K. (2016). *A guide to results-based management (RBM): Efficient project planning with the aid of the Logical Framework Approach (LFA)*. Swedish International Development Cooperation.
- Petkovic, J., Magwood, O., Lytvyn, L., Khabsa, J., Concannon, W. T., Welch, V., & Tugwell, P. (2023). Key issues for stakeholder engagement in the development of health and healthcare guidelines. *Research Involvement and Engagement*, 9(1), 27. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40900-023-00433-6>
- Rasmussen, M. A. (2001). Information and development: The information effect. *Information Development*, 17(1), 12–18.
- Republic of Uganda. (2020). *Third national development plan (NDPIII) 2020/21–2024/25*. National Planning Authority.
- Republic of Zambia. (1966). *First national development plan 1966–1970*. Government Printers.
- Republic of Zambia. (1996). *National capacity building assessment*. Ministry of Finance and National Planning.
- Republic of Zambia. (2002). *Zambia transitional national development plan 2002–2005*. Ministry of Finance and National Planning.

- Republic of Zambia. (2006). *Vision 2030*. Government Printers.
- Republic of Zambia. (2011). *Sixth national development plan 2011–2015*. Ministry of Finance and National Planning.
- Republic of Zambia. (2014). *National planning and budgeting policy: Responsive, transparent, accountable and results-oriented development planning and budgeting processes*. Ministry of Finance.
- Republic of Zambia. (2017). *Seventh national development plan 2017–2021*. Ministry of Finance and National Planning.
- Republic of Zambia. (2022). *Eighth national development plan 2022–2026*. Ministry of Finance and National Planning.
- Republic of Zambia. (2023). *Eighth national development plan—Implementation plan 2022–2026*. Ministry of Finance and National Planning.
- Royo, G. M., Diep, L., Mulligan, J., Mukanga, P., & Parikh, P. (2022). Linking the UN sustainable development goals and African Agenda 2063: Understanding overlaps and gaps between the global goals and continental priorities for Africa. *World Development Sustainability, 1*, 100010. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wds.2022.100010>
- Sambumbu, M. A., & Okanga, B. (2016). Integrated strategies for managing the implementation of the national development plan. *Journal of Contemporary Management, 13*, 866–891.
- Srivastava, D. (2023). An introduction to data visualization tools and techniques in various domains. *International Journal of Computer Trends and Technology, 71*(4), 125–130.
- Todaro, M. P., & Smith, S. C. (2011). *Economic development* (11th ed.). Pearson.
- Tran, Q. N., & Carden, L. L. (2022). Work from anywhere: Remote stakeholder management and engagement. *Personnel Review, 51*(8), 2021–2038.
- Turner, M., & Wangchuk, D. (2025). National development planning and sustainability: The case of Bhutan. *Sustainability, 17*, 3261. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su17073261>
- United Nations Children’s Fund. (2017). *Results-based management handbook: Working together for children*. UNICEF.
- United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. (1966). *Administration of national development planning: Report of a meeting of experts held at Paris, France, 8–19 June 1964*. United Nations.
- United Nations Development Programme. (2009). *Handbook on planning, monitoring and evaluating for development results*. UNDP.
- United Nations Human Settlements Programme. (2016). *Regional development authorities engagement framework for Kenya: Towards a new regional planning model in Kenya*. UN-Habitat.
- World Bank. (2002). *World Bank group private sector development strategy*. World Bank.
- Zulu, K., Kanyamuna, V., Chunga, K. C., & Simenti-Phiri, E. (2023). The changing paradigms of national development planning: An enigma or a necessity? *World Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities, 9*(1), 34–47.