CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT, DECENTRALIZATION AND SERVICE DELIVERY IN AFRICA

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AFRICAN ASSOCIATION FOR PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AND MANAGEMENT (AAPAM)

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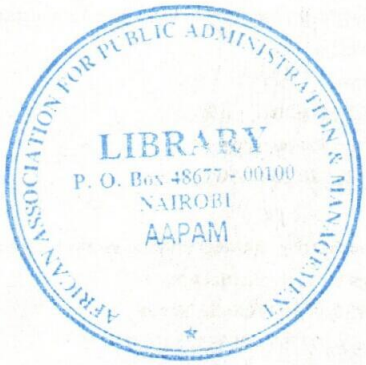

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Foreword

A significant milestone in the development of African Public Administration and Management was reached at the 33rd African Association for Public Administration and Management (AAPAM) Roundtable Conference held in Lilongwe, Malawi from the 14th – 18th November 2011. Participants from twenty nine (29) English and French speaking countries among them Cabinet Ministers, Heads of Public/Civil Service and Secretaries to Cabinet, Permanent/Principal Secretaries and other high ranking Government Officials, Chairpersons and Commissioners of Public Service Commissions, Heads of Management Development Institutes, International Organizations Representatives and other Senior Officers in the public and private sectors met and extensively discussed workable decentralization measures which would effectively promote good governance and citizen engagement in public service delivery. The conference which informs the publication of this book, centered on positioning citizens' participation at the heart of democracy, governance and service delivery.

For over half a century, African countries have been implementing and are in different stages of decentralization. However, for decentralization to fully achieve its intended objectives, a number of bottlenecks need to be surmounted by all the actors engaged in this process. Some countries face the challenge of lack of harmonization between the constitutional and legal frameworks and actual practice, thus hampering decentralization initiatives. Political and bureaucratic hurdles have equally been cited to derail the process in the continent. Further, fiscal and human constraints continue to negatively affect the decentralization process in many African nations.

I have observed that whatever democratic model each of our countries may have adopted, citizen engagement and participation is becoming a growing and imperative trend. Evidently, citizens are demanding to be fully consulted and engaged in governance issues around and about them.

This book therefore focuses on citizen engagement through decentralization, which has itself been a major policy drive in the last decade as countries have sought to deepen democracy and promote good governance. Some of the highlights of the articles in this book include the importance of supporting local governments to strengthen their planning and implementing capabilities, thereby building the capacities of citizens to engage their elected representatives. This form of engagement will enable governments to build national decentralized systems of local government that demonstrate the ability to provide economical, efficient and effective services in a bid to foster development. For decentralization to be inclusive, communities should be involved and engaged in the implementation processes. Emphasis should also be put on building horizontal and vertical accountability systems in the local procurement and accounting processes among others. Decentralization is indeed an effective tool for citizen participation, especially where predictable and transparent revenue sources for devolved bodies are clearly established. Countries should also ensure that financial and human resource devolution accompanies functional devolution. As much as possible it is critically important that key issues in decentralization are constitutionally and legislatively protected.

For countries, scholars, policymakers, managers, leaders, administrators, students and the general public who are keen to make and implement informed policies on matters of decentralization, this book is thus a priceless asset for development as far as citizen engagement in governance is concerned.

Finally my deep appreciation goes to the editors, George K. Scott and Malcolm Wallis who have endlessly reviewed this book. I additionally, acknowledge the priceless contribution of the AAPAM secretariat who have fruitfully steered this book project. The publication of this book has also been made possible by the support of the Administrative Staff College of Nigeria (ASCON) and Eastern and Southern African Management Institute (ESAMI), who provided their expertise to ensure the success of the book.

Further, I would like to thank the AAPAM Executive Committee, whose commitment and support has not only encouraged the effective management of AAPAM, but also propelled the success of its programs and projects like the publication of this book.

To all who in one way or the other contributed to the successful production of this book, though not mentioned herein, we say thank you.

Abdon Agaw Jok Nhial
AAPAM President

Acknowledgments

This book is undoubtedly an outcome of collaborative efforts and the success of the 33rd AAPAM Roundtable Conference held in Lilongwe, Malawi in 2011. We would like to thank the Government of Malawi for hosting the conference and allowing delegates from across the globe convene, debate and share ideas on the theme *Strengthening Citizen Engagement Through Decentralization To Enhance Public Service Delivery in Africa*. Special thanks are extended to other African Governments, corporate and individual members of AAPAM who have supported the production of this book.

I would like to appreciate my co-editor Prof. Malcolm Wallis for his enormous contributions; with his expertise we were able to pull together this valuable volume of knowledge. I further would like to thank Mr. A.A. Peters of the Administrative Staff College of Nigeria (ASCON) and Prof. Boniface Mwape of the Eastern and Southern African Management Institute (ESAMI) who provided an additional review panel that effectively went through all the papers and provided a conclusive report which majorly defined this book.

AAPAM wishes to acknowledge the technical and financial support of our development partners; the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), Institute of Public Administration Canada (IPAC) and Deloitte Canada and East Africa. We highly appreciate and acknowledge the valuable contribution of all our authors for their well-researched and informative wealth of knowledge that forms the content of this book. Finally I thank the effortless contributions of Ms. Jessica Omundo, Ms. Elizabeth Muia and the entire staff of AAPAM Secretariat who worked endlessly to ensure that the book project is a resounding success.

George K. Scott
AAPAM Secretary General

About the Editors

Mr. George K. Scott is the current Secretary General of the African Association for Public Administration and Management (AAPAM). He has a wide range of experience in public administration, having served in different capacities in the public service of Ghana. He has served as Chief Director (Permanent Secretary) in the Ministries of Environment, Science, Technology and Aviation, Ghana. Mr. Scott also served as a Municipal Coordinating Director in many districts in Ghana. He is experienced in coordinating various international and donor funded programmes and was the Project Director of the recent AAPAM Member Value Research Survey, which was carried out in collaboration with Deloitte. The aim of the research survey was to develop a deeper understanding of current and prospective member needs and career concerns of the Public Service of Africa. He also served as a part time lecturer on the Post Graduate Diploma Course in the Ghana Institute of Management and Public Administration (GIMPA) and has published a number of books.

Prof. Malcolm Wallis is a lecturer and researcher at the Regent Business School, South Africa. He has been a long serving academician, researcher and consultant making distinct contributions to the field of public administration and management in Africa. He has published academic works that have been extensively published in various renowned publications including the African Journal of Public Administration and Management. He also received the AAPAM Gold Medal Award during the 33rd Roundtable Conference held in Lilongwe, Malawi 2011.

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Introduction

George K. Scott and Malcolm Wallis

This volume has emerged from a roundtable conference held in Malawi in 2011, the theme of which concerned decentralization, service delivery and citizen engagement in Africa. Organized by the African Association for Public Administration and Management (AAPAM), such conferences are held annually in different countries on the continent and aim to be a forum for debate on varied important issues of management, governance and development. Founded over forty years ago, AAPAM has on several occasions published its deliberations and research based articles both in books, monographs and through its journal *The African Journal of Public Administration and Management.* It is an important part of the association's strategic plan to publish, in order to provide members and non – members with access to information and analysis related to the challenges the public sectors face in Africa.

For some time now there has been a global consensus that citizen engagement and decentralization have the potential to enhance effectiveness in public service delivery. For example, some years before the Malawi conference, AAPAM had debated service delivery issues in Arusha, Tanzania (AAPAM 2006). Countries all over the world have adopted economic and governance reform strategies to ensure citizens play a key role in deciding matters that affect their lives with a particular emphasis placed on engagement at local level, often, but definitely not always, through elected authorities. More or less in parallel with this trend, at the national level, countries have adopted democratic reforms to enable greater citizens' participation through elected representatives. However, development challenges as diagnosed and debated both within nations and globally, and citizens' pressure for greater participation and political pressures have demanded the devising of mechanisms that would enable citizens to take a more direct and active role in governance. In turn, several governments have responded by adopting decentralized governance as a viable mechanism to realize and enhance citizen engagement through strengthening local governments.

Decentralization is a term frequently used, in this book and elsewhere, to mean the transfer of legal, administrative and political authority to make decisions and manage public functions from the central government to field-based units of those agencies, subordinate units of government, semi-autonomous public corporations, area-wide development authorities, functional authorities, autonomous local governments, or non-governmental organizations. While the foregoing definition of decentralization is broadly accepted, there are divergent views on the optimal approach to decentralize power and authority from the centre to sub-national level. There are those who see decentralization as an organizational and managerial solution to issues of efficiency and effectiveness in governance and service delivery. Here, effectiveness is conceived in terms of internal characteristics and dynamics of public institutions. In this case, decentralization is related to ensuring the realization of relatively high levels of employee motivation and productivity, smooth communication between various levels of organizational hierarchy, participation in decision-making by employees at lower hierarchical levels and increased capacity to achieve organizational goals at reduced cost. Under this situation decentralization involves deconcentration of the workload from the central locations of government departments (headquarters) to offices of the organization, based outside the headquarters. It centres on transferring responsibility and authority for public functions to organizations within well-defined sub-national, spatial or political boundaries such as a province, region, district, villages and neighbourhoods.

On the other hand, there are those who see decentralization as a governance mechanism that is intended to empower citizens to participate in decision making either directly or through their elected representatives. Invariably, this involves the devolution/ transfer of governmental power and authority through conferment of legal powers upon formally constituted local authorities to discharge specified or residual functions. This entails inter-organizational transfer of power to geographical units of local government lying outside the command structure of the central government.

In many parts of the world new forms of decentralized governance have been realized through establishment of democratically elected institutions at regional/provincial, district and grassroots (community) levels. This has sometimes gone hand in hand with the devolution of political, administrative and fiscal powers as well as

resources and functions to those institutions. However, a caveat needs to be entered here; in many cases, and not just in Africa by any means, the tendency has been to decentralize without supporting powers, functions and resources; this can be seen as a recipe for failure.

Globally, public sector reform efforts have been geared toward strengthening citizens' voice in governance and delivery of public services. Lessons learnt from several countries also have shown that participatory public administration is not only an effective mechanism to improve service delivery to especially poor communities, but also a new agenda in support of poverty reduction and social accountability.

In Africa, the current efforts to strengthen local governance, which began in the 1980s, stem from the widespread realization of the failures of the post-independence centralized states to deliver public services. A good and comprehensive account of this issue was published in the 1990s and depicts the dysfunctional effects of centralization in a number of African states (Wunsch and Olowu 1995). By the early eighties many African governments and observers had realized that outcomes of centralization were a burden to them and were seen to be resulting in state failure. Under pressure for reforms from international sources such as donors (particularly the World Bank) and more domestic players, African states revisited their centralization strategies by looking at the possibilities of re-opening avenues of citizen participation and creating more decentralized forms of governance.

The 1990s saw a wave of democratization which intensified these pressures for governance and economic reforms. As part of public sector reform undertakings, many governments reviewed their local government policies with the aim of creating more autonomous and accountable local authorities. In recognition of the potential benefits of decentralized governance, many governments pronounced and/or adopted decentralization by devolution (the creation of relatively autonomous elected bodies at local level) as a mechanism of promoting good governance and improvement in service delivery through strengthening citizens' engagement. However, only a few countries have taken sufficient steps to effectively implement decentralized governance. Some countries have partially implemented such reforms, but there are others that have not accepted decentralization as a potential reform measure. Consequently, gains of citizen engagement in promoting poverty reduction, good governance and service delivery are yet to be optimally realized. Some countries, which however, have been commended for having moved a step forward by entrenching decentralization by devolution in their constitutions, include South Africa, Rwanda, Ghana and Uganda. Nonetheless, even in these countries challenges of local governance still persist despite the attempt to improve the constitutional and legal framework for local governance.

When delegates convened from 14th to 18th November 2011 at the Cross-Roads Hotel in Lilongwe, Malawi, they engaged in spirited and well informed discussions on the theme *Strengthening Citizen Engagement through Decentralization to Enhance Public Service Delivery in Africa.* The Choice of this theme arose from the realization that a major constraint to effective implementation of such visions by African countries is the inadequate engagement of citizens in governance and development through decentralization of powers, resources, functions and responsibilities to autonomous local government. Whether at plenary sessions or in syndicate groups, the Roundtable participants displayed keen interest and awareness not only of the theme but also on how decentralization is closely connected to democratic governance and service delivery. They explored how citizens can effectively be involved in these processes, thereby contributing to the development of the nations of Africa.

While the Roundtable attracted presentations from many eminent administrators and renowned academics, only a few of the contributions have been included as chapters in this volume. The chapters in this book have been assembled and refined as a response to the issues delineated above. The content of the present volume addresses issues of strengthening citizen participation in a decentralized environment from different perspective so as to improve public service delivery.

The first chapters are largely conceptual, but also draw on evidence based research to illustrate and explain some important and sometimes confusing terms. This includes the often problematic triangular combination of the key words often used in the book – decentralization, deconcentration and devolution. At both conceptual

and more empirical levels, the authors have, from various perspectives, linked these terms to issues of citizen engagement and service delivery in the context of African development in general but also on particular national experiences, drawing on a wealth of literature, much of it recent, to do so.

As noted by the eminent Ghanaian researcher and former national minister responsible for local government, Kwamena Ahwoi, there are numerous challenges to be faced in Africa. He dealt with these in his 'keynote' address to the roundtable as well as in a presentation on the case of Ghana, where he was closely involved as a key role player at national level. Challenges emerge frequently in the volume, for example, there are chapters discussing local economic development, community empowerment and leadership and service delivery in rural areas which make reference to the difficulties which African states face in taking forward the directions being discussed. Whilst it is unwise to generalize on such matters, what does emerge from these findings is the conclusion that, much has been attempted yet, the results of these initiatives have so far been rather limited in the impact made on peoples' lives. Most emphatically, however, the option of reverting to a more centralized model is not seen as part of the agenda going forward.

One of the other issues emerging from these accounts is that there are specific challenges associated with rural development in many African states. These have been looked at in some depth in the case of Malawi. Various parts of the book also feature the influence of donors, roles played by politicians, dynamics of communities and, recurring and serious problem of implementation which have a number of aspects requiring consideration and action by governments. The book chapters provide a general focus as well as, those on specific country case studies like Malawi, Mali and Ghana. Other authors, in the process of addressing general themes make in depth reference to particular experiences, examples being Kenya and Nigeria.

AAPAM and the editors hope that the present volume will contribute to the ongoing debates on decentralization, service delivery and citizen engagement in Africa. The importance of such debates cannot readily be overestimated given the continuing gap between what needs to be achieved and what is in place currently. Latterly, these debates, related controversies and conflicts have heightened in intensity in many places, reinforcing the need for informative knowledge as presented in this volume. Possibilities for research arise accordingly; it is hoped that academics and public servants will feel encouraged to undertake such work, perhaps drawing on what has been presented here.

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Chapter 1

Theoretical and Conceptual Perspectives to Enhance Citizens' Engagement in Decentralization in Africa

Yasin Olum

Abstract

Decentralization and citizen engagement have a symbiotic relationship. On the one hand, decentralization requires some degree of citizens' engagement because the creation of local governments enables them to respond better to local needs and efficiently match public spending to private needs due to the existence of information flow between the citizens and the local governments. On the other hand, the decentralization process enhances the opportunities for citizen engagement by placing more power and resources at a more easily influenced level of government. The benefit of this symbiotic relationship is that it can ultimately lead to the creation of regular and predictable opportunities for citizen-state interface. However, the symbiotic relationship between decentralization and citizen engagement can end up producing contradictory policy outcomes. This article deals with two key theoretical and conceptual issues. First, broad mechanisms for citizen input are critical in the design of decentralization policy. Here, the argument is that the types of institutional mechanisms for decentralization that are embedded in the specific national environment can only be developed over a long period of time, and not by a simple legislation. The second issue deals with the specific avenues for citizen engagement and empowerment that can be created and nurtured in the process of decentralization. The latter argument is that incremental changes can eventually evolve toward broader opportunities for citizen engagement and democratic governance. Besides these two-prong arguments, the article will also argue that effective decentralization for citizen engagement requires both political and civil will, capacity development at the local level, and careful implementation.

Introduction

The relationship between decentralization and citizen engagement is symbiotic. On the one hand, decentralization requires some degree of citizen engagement in the sense that the creation of local governments enables them to respond better to their local needs and efficiently match public spending to private needs, because of the existence of information flow between the citizens and the local governments. On the other hand, the decentralization process can enhance the opportunities for citizen engagement by placing more power and resources at a more easily influenced level of government. The benefit of this symbiotic relationship, which is more noticeable in areas which have low traditions of citizen engagement, is that it can ultimately lead to the creation of regular and predictable opportunities for state-citizen interface. However, the symbiotic relationship between decentralization and citizen engagement can end up producing - and sometimes does produce – contradictory policy guidelines. Sometimes the contradictions arise from the different conceptions attributed to decentralization itself.

Given the plethora of understandings of the concept "decentralization", Leonard (1982) concludes that a single universally applicable typology of decentralization is impossible. This article conceives "decentralization" as the process through which the central government transfers its powers, functions, responsibility and finances, or decision-making power to other entities away from the center to either lower levels of government, or dispersed central state agencies, or the private sector. It is a mechanism for bringing government closer to citizens to enhance local service delivery and local participation. The assumption in this article is that through strengthening local institutions and local administration then service delivery can be improved and there is greater likelihood of ownership, sustainability and lasting impact on poverty. Besides this conceptualization is the fact that there must be significant and effective decentralization before local governments can successfully involve citizens in decision-making processes. This issue raises the concern regarding the meaning of citizen engagement and/or participation.

To King and Martinelli (2005: 2-3), citizen engagement means something other than citizen involvement or participation. To them, citizen participation happens in a traditional production model of governance where citizens are stakeholders who act in a consultation role to and with established institutions. Specifically, Fox and Van Rooyen (1995: 20) define citizen participation as:

> The involvement of citizens in a wide range of administrative policy-making activities, including the determination of levels of service, budget priorities and the acceptability of physical construction projects in order to orient government programmes toward community needs, builds public support, and encourages a sense of cohesiveness within society.

In qualifying the notion of "citizen participation" further, Brynard (1996: 40) views it as "a process wherein the common amateurs of a community exercise power over decisions related to the general affairs of a community". By "common amateurs" he means non-elite citizens, namely; persons without paid office, wealth, special information, or other formal power sources beyond their own numbers, and whose control is only gained from the participatory process. He identifies the following objectives of citizen participation: providing information to citizens; getting information from citizens; improving public decisions, programmes, projects, and services; enhancing acceptance of public decisions, programmes, projects, and services; supplementing public agency work; altering political power patterns and allocation of resources; protecting individual and minority group rights and interests; and delaying or avoiding complicating difficult public decisions.

On the other hand, "citizen engagement" comes out of a co-production model of governance where citizens are an essential part of the production process. In theory, engaged citizens are committed to some larger sense of the "common good" beyond their individual and independent selves. Engagement fosters a sense of citizenship that extends beyond what individuals get to some larger notion of the roles and responsibilities of individuals as part of a collective. Thus, citizen engagement includes:

All measures and/or institutional arrangements that link citizens more directly into decision-making process of a state as to enable them to influence the public policies and programmes in a manner that impact positively on their economic and social lives (UNDESA 2007).

Clearly, engagement and empowerment go hand-in-hand. Empowerment means taking power where power is due or can be due. However, the problem with the term empowerment is that it is often used in a patronizing way in that those in power claim to "empower" those who are not in power. It is, therefore, important to view empowerment as an organic notion: people come to recognize the ready power needed to do what needs to be done through harnessing it.

However, citizen engagement and participation do not necessarily lead to empowerment. Participatory governance can be measured by the changes in the numbers of citizens participating in elections, representative bodies, among others, as well as by changes in its scope i.e., the group which is participating and how inclusive the process is (Crook 2003: 4). Thus, for empowerment to occur, participation must be 'effective' so as to enforce accountability and changes in behavior within relevant government bureaucracies. This new construction arises from the realization that programs designed on a top-down basis which alienate the grassroots, tend to favor the interests of the powerful, wealthy and influential members of the society.

In regard to citizen engagement, this notion historically evolved from the liberal democratic tradition of reducing the frontiers of the state while, at the same time, embracing the theory of public-choice. Citizen engagement has been advanced by international multilateral agencies spearheaded by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund through their neo-liberal policy prescriptions. Their central argument is that offering citizens more choice would stimulate competition as well as enable the public service to become more efficient and service-oriented by embracing citizens' interests (African Development Bank 2005: 128-129).

This article argues that decentralization should be in position to institutionalize citizen engagement in democratic governance if its implementation is to be successful. To analyze the symbiosis between decentralization and citizen engagement from both theoretical and conceptual perspectives, the following themes will be addressed: institutional mechanism for decentralized citizen engagement, creating spaces for citizen participation, the degree of both political and civil will in the decentralization process, capacity development at the local level, careful implementation of decentralization, and embedding democratic governance through decentralization. Before discussing these themes, however, it is imperative to trace briefly the acclaimed benefits of decentralization from three perspectives, namely: developmentalist, democratizing and centralist.

Benefits of Decentralization

The developmentalists, including the mainstream development donors, advocate decentralization, because it will lead to improved provision of services and more equitable economic development; bring government closer to the people; facilitate local participation especially of the poor and thus allow government to better understand the people's needs; improve public policy design; educate people to become full citizens; reduce conflict by helping people to accept government decisions; make local economies more prosperous and more equitable; and socially integrate the community.

The democratizers identify the following benefits of decentralization: it opens the way for popular participation in making decisions about policy design and implementation; it enhances greater citizen input in governance by strengthening both local elites and the central state; and it yields higher levels of government responsiveness, honesty, legitimacy, and tolerance among citizens. The latter benefit hinges on the fact that local officials have better knowledge of local conditions than central government officials and are thus better positioned to respond to local tastes and preferences (Burki et. al. 1999: 22).

Centralists argue that, decentralization transfers social conflicts as well as resources and responsibilities to the local level, where there is greater political inequality. However, they note that decentralization reinforces relationships of subordination and pulverization of the relative strength of subaltern actors. They also argue that corruption and clientelism are more prevalent at the local level, making participation unattractive to many citizens as well as, making participation itself undemocratic. Lastly, they observe that, decentralization hinders development because local governments are less technically capable than central government, since the state loses regulatory capacity and fiscal control.

The difficulty of finding strong and consistent evidence of direct causal linkages between decentralization and many of the acclaimed benefits that its advocates advance in its favour may lead to the conclusion that decentralization can be instrumental in promoting development and good governance but it is not a panacea or an end in itself. In short, decentralization has its own political dynamics and is by no means a universal 'good' (Barkan and Chege 1989). Thus, if the acclaimed benefits of decentralization are to be achieved, a number of critical factors as outlined before have to be taken into consideration. This is the subject of the next thematic sections.

Institutional Mechanism

One important factor contributing to the prospects for a successful decentralization reform process is the institutional arrangements/coordination surrounding it (Litvack et. al. 1998: 7-8; Mutahaba 1991: 87-90; Steffensen et. al. 2004). Decentralization, while being both technical and political, is largely about the latter. The decentralization of political power within states requires the creation of decision-making institutions which are both elected and appointed (Smith 1985: 122). Rhodes (1995: 46) sees political institutions as "instrumentalities". He notes that, the state is a human grouping in which rules a certain power-relationship between its individual and associated constituents. Some of the political institutions cover the elements of state organization, including democracy, separation of powers, constitutions, center-local relations, and federalism.

Theoretically, the institutional approach makes statements about the causes and consequences of political institutions and it espouses the political values of liberal democracy. Therefore, the broad mechanism for citizen input in political institutions is critical in the design of decentralization policy. The institutionalized channels for citizens' engagement in decentralization and the ability of the citizens to use them are two critical factors which should be taken into account as design parameters for decentralization programs in any country.

Thus, local government institutions should provide the opportunity for citizens' participation (Ali and Ali 1985: 298). However, the types of institutional mechanisms that are created in the specific national environment can only be developed over a long period of time, not by simple legislation. This is not to say that legislation is unimportant. Indeed, national constitutions should legislate, not nebulously, the institutional framework for citizen participation. The new spaces for citizen input and written into organic laws should be put into practice, and not manipulated by political leaders or technocrats for patronage, or private interest purposes.

The institutional channels through which development activity can take place are of different kinds (see Uphoff 1985: 48-58). Three basic types of institutions are identifiable. The first is governmental or quasi-governmental institutions where the authority and other resources of the state are involved, either directly or by delegation. The second type of institutions is membership or self-help, where persons have joined together to advance their interests through collective action. The third type of institutions is private or quasi-private, where decisions can be made by owners on a for-profit basis, or by patrons and contributors on a charitable basis. These three types of institutions can be divided into local level sets of institutions, namely; local administration (bureaucratic), local government (forum for political representation), membership organizations, co-operatives, service organizations, and private businesses. These distinctions are crucial for evaluating possibilities for decentralization.

However, local institutions can only be regarded as legitimate and salient to the people's lives if they engage them in governance. Reciprocating "linkages", rather than autonomy for local institutions will provide more productive relationships for both center and localities. In constructing decentralized institutions, care should be taken that they are not controlled and exploited by more advantaged sections of the rural community. Governments, therefore, need to adopt strategies that promote institutionalized collaboration among state and non-state actors in identifying, analyzing and addressing the "best" approaches in ensuring the success of decentralization. Indeed, experiences from various countries indicate clearly the need to engage civil society so as to guarantee that any actions taken are congruent to the actual needs of citizens.

Furthermore, the institutional framework ought to be constructed in such a way that the management of the

decentralization process creates a great impact on its efficiency and effectiveness as a tool for engagement. The institutions and structures through which responsibilities, power and authority are transferred to local governments should have substantive representatives. Similarly, for local democracy to prevail, clear responsibilities should be defined for the representatives. In other words, decentralization should neither maintain nor further "ongoing legislative apartheid" by reinforcing the power of unrepresentative local leaders. In sum, the more resources, responsibilities, and decision-making authority are transferred downwards, the greater the likelihood of institutionalizing participation because local governments can offer citizens benefits for their participation.

Creation of Spaces for Participation

The concept "participation" is as old as politics, but it was after the Second World War that it was extended to all spheres of life. Its modern use came into effect during the 1960s to express what the European Economic Commission once coined "the democratic imperative". Thisis defined as the principle that "those who will be substantially affected by decisions made by way of social and political institutions must be involved in the making of those decisions (Bullock et. el. 1977).

In international discussions of development policies, "participation' is frequently used to espouse a long socio-historical tradition. Participation by local citizens in the development process has to do with enhanced capacity to perceive their local needs, formulate their demands, organize to promote their legitimate interests, secure conditions for their improved livelihood and play a major role in the management of their own affairs (Olum 1989: 12). Essentially, participation means three things, namely (Nkunika 1987; Lisk 1985; Lisk 1981)): people's involvement in the decision-making process in implementing programmes; people's sharing in the benefits of development programmes; and people's involvement in efforts to evaluate such programs.

Besides these three meanings, participation also refers to organized efforts to increase control over resources and regulative institutions in given social institutions, on the part of groups and movements by those people hitherto excluded from such control (Pearse and Stiefel 1979). In its broadest sense, participation sensitizes people to increase the receptivity and ability of rural people to respond to development programs and to encourage local initiative.

Clothed in the democracy context, the history of democracy is in large part the history of development of regular and legal channels through which citizens can express their preferences and apply pressure on the government to comply with these preferences. In other words, there is a need for continuous interaction between the state and citizens or society generally in a manner that combines social justice and customer focus for citizen empowerment in the dynamics of policy development. Hence, citizens assume the role of "agent" in shaping and implementing public policies which depend more on a collective change of behavior than on the legislative authority of the state.

Several measures can be taken to encourage more widespread participation in local governments (Burki et. al. 1999: 32-3). Four measures will be discussed. The first is to adopt ward or neighborhood-based electoral districts. The election of, say, Councillors by a ward or a neighborhood gives geographically defined interest groups an assured seat in Council and thus some prospect that their involvement in the political process will produce tangible and beneficial results. A second measure is to adopt open, unblocked electoral systems for local elections. This system decreases national party control over elected officials. A third measure is to change the timing of sub-national elections. The timing of local elections should be such that it does not coincide with national elections to avoid local government elections being overshadowed by national elections held at the same time. It also discourages clientelist considerations in the selection of candidates for local office. A fourth measure is where a country is practising multiparty politics. Under multiparty-ism, political parties will provide the critical connectivity between the electorate and the political system. Political parties are an essential instrument for representing political interests, aggregating demands, recruiting and socializing new candidates for office, organizing the electoral competition for power, and forming effective governments (Diamond 1997). Hence, by organizing class and other interests, political parties are one of the instruments

by which the poor and marginalized groups can gain 'voice' in the formal political system (Boeninger 1991; Przeworski 1995). Party members and leaders have an incentive to get out the vote, create a presence in the community, seek out voters, and respond to voters' interests.

Fundamentally, therefore, decentralization relies heavily on participation to improve the allocation of services. Of critical importance in the symbiotic relationship between decentralization and citizen engagement is the specific avenues for citizen engagement and empowerment that can be created and nurtured in the decentralization process. It has to be recognized that incremental changes can eventually evolve toward broader opportunities for citizen engagement and democratic governance. Indeed, decentralization should never be used for engaging the citizens to support central government' programs, directives, and hegemony but as a framework for genuine popular control over decision-making processes. Griffith (1981: 225) cautions that, "power at the local level is more concentrated, more elitist and applied more ruthlessly against the poor than at the center".

Given the possibility of decentralization being used to support central government, decentralization should be able to allow for the shared exercise of power and facilitate the involvement of local communities in policy decisions regarding development within their own surroundings. Indeed, decentralization will cease to be effective if it fails to empower citizens to engage in decision-making processes so as to ensure that policies are citizen-centric, responsive and sustainable. Theoretically, decentralization and government size have posited that more participatory local governments tend to be larger because their constituents trust them with more resources.

Furthermore, the engagement of stakeholders in decentralization has the potential in fostering social, political and economic stability. For instance, removal of the barriers to women's participation such as traditional norms about gender roles, women's care-giving burdens, and their inexperience in leadership positions, will go a long way in enhancing the prospects of successful decentralization policy. Women's engagement can be increased by enhancing reforms to end gender discrimination, setting quotas for female representation in government and undertaking capacity development to strengthen women's leadership skills. More broadly, it is important to take concrete steps such as constitutional reforms or the creation of special mechanisms, to protect minority rights and engage minority groups in participatory decision-making.

However, broad participation can be disruptive. For instance, local electoral cycles can lead to periodic fiscal indiscipline as local leaders try to attract more votes. Hence, assessing how much citizen input constrains local government's actions provides a starting point for designing decentralization policies. Indeed, these initial conditions determine the extent to which decentralization will increase the central government's responsiveness to citizens and provide a guideline for including participation-enhancing measures in decentralization policy. Institutional structures such as regular elections, permanent public-private councils and local referendums are identifiable conditions that may improve the ability of local governments to identify and act upon citizens' preferences.

However, levels of social capital which determine how well citizens are able to take advantage of the institutional arrangements for participation, are slower to develop and harder to determine. The presence and activities of citizen groups such as Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) can be a revealing indicator. Nevertheless, it is important to determine who these organizations really represent. It has to be realized that disparities between those who are represented by the citizen groups like NGOs and those who are excluded from the system can lead, and sometimes do lead, to local government 'capture' and preclude, for example, efficient matching of public spending to the needs of local citizens. In situations where local governments are not elected, the electoral process tends to favour a small group of elites rather than local citizens.

Political Will and Civil Will

Political commitment for decentralization is the sinequanon of strategy implementation (Rondinelli 1982: 43-60). Yet it is often an element that frequently misses in developing countries. It is the national governments that make the rules under which local governments operate (Burki et. al. 1999: 18). The power of sub-national

interests in the national governments has a key bearing on how the intergovernmental rules are constructed and enforced. Ideally, decentralization would devolve government functions and authority to the local level, allowing citizens to elect their representatives to manage local affairs.

This perspective typically highlights the fact that moving government closer to the people will ease the interactions and information flow between political leaders and the citizens. It has also been the struggle of democracies regarding the question of how to represent regional interests in the national government. Theoretically, this democratization process aids in formulating a development agenda that corresponds to local needs and opportunities thus improving transparency and accountability in public service delivery.

It should be emphasized that local development does not have political colour. Hence, the behavior of politicians and the local citizens towards social and economic issues will greatly affect, positively or negatively, the outcome of every locality. The constitutions and local dynamics of every country will have a lot to do with success or failure of decentralization programs. Therefore, political leaders should expand the frontiers of democracy by encouraging greater citizen participation in political affairs of their localities and those of the nation.

However, political leadership which behaves more in a partisan manner and is non-committal to decentralization encourages corruption and exclusion of the local citizens in the running of local governments. In the end, and acting outside the framework of the national constitution, social organs are targeted at party members instead of the deserving poor. Elite capture then crops up, which encourages corruption and lessening of participatory governance. In the end, the democratic benefits of decentralization are not fully realized.

If political leaders are to be effective, they have to advocate civic renewal. This requirement is even more so given the somewhat artificial and weak regimes in most developing countries. To rid these countries of democratic deficiencies in their respective local governments will necessitate the creation of participatory institutions and an active citizenry to sustain them. The more decentralized or devolved the political system, and the less clientelistic and confrontational the strategy used by the political leadership, the greater the prospects of success of decentralization. In other words, in any decentralization strategy, partisan and functional disputes should be minimized at all costs.

In a similar vein, like political leaders, there is a need for local citizens to demonstrate the will to contribute fully in the participatory institutions so created to effect decentralization. After all, it is the inability to integrate citizens into mainstream development and the poor performance of the state that has given birth to the call for decentralization and good governance. Thus, citizens are likely to de-participate in any institutional framework if they know that they are being used to advance the interests of other parties. In this sense, citizen engagement should neither conflict with representative democracy nor diminish political will. In other words, decentralization can neither guarantee more representativeness and accountability nor more democratic government at the local level if the local people are not the direct beneficiaries but a means of legitimizing elite power, mostly through patron-client networks.

Unfortunately, developing countries portray features of neo-liberalism and elite-dominated democratization, which need to be broken through active citizenship. No wonder that in most developing countries, patron-client relations between citizens, political organizations, and the state, and a paternalistic and passive political culture that have traditionally predominated have failed to disappear with the advent of decentralization (Alvarez 1998; Nickson 1995: 267). This unhealthy situation has had to happen because the condition of citizenship in these countries has been weak, precarious, and restricted. Until a new type of active citizenship emerges, anomie and rootlessness will continue to predominate to the extent that decentralization will not achieve what it set out to do.

Thus, local citizens should have the will to become actively involved only when their vital interests are at stake (Hirschman 1970). However, local democracy should not be seen as a forum for mass decision-making on all issues of public policy. Rather, it should provide a mechanism for interest groups to reach political decisions without resorting to open conflict.

Finally, citizen engagement is not a panacea for local development and local governance. Proponents of citizen engagement should, therefore, not "romanticize the citizen" (Pollitt 2007) – in fact, no one is interested in everything. What citizens care about is that, they could participate if they want to and that their 'voice' would be heard if the need arises. While citizen engagement is not in conflict with representative democracy and it is no substitute for political will, an active and dynamic citizenry will be increasingly needed not because political leaders are somewhat lacking, but because the active role of citizens as players in policy formulation and policy implementation will be increasingly central to creating new public goods and services. But sound policy formulation and successful policy implementation demands the right type of capacity.

Capacity Development at the Local Level

One of the essential attributes of decentralization is the capacity that is built to implement it. The nature of the administrative system or the capacity building unit that is established, the types of administrators who occupy the offices so set up, and the accompanying tools and equipment they have, will prove extremely crucial in the success of any decentralization program. An administrative system which is bloated and has poorly qualified or "ghost" public personnel with inadequate experience, and hired on clientelist criteria, cannot deliver successful decentralization.

Hence, if decentralization is to work, local administrative capacity should be such that bureaucratic requirements imposed by the center are appropriate for local decision-makers. What this also means is that central government should have the capacity to manage local affairs. In addition, the design of intergovernmental relations should provide guidelines, resources and incentives that would lead to strong local capacity. However, local capacity is a complicated issue, and the appropriate way to improve it may not simply be through increased training of local officials (Litvack et. al. 1998: 27-28). Indeed, local capacity building should not be looked at in a top-down, supply-driven framework. In policy terms, capacity building should precede decentralization. There should also exist a more dynamic and demand-driven relationship between decentralization and capacity building.

Essentially, therefore, personnel working under a decentralized system should not only have a full grasp of what decentralization means as well as possess the requisite skills to implement the decentralized programs, but also must be seen to be co-operating with it. Ideally, the functionality of the technical staff under a decentralized system is not parallel power structure to the system itself but rather part-and-parcel of it. Personnel operating under a decentralized system should be seen to be creating the arena for citizens to make their input in the day-to-day administrative process thus nurturing a new administrative or bureaucratic culture.

What is being demanded of this new administrative cadre is to participate in the construction of a new participatory institutional system that will be essential for embedding a new democratic political culture. This perspective should, therefore, become the new "integrative-corporatist" ethics for following the rules of procedure in the new reformed institutional framework as a result of decentralization. Public officials can improve their performance when incentives such as publicly praising and rewarding good service, allowing workers to perform a variety of tasks, and most importantly, fostering trusting, collaborative relationships between public officials and their clients by providing information to citizens and encouraging them to monitor public officials and demand improvements, are instituted.

This new cadre of administrators need not fear the devolution of much more decision-making power to the citizens – something that usually happens as soon as decentralization is conceived. They should not fear to create strong participatory programs simply because their "opponents" might capture the new public spaces. Rather, they should be supportive of the creation of grassroots organization which will be central in the development of participatory mechanisms. However, for the new administrative cadre to undertake their decentralized responsibilities effectively, they need the right motivational incentives, access to resources, and to have jurisdiction over important services. In this regard, there is a need for clarity on the relationship between central and local officials on all matters relating to decentralized management. Because administrators are

largely responsible for policy and program implementation, they should be allowed to execute their functions without any external interference especially by politicians.

The democratization of the decentralized administrative system at regional and district levels should be motivated by three important but interrelated considerations, namely; to give the administration a 'local look' and so reduce the gap between the administration and the citizens; the integration of the political and government structures; and rural development. State-society synergy will only occur under conditions where state agencies and civic organizations possess cooperative and trusting ties with one another. The occurrence of such synergetic relationship will produce more disciplined and better informed public agencies and, thus, more civic engagement. Synergy can be constructed if reformers in the state find innovative ways of organizing cooperative institutions and of presenting problems and interests as common to all stakeholders involved.

Careful Implementation

Decentralization cannot be successful in any polity if it is implemented without the establishment of proper planning and accountability mechanisms. Short of these measures, decentralization can reallocate power and resources in a way that leads to power struggles and renewed conflict, a phenomenon that is counterproductive to the very essence of decentralization itself. Careful implementation demands appropriate power-sharing arrangements and allocation of resources. Ayee (1994: 199-201) accurately captures the problem associated with the implementation of decentralization policies:

> The ... execution of decentralization ... is not simply one of establishing "correct" goals and procedures. Rather, policy is a kind of theory, and a gap always exists, to a greater or lesser degree between this "theory" and the world ... being explained and, optimistically, controlled by the theory... the implementation process is not seen as an evolutionary learning process... the implementation of decentralization policies may be seen as a continuing process of modifying government structure and procedures as conditions become more and more conducive to incremental expansions in their scope and applications.

Successful implementation of participatory programs rests on, among other factors, breadth, depth and continuity (Berry et. al. 1993: 54-61). Breadth refers to the extent to which all citizens are afforded the opportunity and encouraged to participate, and can be indicated by how many people participate and how representative they are of the population of the given area. Depth refers to the extent to which their participation actually influences policy decisions, and can be indicated by the range of decisions over which citizens have input and the degree to which that input matters – i.e., whether citizens inform, consult, implement, oversee, or decide upon policy. Continuity refers to the regularity and the duration of citizen participation programs.

There are two other key factors that are crucial in the implementation of decentralization (Conyers 1990: 29-30). First is the nature of the special implementation machinery that is put in place. Any agency that is meant to implement decentralization should have the authority, resources and motivation. The second set of factors is the degree of acceptability or opposition which it will generate both at the center and local levels. Resistance could, for instance, arise at the local level from civil servants who resent increased local political control over their activities in cases where powers are decentralized to local politicians. At the center, resistance could, for example, arise from civil servants who are reluctant to relinquish power or authority, say, over financial control. In spite of the fact that such problems could arise during implementation, where possible, some of them should be offset right at the design stage and spelt out in detail to avoid their recurrence at the implementation stage.

Programs, such as decentralization, in which many people can and do participate in significant ways over a wide range of issues on a regular basis over a long period of time are more successful than those in which few people can or do participate in relatively trivial ways over few issues on an infrequent basis or for a short time. Kauzya (2007: 11) rightly notes that "participatory democracy which refers to how the local communities engage in the making of the decisions that concern them needs to be studied not only in respect of whether

and how it is taking place but especially in the way institutions have been created to formalize its operation and sustainability". Lastly, for decentralization to succeed, decentralized services and workload should be accompanied by the decentralization of commensurate resources. This issue raises political and democratic concerns regarding decentralization.

Decentralization and Deepening Democratic Governance

In theory, decentralization as a method of organizing the operation of the state resonates well with the concept of democracy in general and citizen engagement in particular. By creating conditions for citizen engagement, decentralization is seen as being capable of deepening democracy at the local level. Prah (2004: 21) rightly notes that:

> Decentralization provides a structural lead to the infrastructure of a democratic culture. Decentralization permits the existence of democratic rights at the local level, at which point most Africans carry out their everyday activities. The translation of democracy to satisfy representation and voice at the most local setting, for example at the village level, empowers people at the social points in which they most need to have a say and influence. Decentralization brings the possibility of democracy to the elementary structures of social organization.

However, democracy ought to include effective government. If centralization was a governmental arrangement that stifled creation of local democratic states, then theoretically, decentralization was viewed as capable of ensuring that democratic governance is established within any political system. Indeed, in the liberal democracies, there is a growing concern about the quality and quantity of political participation (Blaug 1995: 52). It is arguable that participatory governance at the local level facilitates the involvement of local communities in policy decisions that affect them both directly and indirectly. Indeed, and as Shapiro (2003: 104) once correctly observed: "no conception of democracy geared towards reducing domination can ignore the relations between the political system and the distribution of income and wealth".

Therefore, decisions that are taken in local governments should focus on solving local problems rather than to satisfy the interests of those at the helm of the local government system (Martinez-Vazquez and McNab 1997; Olum 2010: 107). One area which is central in enhancing accountability (all forms of accountability such as political, financial, and bureaucratic), is where participatory democracy allows for the continuous involvement and open consultations of all citizens, including civil society, on important governance issues such as budgets, opportunities to raise complaints about irregularities and poor service deliver, verification of financial accounts of local governments, transparent tendering and procurement, and the monitoring and evaluation of programs, in order to promote democracy and good governance (Kiyaga-Nsubuga and Olum 2009; Kjaer and Olum 2008).

Hence, local government is a critical space wherein local citizens, including special interest groups, are not only integrated in the decentralization system but in the democratic system (Mbatha 2003: 210). It is only through integration that the local actors can shape local and national policies and service delivery in accordance with their needs. Indeed, the local government structures that percolate up to the localized geographical areas should be able to create the necessary avenues for the communities to influence government decisions and policies. Linkages between such local organizations horizontally at the local levels and vertically to the national capital should be seen as vital in making democracy substantive. Mbatha (2003: 192) rightly notes that:

> Local government is required to be democratic, participatory and accountable, and to promote sustainable social and economic development. The constitution gives local government the power to deal with a wide range of issues, from regulating and providing services to formulating development plans... The constitution clearly gives scope for local government to act as an agent of transformation, but the reality is that localized power entrenches existing interests in social and cultural arrangements and continues to undermine the ideals of the constitution.

Thus, when designing democratic decentralization policies five key characteristics must always be met: first, constitutional policy and statutory reforms should devolve power not only to local governments but also to local communities. Second, local governments' capacities should be strengthened in terms of, finance, personnel, organizational structures, management systems, data information, facilities and networks, among others. Third, local government accountability to citizens and central government, transparency, and responsiveness should be assured. Fourth, the role of civil society both at the local and national levels (through practicing horizontal decentralization) should be enhanced. Lastly, there is a need to show both intent and progress in improving the quality of life of the local people – i.e. enhancing local citizens' access to public goods and services.

Viewed from the perspective of fair, regular, local election and high levels of "social capital", community cohesion and history of working together enable citizens to both signal their preferences efficiently and enforce leaders' compliance with their wishes. Clearly, broad, on-going, citizen control of their leaders can, and does, improve the quality of governmental action. Public officials who fear for their jobs are much more likely to pick better staff to carry out the day-to-day work of government. Putnam (1993) once observed that:

> ... those governments which were more open to constituent pressure were more successful at managing resources and creating innovative programs to distribute services effectively.

However, there are scholars beginning from Plato to Mosa, Schumpter and recently including Moynihan and Huntington, who argue that too much participation leads to inefficiency, ungovernability and citizen frustration. Huntington is of the view that a surge of participatory democracy weakens government by overloading the system with demands and making it impossible to govern effectively (Berry et. al. 1993: 8). This is why some critiques of decentralization prefer centralization because local politics becomes the home of corruption and clientelism rather than democratic citizenship. Furthermore, because decentralization has sometimes had the consequence of secession, it is important to foster dialogue and reconciliation among antagonistic groups, building a shared national identity that overrides ethnic or religious cleavages.

On another note, and viewed from a global perspective, decentralization should not solely be at the behest of external actors like World Bank, UNDP, GIZ, DFID, and CIDA, in domestic policy formulation, where it is part of imposed political conditionalities attached to foreign assistance or aid (Doornbos 1999). Much as development partners can be useful in supporting decentralization programs in areas such as capacity-building (e.g., effective data management, planning, and empowering local communities), establishing democracy and good governance and accountability mechanisms, this has to be within a clear policy framework to prevent the setting up of parallel structures – government on the one hand and donors and civil society organizations, on the other – on service provision (Saasa 2000: 24-26).

If the relationship between nation-states and development partners is to be in tandem with the theory of governance, international organizations and developed countries should work with local partners rather than dictate the democratic processes if local institutions are to be nurtured based on specific local conditions. However, given the might of developed countries and their multi-national corporations, the local citizens have little legal or moral authority over them. Thus, the democratic space in developing countries tends to be constructed more at the whims of foreign actors (Maathai 2009: 63).

Yet decentralization constructed externally does sometimes lead to only episodic outcomes thus breeding deep social, economic and political challenges which are not in line with local politics and culture. Rather than taking an open-ended generalized approach to strengthening engagement in local governance processes, the project-based support from donors eventually turns into issue-based civic participation with specific need-based sectorial targets and outcomes. Newton (1995: 108) rightly observes that:

> ... for the effective development of globalization theory, especially with regard to issues of democracy, much more care needs to be taken in investigating issues which focus on the active role of states in furthering globalization and the implications this has for existing 'democratic' structures.

Communities should, therefore, think of ways of preventing any potential harm that may arise from foreign interference in domestic affairs that may be illegitimate for self-governance and injurious to community stability. In the end, local communities should endeavor to acquire power to assert their claim not only on decentralization but authority over external actors.

Conclusion

This article concludes that citizen engagement is an essential part of successful decentralization. Planning decentralization policies should take all imperfections into account and endeavor to improve the depth and degree of citizen engagement on local governments' action. Local governments' responsiveness cannot be realized in the absence of mechanisms for transferring information between them and their constituents. This is why the relationship between decentralization and citizen engagement has to be constructed symbiotically.

Indeed, citizen engagement in any decentralization program has both an "intrinsic" and "instrumental" value. Intrinsic in the sense that it leads to a more active citizenry, it elevates the public discourse, enhances transparency and accountability, and it increases the sphere within which citizens can make choices. Instrumental because it encourages debates that lead to broad-based consensus in support of government initiatives. In this sense, it reduces the political costs and improves the likelihood of success of government actions.

Any government which intends to implement decentralization policy in order to develop pro-people policies and provide social services has to bear in mind citizens' engagement and participation from time to time whenever it is convenient to do so and recognize the value of citizen engagement on matters that interest them. Citizen engagement, it has to be stated, is neither a panacea nor a romantic vision of the ideal citizen. Citizenship is the cornerstone of the democratic system and of democratic institutions. Giving citizens a 'voice' on matters that affect them most will be central to future success of not only decentralization but governmental reforms.

Finally, decentralization often takes place amidst political and socio-economic turmoil. This turmoil creates problematic environment in which careful, rational, and orderly process of decentralization to occur. Even where the conditions are less traumatic, questions of strategy and timing of the implementation of decentralization will arise. Thus, experimenting, adjusting, testing and replicating will become essential methods of decentralization in many countries. In other words, because there is no blueprint for decentralization, much will depend on the subjective and concrete conditions in a given country and the particular political interests that support or oppose it.

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Chapter 2

Decentralization and Citizens' Participation: Theoretical and Conceptual Perspectives

Ambrose Kessy

Abstract

Although the terms decentralization and citizens' engagement/participation sound familiar to scholars and policy makers, their meanings, forms and scopes are controversial in current literature on local governance. This paper reviews some of the theoretical and conceptual issues on decentralization and citizens' participation by questioning the often emphasized positive relationship attached to the terms. Indeed, the two terms have become "bywords' associated with public sector reforms in developing and transitional countries. Unfortunately, the usage of these terms appears to be like mental exercises in that their meanings are still at the abstract levels. For instance, the question of measurement has been highly contested in literature and any discussion of the terms as more power to the people, improving local governance is often viewed by critics as no more than a theoretical exercise. While the terms are still used as mental exercises by the majority of the theorists, researchers and the policy makers, more attention should be directed to transform these terms from their currently abstract level to the concrete level. Accordingly, this paper welcomes the debate on 'Second Generation Theory' (SGT) which has emerged in literature in the past five years arguing for more clarification of the terms and moving towards political economy and going beyond the idealized normative assumptions by paying relatively more attention to empirical results.

Introduction

Although the terms decentralization and citizens' participation sound familiar to scholars and policy makers, their meanings, forms and scopes are controversial in the current literature on local governance. In general, "decentralization' has become a "byword associated with public sector reform in developing and transitional countries ...the popularity of the word was due to in part to its adoption by people from across the political spectrum..." (Rees and Hossain, 2010:581). On the other hand, citizens' participation is also a contested concept (Callahan, 2007). Indeed, a number of important questions can be addressed here: What exactly is meant by these terms? Why are they seen as important elements in the current discourse on local governance? What forms of decentralization and citizens' participation are described in literature? What are the theories guiding these debates? Extra space and time would be required to provide comprehensive answers to some of these questions, as the parameters for the study these terms cut across political, economic and social dimensions beyond the scope of this paper. For example, there is a myriad of problems associated with the study of decentralization such as forms, scope, and other issues associated with it. For example, in the study of decentralization in one country, there could be a variation of local government functions and responsibilities (Saito, 2011). In the same way, citizens' participation can be studied within the realm of the public sphere rather than the private sphere; hence public political participation. In other instances, citizens' participation can be studied in the way a citizen interacts with the political system through voting in elections, attending council meetings, or participating in local committees created by the local government authorities and civil society organizations. In this case, the term political participation would be used here.

This paper is organized as follows. First it highlights underlying issues entailed by the two concepts: decentralization and citizens' participation. Second it reviews some relevant theories and models that explain citizens' power in decision making bodies. Third, it explores rationale for decentralization and citizens' participation. Fourth, it looks at the mutual relationship existing between decentralization and local governance and how they relate with a plethora of other closely interconnected issues. Fifth, the paper examines whether decentralization has really brought about genuine citizens' engagement and hence local good governance. Finally a conclusion is made on whether decentralization policies have any impact on citizens' power and the establishment of effective systems of local governance at the grassroots levels.

Definitions: Decentralization and Citizens' Participation

Decentralization: A Contested Concept

Definitions of decentralization have one characteristic in common; they construe the process of decentralization as an initiative that is engineered to empower the people by giving them opportunity to decide on matters of significance to their lives. Literally, the word means "reversing the concentration of administration at a single center and conferring powers to local government" (Smith, 1985:1). Decentralization is also viewed as an articulate strategy for governance that seeks to empower citizens by bringing decision making powers closer to the people. For example, (Agrawal and Ribot, 1999: 475) observe that "decentralization is a strategy of governance to facilitate transfers of power closer to those who are most affected by the exercise of power". Viewed from any perspective, what is clear is that definitions of decentralization tend to treat it as an indispensable tool for attaining development, efficiency, democracy and more importantly bringing about citizen participation.

Decentralization as a concept in the context of a state revolves around how the state structure is designed to allow sharing of power between the center and its sub-national units. Theoretically, most national governments distribute their powers both regionally and functionally. On an ad basis, power is distributed to regional and local governments while on a functional basis, power is distributed among the "specialized ministries and others agencies that are specialized in one or more related activities (Humes, 1991:2-4). In this process the regional and functional are complementary in the process of execution of public duties. However, not all the governments apply the same level of interdependency in all their functions. Some functions will be more controlled by the ministries while others will be shared by the local authorities. For example, education,

water, and heath sectors have tended to be highly centralised in developing countries (Cheema and Rondinelli 1983; Crook and Manor 1998; Mawhood 1983; Rondinelli et. al. 1983).

One form of decentralization is popularly known as 'political decentralization'. It can be said that political decentralization, among other things, entails democratization at the local level by enabling local people participate in decision-making processes. In this form of decentralization, the leaders are elected through free and fair elections and occupy public offices for a fixed period. Moreover, the leaders become accountable and responsible to the local people (Smith, 1985).

Typologies of Decentralization

There are a number of decentralization typologies. One common one is to distinguish deconcentration, delegation and devolution. Deconcentration refers to a situation where specific responsibilities and services are transferred from the central government to the lower levels such as regional offices and branches. Devolution happens when authority for decision making and finance is transferred from central government to subnational level, which enjoys a relatively degree of autonomy. Delegation is a problematic typology to define. Some analysts prefer to define the term as something between deconcentration and devolution depending on the degree of autonomy transferred from central to subnational governments. There is also another typology of decentralization which some analysts see as not part of decentralization because they are essentially understood as division of tasks among political offices (Saito, 2011). What becomes problematic with these typologies is that they often become blurred in practical application (Kessy and McCourt, 2010). More importantly, the reality surrounding the debates about typologies of decentralization is profoundly complex and the debate still remains unclear especially related to empirical questions (i.e. when these abstract terms are translated into reality). It should be also noted that one country can demonstrate more than one typology of decentralization at the same time. It is therefore impractical to attempt to fit one typology or decentralization measure into a single category as either being devolution or deconcentration (Saito, 2011; Kessy and McCourt, 2010).

Generally, the majority of studies on decentralization and citizens' participation have tended to focus on the following areas: community participation (Kliksberg, 2000; Lowndes et al. 2001; Gaventa and Valderrama, 1999); democracy and decentralization (Crook and Manor, 2001); decentralization and gender (Myers, 2002); political participation (Gaventa and Valderrama, 1999); participatory development (Goetz and Gaventa, 2001; Hickey and Mohan, 2004). Dubois and Fattore (2009:705) citing Pollitt (2005) conclude that "decentralization in its broadest interpretation has been a topic of debate for centuries". To advance this debate further, they contrast and analyze different components of the definitions of decentralization and present a useful categorization according to their main distinguishing emphases. One important contribution of their work has been stimulating a deeper understanding about the nature of decentralization along a multidimensional perspective, although they acknowledge that difficulty involved in the clarity of the term which serves different purposes.

Citizens' Participation

Citizens' participation is regarded as an end; it aims at "empowering the intended beneficiaries so that they may share in the control of resources, organize to control their means of livelihood and take action to bring about structural changes that increase their power" (Therkildsen, 1988:61). In short, citizens' participation can be defined as:

> The redistribution of power that enables the have-not citizens, presently excluded from the political and economic processes, to be deliberately included in the future. It is the strategy by which the have-nots join in determining how information is shared, goals and policies are set, tax resources are allocated, programs are operated, and benefits like contracts and patronage are parceled out (Arnstein, 1969:1).

It appears that this definition fits better in the development context than in the political realm of citizens' participation and apparently excluding voting in elections, attending political meetings, demonstrations, and political campaigns. Unfortunately, the majority of empirical studies on political participation have been

broadly content with this form of participation and more focused on national and local elections. This form of participation is regarded as an automatic sharing of political power by all the local people, and this is more apparent than real. In practice, the few have control of community power over the majority. Ideally, public participation entails that citizens are involved in the various stages of the decision making process right from the beginning of the process with agenda setting to the final stage of making the decision (Rowe and Frewer, 2005).

Citizens' Participation and Development

Indeed, there has been controversy over forms of citizens' participation identified in the previous section as genuinely representing the interests of the majority poor and disadvantaged groups. Although these studies claim that when indigenous organizations are involved in development projects, they can play a significant role in mobilization of the disadvantaged groups to participate in the political system (Blaser et al. 2003); similar studies have questioned this view. For example, the requirement for citizens to participate in development projects has been regarded as adding credibility to the projects, either for the qualification of getting funded or legitimizing decisions and plans conceived elsewhere and implemented at local levels rather than truly representing the interests of the majority (Gaventa and Valderrama, 1999). One would also observe that the dominant literature of participation in the 1980s to the late 1990s focused on participatory approaches to development such as Participatory Poverty Assessment (PPAs), Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRAs) and other similar forms of citizens' participation. As Cornwall (2006:62) strongly argues:

> Participation has gained the status of development orthodoxy. With promises of giving 'the poor' a voice and a choice, it has become something to which no one could possibly be opposed, an essential ingredient in getting development interventions and policies right. So thoroughly embedded in the discourses of mainstream development agencies has participation become, that its ubiquity has been cast by some as 'tyranny'

Accordingly, for the past three decades we have witnessed many African countries embracing initiatives towards decentralization. Arguably, this follows the gloom period of centralization policies pursued by most African states immediately after their independence (Johns and Riley, 1975). Over time, the benefits often associated with citizens' participation in development have been ebbed away (Cornwall, 2006). Over time, competing versions of the benefits of participation have ebbed and flowed in discourses of mainstream and alternative development, coming together in new currents as they are put to new purposes in changing contexts. In most cases, developing countries have failed to guarantee citizen participation which is one perhaps among several conspicuous failures of most of the post independent centralized African states although some countries like Tanzania stayed with the system of local government until 1972. For that matter African countries have been urged to embrace decentralization measures in order to achieve, among other things, citizens' participation (ECA, 2003). In other words, strong local governments are critical for citizens' participation. Nonetheless, their autonomy and strength have been constrained throughout their history (Samoff, 1989 and REPOA, 2008).

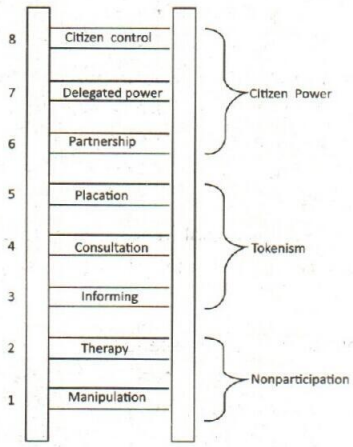
Conceptual and Theoretical Perspectives on Decentralization and Citizens' Participation

Arnstein's classical ladder of citizen participation, in which she identified eights rungs, ranging from mere participation to empowerment of citizens, has remained sound for the last four decades despite strong criticism. Accordingly, citizens' participation in this context has often been regarded as both means and end. As means, citizens' participation aims at "mobilizing the intended beneficiaries to take part in activities for which the contents have basically been determined from the outside (Arnstein, 1969:1). Accordingly, there is a significant difference between "going through the empty ritual of participation and having the real power needed to affect the outcome of the process" (Arnstein, 1969: 215). In other words, citizens' participation is a categorical term for citizen power.

In attempting to measure citizens' participation, several theories and models have been advanced to explain the relationship between the governed and those who govern (Callahan, 2007), polarized into uninformed

and informed citizen models. One of the models so far advanced in literature is the Arnstein's (1969) classic model of citizens' participation. This model is not chosen as the best among others in analyzing citizens' participation, but perhaps it is conceptually sound in terms of how we view different levels of empowering the citizens in decision making processes and policy implementation. This model is subdivided into three extremes of citizens' power: non-participation, tokenism and citizen power (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Arnstein's Ladder of Citizens Participation



Source: Arnstein's Ladder of Citizens Participation (1969)

The three forms comprise a ladder of eight rungs of citizens' participation. Non-participation is at the bottom rung of the ladder and includes forms of participation such as manipulation and therapy. These two forms are not regarded as genuine citizens' participation but rather they enable the power holders to 'educate' or 'cure' participants in participating in programs. Tokenism includes informing, placation and consultation, which provide minimal opportunity for the voices of the 'have nots' to be heard but no assurance that their voices will be heeded by the power holders. Lastly, citizen power, which comprises the top three rungs of the ladder, involves partnership, delegated power and citizen control: citizens can try to reach a compromise, make tradeoffs and can have a stake in the decision-making process. However, citizen control is an ideal form, which seems to be difficult to attain in the real situation of power relations. In a general sense, our model of citizens' participation does not include citizens' participation in elections; it guides us to view citizens' participation either as giving citizens' power or simply as a political rhetoric for legitimizing local government programs.

Her argument that, "there is a critical difference between going through the empty ritual of participation and having the real power needed to affect the outcome of the process" (Arnstein, 1969:216) is a valid one. However, although these rungs are theoretically sound, the model has been criticized by Burns et al. (1994) as it is specifically useful for the study of citizens in specific government programs and in development projects, and not therefore appropriate for the study of citizens' participation in local government; the model needs modification to include individuals' or groups of citizens' spheres of influence. Some critics have also strongly argued that "in the real world of people and programs, there might be 150 rungs with less sharp and 'pure' distinctions among them". The model also seems to emphasize the gap between the "haves" and "have-nots" whose boundaries are difficult to establish in practice.

There are also other models, which have been developed to study citizens' engagement. These are: Five Rungs of Citizens Participation (Thomas, 1995); Free riders (clients), watchdogs (middle) and activists (owners) (Box, 1998); Three Models of Citizens Participation- active, passive and transitional (Timney, 1998); an evolutionary

continuum of public administrator and citizen interaction (Vigoda, 2002); A value-centered model (Schacter, 1997), the Owner Model (Schacter, 1997) and seven rungs of participatory planning (Pretty, 1995). It should be noted here that some of these models overlap, suggesting that there is no single model, which can be regarded as conclusive in the study of citizens' participation. Nevertheless, the rationale for these models is to conceptualize the interaction between citizens and their leaders in the decision-making bodies. All these models have some strength as well as limitations and more.

Rationale for Decentralization and Citizens' Participation

The arguments that are given as justification for both decentralization and citizen participation portray the enduring mutual relationship, which exists between the two concepts. Below we discuss the two trends of arguments. The first justification wraps economic reasons while the second justification bundles political reasons. The first justification for decentralization is grounded on economic reasons. For example it has been argued that decentralization is a solution to a number of economic problems which faced African countries. It is argued that centralization policies which were pursued by the African governments proved failures as they dragged these countries into the predicament of mismanaged and poorly performing economies. It is against this backdrop that decentralization was introduced as a substitute and an alternative model for state planned development (Maro and Mlay, 1979). Thus decentralization is seen as a tool for speeding up development, improving service delivery, attaining efficiency and increasing accountability in the management of resources and economy.

The second justification for decentralization is based on political reasons. Decentralization is an important ingredient for instituting democracy and widening the civic space for citizen participation. Decentralization sparks good governance and the empowerment of local citizens (Francis and James, 2003 and Kabemba, 2003). It should be noted that these words were virtually absent or vanished with the rise of the post independent African military and authoritarian regimes. These regimes either seriously curtailed the autonomy or abolished local governments altogether (Johns and Riley, 1975). Decentralization has been introduced as a coherent strategy for ensuring citizen participation (Samoff, 1979 and REPOA, 2008). The rationale often held by the decentralists is that local governments are located closer to the people and thus better suited than central government to the kinds of services that local people need. In other words, local governments can produce services that are more responsive to the local public aspirations given that needs differ from one locality to another which can only be provided by local governments through decentralization. Local governments can provide tailor made solutions in each locality against standardized services often held by the anti-decentralists (Saito, 2011). Accordingly, the greater citizen engagement through decentralization increases government's responsiveness to citizen needs and preferences (Marschall, 2004). Public participation is an end in itself and capable of improving efficiency, equity and development (Agrawal and Ribot, 1999). This implies that there is a link between decentralization, citizen participation, democracy and development. That being the case, some scholars argue that the debate is not whether citizen participation is desirable but what forms of citizen participation should be put in place (Irvin and Stansbury, 2004 and Rowe and Frewer, 2005).

However, there are some critiques against all the claims made by the pro-decentralists. Saito (2011) provides an excellent summary of the counterarguments. First, the argument based on the economic efficiency of local governments to provide better services is challenged on the ground that local governments have little capacity to translate their claimed advantage of proximity into reality because local people do not necessarily have the knowledge on their local issues. The second critique is on the information advantage held by the decentralized governments in that local governments often face an increased cost of coordination as many tasks are devolved and more players involved in service delivery. In this regard, coordination becomes a problem as managing complex problems is seen as one of the paradoxes of decentralization. Third, the argument that local governments are closer to the local people does not always results into positive impacts. For instance, local governments are often captives of the local powerful elites who often abuse the powers and resources available at the local levels. Fourth, critics of decentralization disagree with the assumption that decentralization pushes for more decentralization. For instance, the grassroots poor are not used to participation and often not consulted by the government officials. This fits well in the rungs identified by Arnstein model of participation (i.e. tokenism). That being the case, the critics of decentralization also argues

that the newly granted local autonomy may actually reinforce the idea of elite capture. Fifth, the idea of ethnic harmonization which is often associated for the push towards decentralized government is questioned. It is argued by the critics of decentralization that granting regional authority to subnational governments only shifts ethnic tensions from the national to the local levels. Coupled with the danger of elite capture, achieving ethnic harmony can become problematic and also due the fact that decentralization measures tend to jeopardize equity among different localities. Accordingly, what comes out clearly from this debate of pro-decentralists and anti-decentralists is that the same reasons are used toward their own ends. Saito (2011) cements this idea by quoting Qalo (1985) who argues that arguments pro and anti-decentralization are often akin to proverbs with most principles answerable by an equally plausible and acceptable contradictory principle.

Decentralization and Local Governance

Local governance is closely related to the concept of decentralization. For example, some scholars have asserted the presence of a strong relationship between decentralization and local governance only when there is flow of significant funds from the central government to the local (Crook and Manor 1998). This relationship seems to have both positive and negative impacts in terms of effective governance structure. On the one hand, this relationship is seen as positive when it pushes for more participation of local citizens (Crook and Manor, 1998), accountability and transparency at local levels (Olowu and Wunsch, 2004), and poverty reduction (Crook, and Manor, 2001). On the other hand, Niasse (1997) cited by Ouedraogo (2003:101) argues "... the simple act of decentralizing does not solve the governance problems at the local level". This is echoed by Tanzi (2000) who, stresses that decentralization is more likely to produce the expected results if certain conditions are met. Tanzi further argues that, these conditions range from the presence of effective institutions to combat corruption and efficient management systems before the government decides to transfer financial power from the center to the local authorities. In other words, without the existence of effective institutions, there is little prospect for decentralization of power to local levels. Moreover, experience from countries trying to decentralize indicates mixed results as to how decentralization can establish an effective system of local governance. The difficulties faced in realizing the objectives of decentralization in developing countries are clearly summarized by UNDP (1997): a) there have been some cases where intended aspects of decentralization have been centrally initiated but not linked to sources of political and financial support, as in Tanzania in early 1960s-1970s; b) in some cases, the process of decentralization has been stifled by the inability of local governments to significantly increase their powers in terms of finance, decision making and autonomy (Kessy and McCourt, 2010:4). Decentralization efforts have sometimes been hindered by central bureaucracy, making it difficult to release even the allocated funds to local authorities. Problems of translating decentralization into local governance in developing countries appear to be linked to centrally driven approaches, which are full of bureaucratic tendencies that do not allow for the flourishing of good local governance. Experience has also shown that the process of decentralization first gathers momentum in the initial stages of the process but then loses speed and support from central government. The following section links the concepts of decentralization and citizens' participation in local governance.

Arguments for and against Citizens' Participation in Local Governance

Although participation is one of the concepts with "strong normative overtones, very few people think that participation is a bad thing" (Birch, 2007:145). The supporters of participation argue that an increase in participation is likely to enhance political efficacy (Birch, 2007; White, 1996), because political participation means sharing political power (White, 1996). To some extent participation can be qualified as the ticket for any democratic government though some forms of participation are also engineered in other non-democratic government. Participation also leads to better decision making and is assumed to create social stability by developing a sense of community and promoting collective decision making (Callahan, 2007). In short, participation can improve the quality and efficiency of democracy if the level of participation is increased (Birch, 2007). Using the Arnstein (1969) ladder of citizen participation, rungs five to eight applies here. Similar arguments in favor of participation revolve around a variant of the "decentralization equals democracy" view (Andrews and De Vries, 2007). This is also the main justification for having local government authorities as they are assumed to facilitate the sharing of power at the lowest levels of government. In other words, in order for participation to occur, interface between the citizens and the local decision makers is essential.

In short, arguments fall under two headings: direct versus indirect citizen participation. Those who favor indirect involvement of citizens in governance stress that, "in a representative democracy, elected officials and professional administrators should act on behalf of the citizens and in the best interest of the state". Those who favor the direct form argue that "citizens are the 'owners' of government and should therefore be involved in decisions of the state" (Callahan, 2007:1179). Thus, it is becoming increasingly accepted that citizens' participation provides numerous advantages to the citizens through gaining some control over the local decision space and facilitating better policy making and implementation (Kim, 2011).

However, some critics have questioned the validity of participation as the only available barometer for measuring the level of democracy in a particular country. Similarly, since participation is often regarded as an intrinsic value rather than fundamental value, some (see Andrews and De Vries, 2005) have argued that, it should be carefully studied and implemented. In the same way, participation has some marked repercussions including the problem of local elite capture, human and financial costs, and the danger of tyranny of participation, which may create stalemate in local decision-making bodies. Thomas (1995) warns us that too much representation of actors in decision-making is not an end in itself but is rather costly at reaching consensus. Moreover, involving too many levels of government in decision making is also a problem – not that too much participation is a bad thing, but it needs proper rules of engagement. Despite political participation being regarded as a significant component of any definition of local democracy, good governance and a well-functioning system of governance, this does not mean that participation is universally accepted and practiced. Various scholars have strongly argued that participation depends on those who participate and whether citizens' interests are taken into consideration in decisions that affect their lives (Kettunen, 2002; White, 1996). Birch (2007) contends that a proper system of government must provide opportunities for political participation by the citizens. Hence, participation and control in local governance are regarded as important aspects for opening doors to good governance. Unfortunately, this ignores the challenges involved in designing and implementing participatory approaches.

Has Decentralization Facilitated Citizen Participation?

One among the main objectives for adopting decentralization in most developing countries was to ensure citizens' participation. With the implementation of decentralization being on course for some time now, a critical question that remains to be answered is: Do we have a common understanding on the two terms: decentralization and citizens' participation? If the answer is yes, the second question would be: has decentralization facilitated citizen engagement as it is contended? As we have already discussed the evidence so far gathered suggests mixed results as far as the two are concerned. On the one hand, there is the view that contends decentralization has boosted citizen participation. On the other hand, the second view holds that although decentralization has been in place for quite some time now, it has not been able to unleash a higher degree of citizens' participation. We will discuss these two opposing views in the next sections.

Believers: Decentralization has Boosted Citizen Participation

The first view represents the perspective contending that decentralization has boosted citizen participation. In a way, the pro-decentralists argue that decentralization provide the local people with the legitimate right to voice their concerns in matters which affect their lives (Saito, 2011). Two major arguments emerge in support of this view. Both arguments convey a proposition that the on-going local government reforms in many developing countries have provided the basic conditions for citizen participation to take place. We wish to briefly summarize the two arguments here. The first argument posits that the on-going local government reforms in the developing countries have created an institutional framework for citizen participation. Arguably this has improved citizen participation (See for example Crook and Manor, 1998). It is argued that decentralization has created various structures in the local government system which caters for citizen participation right from the grassroots levels. These structures act as the medium of communication between two points; the center and the local (Saxena et al. 2010). The democratically elected local councils are described as good examples (Gaventa, 2002). These structures provide citizens with the opportunity to participate either directly or indirectly. It is argued that the presence of these structures has strengthened the civic space for meaningful

citizen participation. The second argument is that the on-going local government reform programs in the developing countries are driven under decentralization by devolution principle, which is arguably the most preferable and effective form of decentralization. This is because when decentralization is pursued through devolution it results into autonomous entity with powers to make their own decisions (Mutahaba, 1989). Moreover, devolutionary local governments engender specific positive attitudes to the local grassroots people as it increases popular participation, commitment, and identification with the development initiatives pursued by their localities (Kigundu, 2001). Consequently citizens are empowered to make decisions based on their local conditions. Accordingly, this has helped to achieve meaningful citizen participation. Furthermore, there is the tacit argument that purports decentralization policies are heading into the right direction and at the satisfactory pace. The decentralization programs in most countries have recognized the role of local governments by devolving responsibilities and functions to the latter. The acquired new responsibilities and functions have enhanced these local entities and transformed them into developmental local governments (Nel and Binns, 2003) which are described as the local governments embracing citizens' participation in seeking viable solutions to local socio-economic needs.

Doubters: Decentralization has not yet Unleashed Full Citizen Participation

The second view encompasses the contention that decentralization has not changed significantly the status of citizen participation in the affairs that affect their daily lives (Kessy and McCourt, 2010). A general proposition here is that, despite the presence of the institutional framework for citizen participation, still some optimal conditions are lacking for any meaningful citizen participation. The following arguments emerge to support this view. First, the decentralization initiatives in the developing countries have partially been able to set the local authorities as autonomous institutions ideal for citizen participation. However, the local governments have only managed to afford a curtailed autonomy (REPOA, 2008, Lutaya and West, 2009) as their respective central governments have continued to retain control over critical issues including fiscal autonomy. For the case of Tanzania the grant system is blamed for this as it sets minimum national standards compelling local authorities to frame their budgets according to guidelines and procedures as spelt out by the central government, accordingly this denies autonomy to the local governments (Braathen et al., 2005). This is also true in Uganda where the local governments have limited autonomy over revenues, and still a number of weaknesses and problems with policies governing revenue generation and citizen engagement continue to exist (Lutaya and West, 2009). Arguably the limited local authorities' autonomy in turn affects negatively their capacity and commitment to implement citizen participation (REPOA, 2008).

There are several reasons that are advanced to explain this. They include the reluctance shown by the central governments to devolve substantial powers to the grassroots levels; and secondly is the lack of both political will and commitment to carry out decentralization by devolution to its logical limit. Unfortunately this reluctance characterizes most Southern African Development Community (SADC) countries (Kabemba, 2003). Presence of these two factors makes the stated goal of promoting citizen engagement to be questionable in the eyes of most scholars, and hence it remains as mere political rhetoric. In the case of Tanzania, such rhetoric of decentralization and popular participation has been around since the British colonial administration and in the post-independence government, while in fact what has been practiced is bureaucratic authoritarianism (Eckert, 2007; Kessy, 2008). The vivid example is the Tanzania's 1972 decentralization initiatives' which proclaimed to pursue popular participation but actually viewed people's participation as the constraint and thus worked against it (Mutahaba, 1989).

Second, the framework within which decentralization measures take place contains some inherent weaknesses which compromise the attainment of popular participation. For example, it is has been noted that in Uganda there is presence of overriding national strategies for poverty reductions which conflict with the quest for participatory approach (Francis and Roberts, 2003). The former is described to be national in character and calls for central coordination and inevitably the need for centralization. Consequently, two contrasting modes of local governance have emerged namely technocratic and patronage modes. The former mode prioritizes poverty reduction, is driven by national targets, and is closely associated with poverty reduction strategy

plans (PRSPs). The latter mode emphasizes participatory planning. However, the patronage mode operates in the context of lack of resources and capture by local elites, which consequently ensures little meaningful citizen involvement. Their analysis questions whether the objectives of poverty reduction and community participation can indeed be reconciled (Francis and Roberts, 2003).

Decentralization and Service Delivery

One of the core motivating factors for most of the decentralization reforms in the world is to improve service delivery. The main reasons have been linked to the systematically declining of the basic needs such as education, water, health and others which in the past were being provided by the central government. The other reason behind this move relates to the fact that most of the services provided by governments are consumed at the local levels. In terms of democratic principles, representative democracy works best when the citizens are closer to the government, (Ahmad, et al., 2005; Ekpo, 2007). Pulling together these positive benefits of decentralization called for the need for social services to be provided at the last users' point. However, despite these good intentions embedded in the decentralization reforms, there have been some serious problems related to lack of capacity at sub-national levels to implement these services, misaligned responsibilities, political capture within the lower tiers of government, and poor economic growth... In short, decentralization improves service delivery only where the ingredients necessary for its proper implementation are present (Ekpo, 2007). This is also echoed by the World Bank, (2001:1) that "decentralization holds great promise for improving the delivery of public services but outcomes depend on its design and on the institutional arrangements governing its implementation". In short, the results of decentralization on service delivery from various countries around the world have been grouped as 'positive, negative and inconclusive' (Shah et al., 2004:10).

With respect to a particular service delivery, decentralization seems to have produced mixed results with regard to improved service delivery. For example, the experience of decentralization in Tanzania shows that it is not very possible to draw a direct link between the forms of decentralization and impact on service delivery sector wise. Recent findings show that decentralization has enhanced the service delivery and channeling of funds especially for the education sector and to some extent to health services than other sectors (Tidemand et al., 2008). The study further concludes that improvements in health and agriculture have been less impressive where they cannot be regarded as decentralized per se.

The Second Generation Theory (SGT)

The difficulties experienced from the first generation of theorists in their attempts to conceptualize decentralization and citizen participation could be one of the main reasons calling for a Second Generation Theory (SGT). According to Saito (2011), the new theory has the following main characteristics: a) it emphasizes political economy in its approach, whether or not incentives for diverse stakeholders are congruent in order to attain common objectives; b) it acknowledges that information is not equitably shared among these stakeholders; c) it goes beyond the idealized normative assumptions by paying relatively more attention to empirical results and d) it moves beyond North America and industrialized countries to global comparisons.

SGT is welcomed for various reasons. First, decentralization is not an end to itself but a means toward a range of broader objectives including enhancing citizens' participation and effective local governance. Second, SGT is suited in diagnosing contradictions inherent in decentralization. One of the dilemmas in this case is how to create a central government which is simultaneously strong and limited. As some scholars such as Rodden (2006:17) cited in Saito (2011) have argued, "the center must be strong enough to achieve the desired collective goods-like free trade, common defense, and the like - but weak enough to preserve a robust sense of local autonomy". In this case, Saito strongly observes that the dilemma of decentralization is highlighted in the context of decentralization being often implemented in tandem with marketization and Public Private Partnership (PPP). Third, SGT is welcomed due to the fact that local governments are at

a strategic crossroads. For instance, local governments are important actors for both vertical (central-local relations) and horizontal (public –private) coordination. It is also at the local levels that three distinct reform agendas need to be integrated which are decentralization for administrative reform, expansion of markets for economic transaction; and empowerment for civil society. In this case, proper integration and coordination are needed to realize the objectives of partnerships and effective engagement of local government and staff. The SGT seems to be more practical oriented and contingent in the sense that it moves both the debates about decentralization and citizens' participation from the normatively idealized notions of decentralization to more realistic assessment of the difficulties in implementing the very complex agenda of decentralization. In other words, clear conceptualization of the terms is more important than trying to take them as magic bullets to solve the societal problems. Furthermore, since the definitions of the two terms have not been agreed among many scholars, the study of decentralization and citizens' participation still remains at the abstract level.

Conclusion

From this conceptual and empirical review on the literature on decentralization and citizens' participation, the following major conclusions can be advanced. Firstly, there are ambiguities in the definition of the term decentralization, which result from the ambiguities in the language used to describe decentralization especially in the developing world. For example, the early conception of decentralization is different from the current usage of term for the case of developing countries. Moreover, when national leaders of developing countries were referring to decentralization, what they really meant was decentralization in the form of deconcentration and delegation, which ended up establishing units of local administration that were similar to those found at the national levels. Secondly, there has been a new emphasis for conceptual thinking about the nature of local government studies from local government to local governance. This has been influenced mainly by the NPM, which emphasizes the role of the private sector in social service delivery. Thirdly, the evidence from the literature suggests that decentralization can only be successful when local governments are given enough resources and high commitment from the national leaders. More importantly the decentralization of financial resources has been the most difficult to implement. The evidence further suggests that it is only possible to have successful decentralization once financial resources have been devolved to the local government. Although other resources can be easily decentralized like human resources and decision-making power financial resources are the bedrock for effective decentralization and better service delivery. Fourthly, there is a lack of consensus as to what decentralization can achieve and what it cannot achieve. Most advocates of decentralization will point to the potential benefits of the process without at the same time looking at the dangers associated with decentralization when it comes to practice; i.e. elite capture, corruption, social inequity.

The question of measurement has been highly contested in the literature on decentralization and citizens' participation. Thus, any discussion of the terms as more power to the people, improving local governance is "often viewed by critics as no more than a theoretical exercise" (Edem, 2003:68). We, therefore, conclude this paper by re-emphasizing that greater conceptual and empirical clarity is needed to understand clearly the relationship between decentralization and local governance. For example, the literature on citizens' participation in governance seems to treat it as an intrinsic rather than a fundamental value. Citizens' participation in governance/local governance also has some its risks: the more citizens are included in participation, the higher the degree of stalemate in making local decisions. Moreover, citizens' participation carries with it some potential costs for mobilizing people to engage in the political process, which might be difficult in some poor nations. In the light of these observations, it seems reasonable to conclude that the concept of citizens' participation cannot be fully studied in a single study, because many forms exist, each needing a particular methodology. Likewise, it appears that there are myriad theoretical models but only imperial investigation can prove their validity in a study of citizens' participation.

Finally this paper welcomes the debate on SGT which has emerged in the literature in the five past years. According to Saito, this theory is heartily welcomed for the simple fact that decentralization is not an end in itself but a means toward a range of broader objectives, encompassing democratic deepening and economic

progress. We should as Saito (2011) argues, to strive to embark on further clarification of the terms reach at a point that the terms can be made workable in different contexts across the countries. This remains to the main challenge of the SGT and its impact on decentralization and citizens' participation.

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Chapter 3

Decentralization, Deconcentration and Devolution: A Concept Review

Joseph Olugbenga Dada

Abstract

Decentralization is transforming the structure of governance in Africa. Since the middle of the 1980's, most African countries have begun the transfer of power, resource and responsibilities to their sub-national governments (Brosio, 2000:1). Decentralization is a broad term, which is frequently used to refer to very different forms of government. Decentralization can be described as the transfer of power from the central government to lower levels of government. This can include the responsibility for planning and management of various government functions, as well as resource raising and resource allocation.

The main reason for embarking on this reform initiative is to strengthen democratic governance and improve service provision. Variations in the types and fors of decentralization practised show that there is a lack of common understanding of the concept and its inherent characteristics. Herein lies the gap this paper set out to fill by attempting to come up with working definitions of the key concepts in decentralization.

The paper is divided into seven sections. Section one is the introduction. Section two contains the definitions, types and forms of decentralization. Section three highlights the history of decentralization, major trends as well as its dimensions. Section four discusses the purpose and aims of decentralization. Section five sets out the constraints to decentralization. In section six, the requirements for success and challenges for the future are discussed. The conclusion is contained in section seven.

Introduction

The twentieth century experienced significant changes in the role of the state in both developed and developing countries. In the west, the demands for social and economic reconstruction after the Second World War (WW II), led to the emergence of welfare states that assumed responsibility for protecting the relatively poor, equalizing opportunities to health and education services, creating state-owned enterprises and managing macro-economic cycles. For the developing countries that mostly became independent in the 1950s and 1960s, this was the model of the state they aimed to follow. During the 1970s there were growing concerns over the capabilities of the state and public administrations in developing countries to undertake these responsibilities. The rise of neoliberal thinking and the development of new public management approaches in countries like the United Kingdom and New Zealand in the 1980s and 1990s led to an emphasis on the role of the market and a bias against public provision and state expansion (Scott, 2009:8).

These changes are further exacerbated by the forces of globalization, leading to increased inter-dependence among states and changes to the concept of state sovereignty, the rise of democratization across the world as well as a growing emphasis on citizens as the source of legitimate state authority. This has given impetus to the recent trend for decentralization and an emerging recognition of the importance of government at the local level.

Suffice to say that decentralization is by no means a new phenomenon in Africa. In this respect, Oyugi, (200:16) posited that:

> "There is not a single country in Africa in which some form of local government is not in operation", and the stated objective of virtually all of these reforms is to strengthen democratic governance and service provision".

Today Ethiopia, Ghana, Mali, Namibia, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa and Uganda have constitutions that are explicitly pro-decentralization and formally recognize the existence of local government (UNCDF 2000; Tötemeyer 2000:95; Therkildsen 1993:83).

This recent wave of decentralization, has led to a paradigm shift from focusing on national cohesion and the management of local populations, to a discourse more focused on democratization, pluralism and rights.

Therefore, one can posit that decentralization has become part of a vigorous reform initiative in almost all African countries. More broadly, decentralization is claimed as the center piece of major policy reforms under way across Africa and in other parts of the developing world (UNCDF pp. 5–11). The reforms are not about dismantling central governments in favour of local institutions. Rather, they are expected to strengthen Central government in ways that support the objectives of national unification, democratization, and greater efficiency, and equity in the use of public resources and service delivery. Against the fore-going, one can conclude that the primary objective is to have governments that are able to perform or support all of these functions with appropriate roles at multiple levels.

Local government and local institutions are the key recipients of decentralized powers. Many theorists and practitioners involved in decentralization reforms are more interested in strengthening and building up local governance structures than in diminishing central powers (UNDP 1999; Romeo 1996; Roe 1995a:883). For this reason, decentralization is more appropriately viewed as a relative term concerning central-local relations. Steering away from negative arguments about shrinking central governments, the underlying developmentalist logic is that local institutions can better discern and are more likely to respond to local needs and aspirations. This ability is believed to stem from local authorities—by dint of their proximity—having better access to information and being more easily held accountable to local populations. Downward accountability of local authorities is central to this formula.

Underlying most of the purported benefits of decentralization is the existence of democratic mechanisms that allow local governments to discern the needs and preferences of their constituents, as well as provide a way for these constituents to hold local governments accountable to them (Smoke 1999:10). When downwardly

accountable, local authorities also have decision-making power over local matters, there is reason to believe that greater equity and efficiency may follow. Decentralization can be constructively thought of as the strengthening of local institutions to play a more representative, responsive and constructive role in the everyday lives of local populations and the countries in which they live. Such strengthening usually involves some transfer of decision-making power and financial resources from central government.

On the whole, effective decentralization, whether it is to administrative or political local actors, is about creating a realm of local autonomy defined by inclusive local processes and local authorities empowered with decisions and resources that are meaningful to local people.

However, in practice there seem to be considerable confusion about what constitutes decentralization. In the name of decentralization, powers over resources are being allocated to a variety of local bodies and authorities that may not be downwardly accountable or entrusted with sufficient powers. Many reforms in the name of decentralization do not appear to be structured in ways likely to deliver the presumed benefits of decentralization and participation, and may ultimately undermine efforts to create sustainable and inclusive rural institutions. The World Bank (2000:107) in stating the problem observed that "decentralization is often implemented haphazardly". The term "decentralization", however, is also applied to programs and reforms that ultimately are designed to retain central control. Oyugi (2000:10) goes as far as saying that "the legal-political design of local government in Africa tends to weaken the cultivation of a democratic culture at the local level as well as weaken the ability of local authorities to take initiative in the field of service provision".

Given the 'coordinated confusion' approach that has come to characterize Africa political equilibrium in the past decades, one can posit that, while on one hand centralization was in response to the need for national unity, on the other hand decentralization, responds to demands for diversity. Both forms of administration coexist in different political systems. There seems to be a consensus since the 1980s that too much centralization or absolute local autonomy are both harmful and that it is necessary to put in place a better system of collaboration between the national, regional/provincial and local centers of government.

The renewed interest in this decentralization of the structure of the state comes from the recognition that less centralized decision-making would make national public institutions more effective, and that it would make local governments and civil society more competent in the management of their own affairs. However, the realities about decentralization initiatives in Africa suggest that the initiatives are premised on expectations, as there are no indications that much has been achieved in terms of overall quality of lives.

Concepts Defined

Just like many other social science concepts, the term decentralization has been used by different people to mean different things. This in turn has led to different conceptual frameworks, programs, implementation and implications. Yuliani (2004) attempted defining decentralization through a compilation based on various definitions highlighted in various papers presented at the Interlaken Workshop on Decentralization; this section will accordingly attempt to define the concepts of decentralization, deconcentration, devolution and other related concepts.

Decentralization

Decentralization within the purview of national development management can be defined as follows:

- Any act in which a central government formally cedes powers to actors and institutions at lower levels in a political-administrative and territorial hierarchy. (Ribot, 2002:5 citing Mawhood 1983; Smith 1985).
- The transfer of powers from central government to lower levels in a political-administrative and territorial hierarchy. (Crook and Manor 1998:11-12 and Agrawal and Ribot 1999: 475).
- A broad range of transfers of the "locus of decision making" from central governments to regional, municipal or local governments". (Sayer2004 as cited by Yuliani2004).
- The transfer of power from central government to lower levels of government. This can include

responsibility for planning and management of various government functions, as well as resource-raising and resource allocation (Scott 2009, p. 5).

- The process of re-distributing or dispersing functions, powers, people or things away from a central location or authority(Freedictionary.com 2013)
- In other words, decentralization involves the relinquishing of political, administrative and financial autonomy powers to other levels of the state outside the central government for which they will be held accountable.

Deconcentration

This term refers to:

- A transfer of central government authorities to lower-level or to other local authorities who are upwardly accountable to the central government i.e. administrative decentralization (Ribot 2002).
- The redistribution of decision-making authority, financial and management responsibility among levels of the central government; without real transfer of authority between levels of government. It may involve only a shift of responsibilities from federal officials of the capital city to those stationed in provinces and districts. One can posit that, deconcentration is a "weak" form of decentralization, implying that decision-making remains at the center, the other levels of government being limited to transforming orders and implementing decisions- administrative decentralization.

Devolution

Devolution means:

- "The transfer of management to local individuals and institutions located within and outside of government" Yuliani (2004) citing Edmunds et al. (2003:1).
- "The transfer of governance responsibility for specified functions to sub-national levels, either publicly or privately owned, that is largely outside the direct control of the central government"(Ferguson and Chandrasekharan 2004).
- The transfer of power from a central government to sub-national (e.g., state, regional, or local) authorities. Devolution usually occurs through conventional statutes rather than through a change in a country's constitution; thus, unitary systems of government that have devolved powers in this manner are still considered unitary rather than federal systems, because the powers of the sub-national authorities can be withdrawn by the central government at any time.
- Devolution is often used to refer to any transfer from central government to any non-central government body—including local elected governments, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO's), customary authorities, private bodies and so forth.

Delegation

This term refers to:

- When public functions are transferred to lower levels of government, public corporations, or any other authority outside of the regular political-administrative structure, to implement programs on behalf of a government agency. (Yuliani 2004 citing Alex et al. 2000:3; Ostrom et al. 1993).
- A type of decentralization which transfers responsibilities and authority to semi-autonomous administrative entities that respond to the central government but without being totally controlled by it. (Gregersen et al. 2004).

Subsidiarity

- Subsidiarity is the principle which states that matters ought to be handled by the lowest competent authority. Normally it is defined as the idea that a central authority should have a subsidiary function, performing only those tasks which cannot be performed effectively at a more immediate or local level.

- Subsidiarity is, in principle, one of the features of federalism. The principle is found in several constitutions around the world (see, for example, the Tenth Amendment to the United States Constitution and the Maastricht Treaty of 1993). One of the clearest examples is the case of Switzerland with a strong federalist state built on the principle of subsidiarity. (Olsen 2007:5)

In summary, decentralization refers to any act in which a central government formally cedes powers to actors and institutions at lower levels in a political-administrative and territorial hierarchy. Deconcentration concerns transfer of powers to local administrative branches of the central state. They may have some downward accountability built into their functions, but their primary responsibility is to the central government. With respect to devolution, this is often used to refer to any transfer from central government to any non-central government body- including local elected governments, NGOs, customary authorities, private bodies and so forth. Delegation is when public functions are transferred to lower levels of government, public corporations, or any other authority outside of the regular political-administrative structure, to implement on behalf of a government agency.

The Decentralization – Deconcentration Debate

From the various definitions of decentralization as well as from its types and forms highlighted above, one can conclude that two schools of thought have emerged. The first school of thought believes that deconcentration is not a variant of decentralization; on the other hand, the second school of thought argues that deconcentration is a variant of decentralization.

History of Decentralization

An African Perspective

Ribot (2002:17-20) quotes an array of authors such as Weinstein (1972), Gellar (1993), Therkildsen (1993), Biya (1986), Mamdani (1996), Alexandre (1970), Buell (1929), Perham (1960), Mair (1936), UNCDF (2000), de Valk (1990), Conyers (1993), Rondinelli et al (1989), Crook and Sverrisson (2001), Rothchild (1994), Oyugi (2000) and Crook and Manor (1999). A comprehensive overview of decentralization from an Africa perspective is thus provided.

Ribot (2002:17) points out that decentralization is not new in Africa and that since 1917 there have been at least four waves of decentralization in francophone West Africa—after each of the World Wars, shortly after independence in the early 1960s, and in the current decade. Ribot further submitted that some francophone Central African countries also decentralized just before independence (Weinstein 1972:263–266) while others after independence (Gellar 1995; Therkildsen 1993; Biya 1986:51) and that the anglophone and lusophone African countries have also seen multiple pre- and post-colonial decentralizations.

Citing Mamdani (1996), Alexandre (1970a:65–68), Buell (1928), Perham (1960) and Mair (1932:12-14) Ribot (2002:17) stated that in the colonial period, decentralized government—the "Association" opted for by the French and "Indirect Rule" by the British—was set up as a means to penetrate and manage the rural world (Mamdani 1996). These systems were created to manage Africans under administrative rule rather than to enfranchise them. Although now condemned by history, Association and Indirect Rule were accompanied by idealist justifications in which their purveyors believed (Alexandre 1970a:65–68; Buell 1928; Perham 1960). Liberal anthropologist Lucy Mair (1936:12–14), like some other analysts, praised indirect rule as a progressive form of community participation allowing self-determination.

Ribot (2002) submitted however that nevertheless, policies of Indirect Rule and Association created an "institutional segregation" in which most Africans were relegated to live in a sphere of so-called "customary" law (or the Indigénat, which was an administratively driven form of state-ordained and enforced regulation). Europeans and urban citizens, however, obeyed civil laws. In 1936, British colonial official and scholar Lord Hailey wrote that "the doctrine of differentiation aims at the evolution of separate institutions appropriate to African conditions and differing both in spirit and in form from those of Europeans" (quoted in Mamdani 1996:7). Mamdani points out that "the emphasis on differentiation meant the forging of specifically 'Native' institutions through which to rule subjects".

Furthermore, Ribot (2002:18) quoting Oyugi (2000:16) states that at independence, African governments inherited a system in which local governments were tools of administrative management. Under this system, so-called "customary" authorities were privileged as the "representatives" of the rural world and the prefects, commandants des cercles and district officers were the appointed supervising managers. The coercive abuses of the colonial state delegitimized local governments and customary authorities. Nevertheless, colonial policy set up the infrastructure for the central state to continue managing rural affairs. They did not leave the structures as they found them, but reformed them to further strengthen central roles. For example, governments at independence depoliticized the role of local government in the anglophone countries by deliberately playing down the role of elected councils in policy and decision making.

Therkildsen (1993, p.82) according to Ribot (2002, p.18) posited that in the post-colonial period, Local government had two prominent features: (i) regardless of regime type, ruling groups sought to control local-level public affairs, and (ii) local social groups generally avoided or disregarded sub-national political administrative organizations. After independence, governments across Africa continued to use local governments as administrative units and major functions of local governments—such as health care, education, road construction and local taxation—were transferred to central government control. Elections to local councils were also abolished or centrally controlled. The tendency toward centralization in the two decades following independence reflected the politics of this heyday of authoritarian rule, during which time governments were trying to consolidate political power (Therkildsen, p.82; Oyugi 2000, p.13). Decentralization was used to expand the reach of the state, so reforms took the shape of deconcentration—extending central administration into the local arena. This was reinforced by the period's dominance by one-party states and socialist governments, which did not create the space for elected local governments. There was little popular participation in local government. Deconcentration was designed to reinforce "verticality" (UNCDF 2000:2). Until the last decades of the twentieth century, decentralization proceeded in the form of deconcentration almost without exception.

Making de Valk (1990:4) and Therkildsen (1993:82) his reference point, Ribot (2002:19) says Southern and Eastern Africa experienced a wave of such "decentralization" beginning in the late 1950s and 1960s. For example, under one-party rule, Zambia had decentralization reforms in 1969, 1971 and 1980 in which the party's political control over district administration gradually increased. Kenya decentralized in 1964, 1970, 1974 and 1982, reducing the importance of local government. Kenya's decentralization in the 1980s, called "district focus", in 1983, was "intended to increase efficiency of central government administration rather than promote local autonomy or popular participation" (Conyers 1993:28). Furthermore, citing Conyers (2001:2), Ribot (2002:19) stated that Zimbabwe deconcentrated powers to local administrators in 1984, focusing on creating Planning Committees. However, there was little impact on the allocation of resources, producing frustration and skepticism, but also leading to pressure by the Ministry for Local Government for significant reallocation of powers to existing elected local authorities. In 1993, new powers were officially decentralized to Zimbabwe's elected Rural District Councils, but line Ministries never transferred significant powers to them (Conyers 2001:2).

Francophone West African governments decentralized after independence with the express purpose of introducing "participatory local governments". However, governments considered to be far advanced in their decentralization, such as in Senegal, maintained a system of ruling party control and administrative oversight that strangled local autonomy (Ribot 1999). Making reference to Diallo (1994:1) Ribot (19) confirmed that Mali created elected local councils in 1979, but did not give them powers (Diallo 1994:1).

With respect to Nigeria, relying on the account of Crook and Sverrisson (2001:34) and Rondinelli et al. (1989), Ribot (2002:19 established that Nigeria began a stop-and-go decentralization process in the 1970s, introducing elected local government in 1976 and 1983 (Crook and Sverrisson 2001:34). Nigeria devolved major functions including law enforcement, maintenance of roads and bridges, rural development responsibilities, agricultural development, health care, and water and housing provision to elected local governments in 1976 (Rondinelli et al. 1989). Regarding Ghana, President Rawlings established "elected" district assemblies in 1987; however, these assemblies hadvery limited powers and a large portion of their members were appointed by the central

state (Rothchild 1994:4 as cited by Ribot 2002: 19).

Ribot (2002:20) citing Therkildsen (1993:83), concluded that in practice, even in Ghana and Nigeria or in the francophone countries where democratic local government was written into the constitution or given special legal protection, "the reforms more or less led to growing central government control" (Therkildsen 1993:83) and that through the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, decentralizations across the continent failed to produce autonomous representative local government units. They failed to devolve significant powers to local representative bodies. Specifically, making reference to Oyugi (2000:17), Ribot (2002:20) asserted that surveys in the 1970s and 1980s showed that virtually no local government autonomy emerged from the central state (Oyugi 2000:17). This was further buttressed by the UNCDF when it was averred that: "By the end of the 1970s, it was clear that the state institutional apparatus for decentralized development had neither promoted participation, nor promoted any meaningful economic and social advancement" (UNCDF 2000:2). The above findings were given credence by Oyugi, (2000:17) when he posited that one West African survey "could not find any local government with control over its budget or any with autonomous policy making powers" (quoted in Oyugi, 2000:17).

Bringing to the fore the externally induced factor for decentralization on the continent, Ribot (2002:20) stated that in the 1980s and 1990s, Structural Adjustment Programmes, requiring the reduced role of central governments, forced many governments to develop decentralization reforms. With the fall of the Berlin Wall and the democratic elections in South Africa, these reforms were infused with a new, more democratic language. As one United Nations Agency emphasized in the 1990s, "political decentralization has assumed a new meaning, away from the imposition of centralized monolithic values, towards a much more rights-based culture" (UNCDF 2000:3). Decentralization is now being promoted in a context of pluralist discourse, emphasizing greater representation of citizens as well as state reforms toward market-based development with structural adjustment programs. In this context, decentralization is viewed as a way of supporting local governance and improving the efficiency and effectiveness of service delivery to local populations. Policies of decentralization are pursued for both developmental and political reasons. The re-focusing of the aims and objectives of decentralization was highlighted by Ribot (2002:.20) citing de Valk (1990:.3–6) who argues that emphasis has shifted from the political justifications—national stability, garnering popular support, "petty politicking" and so forth—of the 1950s and 1960s, to the developmental value of decentralization that characterizes the current wave of decentralization, begun in the 1980s. As to whether decentralization was achieving its objectives, Ribot, (2002:.20) citing Crook and Sverrisson, (2001); Ribot (1999), UNCDF (2002:4) and Oyugi (2000:17) submitted that most of the recent reforms taking place in the name of democratic decentralization have neither created the accountable representative local institutions nor devolved the powers that would constitute democratic decentralization (Crook and Sverrisson 2001; Ribot 1999). Donor agencies and theorists now promote democratic decentralization as the ideal form, involving the establishment of "autonomous and independent units of local government" (UNCDF, 2002:4). Whenever changes have been initiated in the local government sector the objective in virtually every country in Africa has been stated to be strengthening them as instruments of democratic governance and better service provision Nevertheless, to date it appears that "regardless of the design of the local government system, the prevailing centralizing tendencies on the part of central government have rendered meaningful political decentralization a myth" (Oyugi 2000:17).

Major Trends in Decentralization

Bonnel and Dohon, (2003:4) highlighted the three major trends of the current wave of decentralization in Africa to include:

> The gradual appearing of a new distribution of responsibilities among the national, regional and local levels of government through the process of deconcentration (an initial and limited form of decentralization);

The disengagement of the state and economic liberalization, which favored a new wave of decentralization through devolution; and increased involvement of local jurisdictions and civil society in the management of

their affairs, with new forms of participation, consultation, and partnership. Deconcentration means that decision-making remains at the center, the other levels of government being limited to transmitting orders and implementing decisions. Though decisions regarding crucial issues are made at the center, the levels with deconcentrated authority can by delegation, make decisions concerning less important issues. When they initiate a deconcentration process, governments seek mostly to bring their services closer to citizens either by moving part of their personnel to a particular location, or by assigning some responsibilities to regional or local authorities, while retaining administrative control over decisions taken locally. The failures of the centralized forms of state intervention and the realization that deconcentration had its limits, and the renewal of free-market theories embodied by structural adjustment and macro-economic stabilization policies, are all reasons for adapting public services in the direction of greater decentralization.

During the 80s, and more intensely during the 90s, governments have tried to overcome the flaws of deconcentration by transferring decision-making powers, not to local levels of central government organs, or to semi-autonomous public agencies, but rather to elected officials of local jurisdictions, and to civil society organizations. Decentralization by devolution is therefore, the transfer of functions, resources and decision-making to citizens themselves, who would exercise the powers ceded to either their local government, or to their representative organizations.

In other words, the transfer of functions and resources between the different levels of the national government (deconcentration) becomes more significant with the transfer of decision-making powers and resources of the central government to civil society (devolution). These new reforms through devolution are characterized by four major changes, which seek to make the objectives of effective administration and local democracy compatible:

- The creation of new sub-national jurisdictions at regional or local level;
- The generalization of elections by universal suffrage to cover all sub-national jurisdictions;
- The transfer of authority with sufficient financial resources for sub-national jurisdictions to carry out functions assigned;
- The removal of the prior supervisory role of state representatives, and the institution of legal administrative control (administrative tribunals), and control of budgets.

Decentralization by devolution or territorial decentralization makes it possible for inhabitants of a town, a department, or region to settle their administrative affairs through their elected representatives. All the same, during the first wave of this type of decentralization, local jurisdictions were placed under the supervision of a representative of the national government, with the task of making checks on the legality of their decisions. New waves of decentralization gradually improved the representation of citizens in the process of decision-making. Representative democracy was limited, nevertheless, especially with local élites capturing the decentralized functions. This situation made it necessary to strengthen the process with participatory democracy, based on civil society organizations.

Devolution is the most advanced form of decentralization as it involves the transfer of powers to a local institution or association, with broad autonomy, legal status, and which is representative. To take its full meaning, this form of decentralization has to be accompanied by mechanisms which institute popular participation in the process of decision-making. It means also that accountability of civil servants and elected officials to citizens should be integrated into the process.

Dimensions of Decentralization

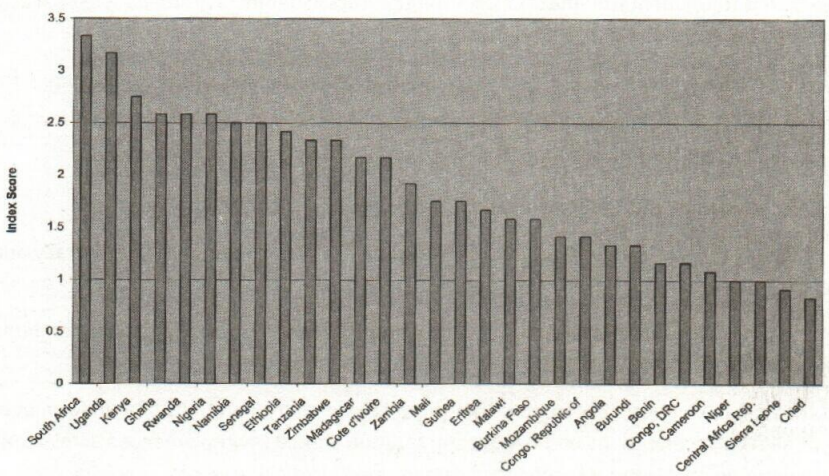
The dimension of decentralization in Africa can better be appreciated from the work of Ndegwa (2002) entitled "Decentralization in Africa: A Stocktaking Survey", the most comprehensive study on the continent with 30 countries included. A composite index was created to rank countries on their overall decentralization taking into account structural and performance factors. Overall, the data indicates a moderate degree of decentralization as of the early 2000s in Africa for the 30 countries for which data was complete and analyzed

(Figure 1). On a scale of 0 to 4, with 0 indicating the lowest level of decentralization and 4 the highest level possible, only two countries namely South Africa and Uganda scored in the top range (3.0-4.0). The next level (2.0-2.9) indicates countries with a moderate degree of decentralization. Eleven countries were in this category, including Kenya, Ghana, Nigeria, Rwanda, Namibia, Senegal, Ethiopia, Zimbabwe, Tanzania, Cote d' Ivoire, and Madagascar. The third group of countries is those with low levels of decentralization (1.0-1.9). This group had the largest number of countries (13), comprising Zambia, Guinea, Mali, Eritrea, Burkina Faso, Malawi, Republic of Congo, Mozambique, Angola, Burundi, Benin, The Democratic Republic of Congo, and Cameroon. The final group with nominal or no decentralization (range 0-0.9) included four (4) countries for which data was complete. They are The Central Africa Republic, Niger, Sierra Leone, and Chad, but could conceivably include others for which there is no data.

In relation to overall decentralization, it is notable that only four of the 13 countries in the upper levels (high and moderate) of overall decentralization are francophone (Senegal, Rwanda, Cote d'Ivoire and Madagascar). Of these, two (Rwanda and Madagascar) have overhauled their administrative systems substantially and can be considered to have had a major break with the established francophone patterns. Indeed, except for four countries (Sierra Leone, Eritrea, Zambia, and Malawi), all the countries scoring in the lower half (low and no decentralization) of the overall index are either francophone (11) or lusophone (2) – that is, countries with a roman law tradition which presume greater state centralization.

Ndegwa's conclusion on the overall decentralization score of the continent is shown in figure 1 below.

Fig. 11. Overall Decentralization Score



Source: Ndegwa (2002:12), Decentralization in Africa: A stocktaking Survey.

Purposes and Benefits of Decentralization

> Most decentralization efforts have both explicit and implicit objectives. Those objectives likely to appeal to the general public, such as local empowerment and administrative efficiency, are generally explicitly stated, while less popular ones, such as increasing central control and "passing the buck" ,are unlikely to be voiced.
>
> Diana Conyers (2000:9)

Purpose

To have a better understanding of the purpose of decentralization, one needs to have an appreciation of the forces driving it. The reasons for decentralizing include: an outcome of pressure from economic crises (Therkildsen 2001:.1; Olowu 2001:53); a means for central governments to shed fiscal and administrative burdens (Nsibambi 1998:2); a failure of central administration (Wunsch and Olowu 1995); an emulation of reforms in other developing countries (Therkildsen, p. 1); a result of populist political success (Heller 1996;31 Olowu 2001: 53); a result of donor pressures and conditions as part of structural adjustment and other programs imposed from the outside (World Bank 2000; Mutizwa-Mangiza 2000:24; Therkildsen 2001: 1);as a response to sub-national splinter groups and pressure to appease and incorporate local elites; and as the consequence of particular relations between central and local authorities (Crook and Sverrisson 2001: 2).

A cursory look at the reasons given above as the basis for embarking on decentralization driving various countries across sub-Saharan Africa leads to the view that there have been varied and wide ranging purposes. This was focused on at the 1994 Burkina Faso Conference on Decentralization in West Africa, entitled: La Decentralization en Afrique de l'Ouest, where country representatives declared various expectations from decentralization (Ribot 2002: 20-21):

- Ivory Coast considers it to be a "pragmatic process leading to the sharing of power between central and local levels";
- for Mauritania, it is "an institutional landmark, a tool for democratization and a way of promoting local development";
- Senegal sees it as "a fundamental element of a learning process in democracy and people's participation in development";
- for Guinea, "decentralization is a project for society based on natural solidarity, oriented towards development";
- Mali sees it as "the best available instrument to use in reorganizing the state";
- for the Cape Verde Islands, it is "a tool used in achieving national solidarity";
- For Benin, "decentralization is an instrument to be used in promoting grassroots democracy and local development"; and
- Burkina Faso expects that "decentralization should reinforce local democracy, grassroots democracy and local development" (Mbassi 1995:24).

The implication of the above expressed purposes is that there can be no expectations of a uniform benefit as well as a one-size fit all recommendations on how decentralization should be implemented across the board although a common denominator is the attainment of development at the grassroots.

Benefit

Based on experience with democratization processes in the Western world, a number of benefits have been deduced. The most important can be summarized (Manor, 1999; Reddy, 1999; Ribot, 2001; UNDP, 2002):

- Deepen democracy by extending representative politics to lower levels;
- Broaden participation in political, economic and social activities;
- Draw on local knowledge and preferences about development;
- Increase government officials' sensitivity to local conditions and needs;
- Improve efficiency in service provision;
- Enhance the accountability of bureaucrats and elected representatives;

- Relieve top central ministry managers of routine tasks to concentrate on policy;
- Facilitate co-operation between government at different levels and lower level associations and NGOs;
- Allow greater access to political decision-making and more equitable distribution of resources for marginal regions and groups in society;
- Create a local focus for more effective co-ordination of all national-to-local programs;
- Allow local 'experimentation' with more creative, innovative and responsive programs;
- Create political stability and national unity by allowing citizens to be involved in local public programs.

Constraints

Decentralization is generally pursued because of the perceived positive impacts, proponents argue that it can make on local and national development, however, recent research results have questioned these assumptions as it has been shown that there is often a vast gap between expected and realized benefits. (Jutting and Corsi, 2005, and Conyers 2007).

No comprehensive study has been carried out on the continent to showcase the gains of decentralization. However, country specific studies have shown little or no gains. Within the purview of regional assessment, one can posit that decentralization initiatives have achieved limited successes. Specifically, if one takes the key indices such as provision of services, local autonomy, efficiency and effectiveness, participation and general development, it is obvious decentralization is yet to achieve its intended goals. Given the fact that most sub-Saharan Africa countries are at the bottom rung of the development ladder on all key indicators, one needs no more evidence of the failure of the present decentralization efforts.

What can be identified as the major constraints to decentralization in Africa? A number of reasons have been given to explain decentralization's poor track record so far:

Threats by and to various Actors

Local democracy and decentralization threaten, and are threatened by, various actors—central governments, donors, civil servants, customary authorities, and other local elites. These threats create new and different alliances. Democratic decentralization is a threat because it creates new authorities and transfers powers among authorities; and it becomes threatened when the actors react to such changes. It also becomes threatened when it is poorly or only partially implemented, thus not delivering the benefits it promises and losing the support of those it is meant to empower. It is further threatened by policies requiring that fiscal transfers coincide with austerity policies or fiscal crisis.

Specifically, some actors in the process feel threatened by the radical changes that democratic decentralization implies. Political actors may see changes in their political base and patronage systems. Civil servants may expect to lose control over resource allocation and decision-making powers. Civil servants may also resist being transferred from a central ministry to work directly for local government. This situation has led to top civil servants persistently trying to retain authority and resources. Loopholes in decentralization legislation may allow central ministries and top civil servants to override or ignore local authorities (Olowu2001 and Ribot, 2002). In some cases this has led to a reassertion of central control that could even be described as a form of 'recentralization'. Threats may equally be felt at the local level, where formal and customary chiefs may resist further democratization. (Wunsch 2001).

Non Existing Institutional Infrastructure

Central governments have not been able to set up the basic institutional infrastructure for what is supposed to be substantial political and administrative reform. Comprehensive constitutional reforms take a long time to process. Related legal frameworks that describe the division of powers, resources and accountability are poorly developed. The reason cited for the latter is that there is always tension between the desire to create

autonomous local structures that are accountable to their local constituencies, and the need to exercise central control to prevent corruption and reduce incompetence. (Ribot, 2002, UNDP 2002).

Capacity Constraints

Capacity is often constrained. This includes a shortage of qualified staff and equipment, a lack of effective management systems and the absence of accurate and comprehensive local data on which to base precise planning. Capacity is a factor that central governments often use to judge whether local institutions are able to receive powers. Since few governments have trusted local actors enough to transfer powers, whether decentralization can proceed before capacity is built remains unclear (UNDP, 2002).

High Cost

Implementing a decentralization process is a costly exercise at a time when governments are experiencing severe resource shortages. Budgeting and fiscal management are hampered by these chronic resource deficiencies. The inadequacy and unreliability of national grants and transfers to the local level disrupts the local resource base, diminishes effective local authority and erodes its credibility. This also provides a disincentive to local tax collection. In a situation where the allocation of national resources is already cumbersome, fiscal policy and decentralization are not yet able to provide for the stabilization and redistribution of resources to the lower levels; particularly to more disadvantaged areas and groups, including women, the rural and urban poor and ethnic minorities (Wunsch 2001).

Weak Institutional Framework

A weak institutional framework often results in poor or incomplete implementation. In a number of cases local democratic structures have been created but have not been designated any powers, or powers are devolved to non-representative or upwardly accountable local authorities. This leads to unworkable situations, and undermines the credibility of the newly-created local institutions. (Ribot, 2002).

Mutual Incompatibility

Few decentralization initiatives have managed to engage local communities in effective, 'bottom-up' planning mechanisms. For the most part, planning and decentralization seem to be mutually incompatible. (UNDP, 2002).

Maintenance of the Status Quo

The concept of participatory processes in communities to enforce good governance on the part of local councils and effective service delivery by public agents at local levels is contested. Instead of bringing the 'voices of the poor' to decision-making at local levels, signs are that decentralized local government merely recreates at district and lower levels the rent-seeking environment that previously occurred at central level. (Ellis, Bahiigwa, 2001).

Lack of Political Will

If we look at the various factors that engender decentralization reform most of them are externally driven especially in the era of Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) or based on other donor agency pressure. This may imply that most of the countries only embark on decentralization in order to be seen as doing their masters' bidding or more positively, to be seen to be moving with the trend. This may explain the lack of political will to pursue the decentralization initiative to its logical conclusion.

Uniformity Fallacy

There is the temptation more often than not to prescribe a one-size fit all approach without taking note of key peculiarities

Requirements for Successful Decentralization

Against the key constraints discussed, this section will suggest the requirements for a successful decentralization initiative.

Designing and Strengthening Local Government

The specific design of decentralization and local government differs in every country. Structure and organization are affected by the historical, social and political context. In some countries there are a mixture of types of decentralization and different institutional arrangements within a single country.

Major challenges in the design of decentralization are allocating responsibilities between levels of government, designating territorial jurisdictions, establishing electoral arrangements, designing internal management structures and creating appropriate accountability mechanisms. The generally accepted view is that a sector or function is a prime candidate for decentralization if:

- local demands for a service differ across localities;
- there are no substantial economies of scale associated with the service;
- there are no substantial spill-overs of costs from the service and the service is amenable to at least partial local financing through taxes or charges;
- local governments have the capacity to deliver ; and
- the service is not meant to provide substantial redistribution of income or wealth

It is important therefore to take cognizance of the specific context for reform. Countries therefore may need to take an incremental approach as against a big bang approach.

Building Capacity

It is important that each level of government has sufficient capacity to carry out the responsibilities transferred via reforms. Local governments are often criticized for having weak capacity, for example in the areas of public financial management, project management, programme monitoring and evaluation. Initiatives to assess and develop capacity are therefore important parts of decentralization strategies. This will require identifying and filling existing knowledge and skills gaps before embarking on decentralization. Also, a capacity building system must be instituted to ensure continuous training and re-training.

Fiscal Decentralization

In order for local governments to be able to embrace the potential of decentralization in terms of poverty reduction, enhanced participation and improved local service delivery, they have to be adequately resourced. Fiscal decentralization therefore involves important decisions about the assignment of central and local responsibilities as well as how these expenditure responsibilities should be financed. It is not solely about the transference of financial resources from one layer of government to another, it is also about the extent to which local authorities are able to make decisions themselves over the management and use of devolved resources and local revenues, and about how they account for those resources. There is need to ensure that resources are sufficient to enable local government to meet citizens expectations.

Sequencing and implementing the decentralization process

There is increasing recognition that greater care must be taken in considering the order and rate of implementation of the complex and interdependent set of factors that constitute decentralization (Smoke, 1999:13). Therefore, great care must be taken to determine what comes first and what follows and at what time.

Democratic Local Government First

The kinds of outcomes expected from decentralization are predicated on some form of downwardly accountable local representation. It would appear that establishing representative institutions would be a priority—perhaps

the top priority. Establishing representative institutions is a matter of legislation. Often it takes only small legislative changes, such as the moves made by Mali and Senegal to incorporate independent candidates in local elections—rather than depending on party lists. In other places, such as Gambia, it may involve widening suffrage and creating term limits for elected local government representatives, rather than appointing them for life. Ribot, (1995). These small changes form the foundation for democratic decentralization. Without systematic means for public participation and voice in local decisions over decentralized powers, transfer of powers to the local arena becomes deconcentration or privatization by default.

Freedom Within Oversight

Establishing a domain of local autonomy with such overbearing systems of tutelle exercised by line ministries, local government ministries and ministries of interior is problematic (Oyugi (2000:7–80; Ribot, 1999).How can local authorities develop capacity to operate independently and how can they develop legitimacy in their own communities? One of the priorities, indeed one of the defining characteristics, of decentralization is the creation of a domain of local autonomy. This domain is constrained by (i) lack of powers (of decision making, rulemaking, enforcement, adjudication and implementation), and (ii) restrictive oversight. In transferring powers to produce autonomy in the local arena, powers that do not depend on continuous central allocation may be good ones to focus on first.

Local Revenue-Generating Powers

This will include re-appraising the legal framework for fiscal decentralization such as the ability to tax land, income, or natural resource exploitation, which may also create greater local independence and legitimacy. This cross-sectorial financing through local government can be highly productive. Drawing on local revenue sources need not be independent of the redistribution functions of the state. Central government can still tax or take a portion of these revenues for such purposes. Of course, the use of some of these powers may require oversight, but this should take place from a distance and should only be used to ensure that local action is within the law, not to micromanage local authorities. It appears that few if any local authorities are free from such strict administrative oversight.

Power before Capacity

It is clear that there is a chicken-and-egg problem. There is reluctance on the part of central governments to devolve powers before capacity has been demonstrated but without powers there is no basis on which local authorities can gain the experience needed to build capacity, and there is no basis on which they can demonstrate that capacity has been gained. Strategies must be developed to deal with this problem. More research is needed to identify how capacity considerations are handled are they real reasons or just excuses not to transfer funds? Local decisions must conform to certain national standards. Some of these may be technically complex and require skill to interpret or apply. But, before asking whether local people have technical capacities, the first question is whether these standards are necessary or overly complex.

Taking Time

The pressure to "get things done" has often led governments to circumvent democratic processes and to develop and implement programs from the top. (Selznick, 1984:37). This impatience with processes in order to achieve external aims undermines some basic principles of decentralization. Based on this kind of impatience, democratic processes are circumvented and the institutionalizing of the representative aspect of decentralization is marginalized. There is learning to be done and adjustment to be made. The bottom line is that reforms cannot be judged unless they are actually implemented and given time to take root.

Challenges for the Future

Despite the above-mentioned constraints, there is still hope that these processes will result in more local ownership and improved development programs. The major challenges are:

Having the Political Will

Political will is required to bring about wider institutional, political and economic reforms in order to achieve decentralization, possibly including land reforms and reforms to the banking system, both of which

are dominated by the political elite. The decentralization policy should cater for an enabling and clear constitutional, legislative and regulatory framework. This framework should provide a fairly comprehensive division of responsibilities between the various levels of government and civil society and clarify the relationship between these levels. Establishing an enabling environment to empower local-level structures in service delivery is considered to be especially important. (Olowu, 2001 and UNDP 2002).

Balancing Goal Expectations at Different Levels

Where national and local interests are contradictory there is the challenge of balancing these realities in a manner that recognizes both the virtues of devolving power, authority and resources to lower levels and the importance of realizing the goals of national development as defined by central authorities.

Provide Adequate Capacity Building

Capacity-building programs should be developed for government officials of different levels and civil society representatives. Local authorities should be able to promote participatory planning, and implement and improve public services to local citizens. These authorities would then be in a better position to assume the role of facilitator or catalyst of a real partnership that promotes cooperative approaches to development.

Ensuring Inclusiveness

Decentralizing power and authority do not guarantee the emergence of enhanced local governance. Effective civil society involvement does not come easily as it calls for a deliberate effort to reach out to local communities beyond the decentralized structures of sub-national authorities. Effective participation requires enlightened intervention, including the improvement of the institutional environment in which varying interest groups co-exist. Equally fundamental, but often overlooked, is that bringing the decentralized sub-national authorities closer to some civil society actors can risk taking them even further away from others. Not all organizations of civil society (e.g. political parties, NGOs, lobby groups) are adequately accountable, either to their own members or to the public at large. And although some groups may be quite vocal, the interests they represent may not be widely shared. In reaching out to groups in civil society, the governance system must be conscious not only of the interests those groups represent, but also of those they do not. Otherwise national pro-poor interventions could risk creating new disparities between the newly accommodated and those whose voices remain unheard: for example, women, the urban and rural poor in informal human settlements, and ethnic minorities (UNDP, 2002).

Developing Better Management Frameworks and Structures

Management structures should be further developed to better integrate the activities of relevant NGOs, the private sector, and other community-based institutions into government frameworks of poverty reduction (Farrington, Lomax, 2001, UNDP, 2002).

Balancing key Components of Fiscal Decentralization

In fiscal decentralization central government should on the one hand allow sub-national authorities to gain direct access to as many revenue resources as possible, and on the other provide them with regular, stable, reliable and commensurate appropriations and in a predictable manner. If well-designed, fiscal decentralization may contribute to economic stabilization and the redistribution of resources (Wunsch, 2001).

Strengthening Financial Management Capacity

Accountability and efficient public expenditure can be improved through participatory budgeting, greater transparency in public procurement and contracting procedures, including enhancement of government finance, accounting and internal audit systems and procedures. To avoid any misappropriation of funds the financial management capacity of both national and local governments should be strengthened (UNDP, 2002; Wunsch, 2001)

Be Realistic about Public Private Partnerships

To broaden the capacity of the lower-level structures, public-private partnerships are recommended. To utilize these partnerships more effectively, strong administrative and management structures and systems within the public and private sector (including civil society organizations) are important prerequisites. Nevertheless,

one should be cautious about having blind faith in the power of the private sector to correct the inequalities in service provision (UNDP, 2002).

Avoiding Uniformity

One should also be wary of the dangers inherent in uniformly decentralizing power and authority to lower-level bodies that may possess varying levels of capacity to productively accommodate new mandates and management challenges. In future, when designing policy or legislating for the various functions, decentralization should not be applied uniformly in a manner that pre-supposes that all local-level structures have equal capacity and the same level of political will with which to take devolved functions on board. However, it is acknowledged that such asymmetric decentralization can lead to complex legal and regulatory difficulties (UNDP, 2002).

Ensuring a Participatory Approach

The reduction of poverty is more likely to be assured when the people for whom pro-poor interventions were intended are allowed, through empowerment, to effectively participate in these interventions. Unless there are strong oversight-cum-accountability institutions, decentralization can reinforce, as it often has , the power of local elites and further exacerbate I inequalities; a phenomenon that has adverse implications for poverty reduction itself (UNDP, 2002).

Conclusion

African governments have undergone repeated decentralization reforms since the colonial period. However, in the most recent wave (beginning in the late 1980s), the language of reform has shifted from an emphasis on national cohesion and the management of local populations to a discourse more focused on democratization, pluralism and rights. It has been argued that democratic mechanisms that allow local governments to discern the needs and preferences of their constituents, and that provide a way for those constituents to hold local governments accountable, are the basis for most of the purported benefits of decentralization. The underlying developmentalist logic of decentralization is that local institutions can better discern, and are more likely to respond to, local needs and aspirations. Theorists believe this ability derives from local authorities having better access to information and being more easily held accountable to local populations. Downward accountability of local authorities is central to this formula. When downwardly accountable local authorities also have discretionary powers—a domain of local autonomy—over significant local matters, there is good reason to believe that greater equity and efficiency follow. These assumptions must be approached with caution, as surprisingly little research has been done to assess whether such conditions exist or lead to the desired outcomes.

Decentralization has not been implemented fully because it threatens many actors; In addition, most of the literature on decentralization focuses more on expectations and discourse than on practice and outcomes. On the whole, the decentralization experiment has only taken timid steps, mainly towards deconcentration. Many reforms are taking place in the name of decentralization, but they are not setting up the basic institutional infrastructure upon which to base the positive outcomes promised by decentralization. Instead, local authorities are created but given few powers, or powers are devolved to non-representative or upwardly accountable local authorities. When instances of genuine decentralization are found—that is, downwardly accountable local authorities with discretionary powers—outcomes can then be measured.

From the various developmental indicators with respect to the African continent, one can posit that decentralization is not taking the forms necessary to realize the benefits that theory predicts.

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Chapter 4

Decentralization, Citizens' Participation and Empowerment

Finlay Sama Doh

Abstract

The chapter begins by discussing the meaning of key terms such as decentralization and community empowerment, linking them to service delivery. It gives a detailed account of various forms of decentralization and their impacts, paying particular attention to devolution as an important means of deepening democracy. However, it is also argued that decentralization can result in elite capture which implies a negative impact on poverty alleviation. An extensive review of the literature is included, some of it is based on historical experiences to trace how these concepts evolved, but much of it is current in nature. The chapter also links the key issues to ongoing debates about the approach termed 'New Public Management '(NPM). Some of the practical requirements for the successful empowerment of communities are discussed; these include the development of skills and capacity, new forms or cadres of leadership, improved technical efficiency and innovation. Throughout the chapter references are made to the experiences of a variety of countries, both in Africa and elsewhere. The chapter ends on a positive note by reference to the potential benefits of community empowerment including the achievement of rights and freedoms as opposed to continued rule by dictators.

Introduction

Decentralization is the transfer of legal, administrative political authority and resources to make decisions and manage public functions from central government to sub national and local levels of authorities in most countries. Decentralization is a means to enact and deepen democratic governance and improve administrative and service delivery effectively (Brinkerhoff and Azfar, 2005). Though decentralization is often regarded as a top-down process driven by unitary or federal states in which the centre grants functions, authorities and resources to sub-national and local levels, impulses for decentralization can also originate from these lower levels (Appadurai and Arjun, 2004).

Closely associated with the bottom-up approach is local or community empowerment, whereby local actors' capacities and resources are mobilized for collective actions to achieve public purposes. Local governments and jurisdictions constitute the institutional loci where top-down and bottom-up drives meet, hence an important question for successful achievement of decentralization's democratic and service delivery aims is how citizens' empowerment interacts with local governments to further these objectives (Azfar, 2006).

Decentralization distinguishes variants along a continuum where at one end the centre maintains strong control with limited power and discretion at lower levels (decentralization) to progressively decreasing central control and increasing local discretion at the other end (devolution). The devolutionary end of the continuum is associated with more democratic governance. Decentralization has a spatial aspect in that authority and responsibility are moved to local governments and jurisdictions in different physical locations, from the centre to the local level. It has an institutional aspect in that these transfers involve expanding roles and functions from one central agency/level of government to multiple agencies and jurisdictions.

In principle, accompanying the transfer of authority and responsibility and the expanded discretionary space to make decisions locally is a shift in accountability. Upward accountability to the centre is supplementary with downward accountability. And indirect accountability, mediated by higher level authorities can be referred to as the "long route" to accountability. The presence and nature of decentralized accountability relationships are significant factors in creating options and avenues for community empowerment. Ribot (2004) raises an important question of whether or not decentralization choices, and the accountability structures and incentives they put in place for local government and local service delivery agencies enfranchise communities.

Types of Decentralization

There are different types of decentralization. Table 1 depicts and identifies the features that characterize local government under each type. Clearly, the content of the table are stylized versions of local government's administrative, financial and political dimensions under progressively more democratic decentralized governance systems. The table illustrates that, in general, democratic local governance offers both a greater range of decisions and more autonomous decision space to local government actors. However, the specific contours of democratic space are strongly influenced by how authority is distributed at the local level. Strong mayor-weak council systems create narrower space than systems that balance authority more evenly between mayors and councils which in turn provide citizens greater input during council meetings.

Table 1: Types of Decentralization and Impacts on Local Government

	Administrative	Financial/Fiscal	Political
Deconcentration	Local Government (LG) follows central policies and plans according to central norms. The form and structure of LG is centrally determined. LG staff are employees of central ministries accountable to centre. LG is the service delivery arm of centre. There is little discretion in service choice, or mix modes of provision. LG provides information upwards to centre.	LG is dependent on centre for funds; sectorial ministries and Ministry of Finance (MOF) provide spending priorities and budget envelop. LG has no independent revenue sources LG reports to centre on expenditure according to centre formulas and norms. Centre conducts LG audits.	No elected LG officials they are appointed by centre and serve central interests. Civil society and citizens rely on remote and weak links to the central government for exercising accountability. Little political space for local civil society central elites control politics.
Delegation	LG follows central policies and norms It has some discretion to tailor to local needs and to modify form and structure. LG staff may be a mix of central and LG employees. LG has authority on hiring and placement. Centre handles promotion and firing. LG provides the service delivery menu set by centre. Some discretion is permitted to fit local needs. LG provides most information upwards to the centre and selected information to local officials, and citizens.	LG is dependent on centre for funds. LG has some discretion on spending priorities within budget envelop. Block grants and conditional transfers from centre offer some autonomy. LG has no independent revenue sources. LG reports to centre and local officials on expenditures according to central formulas and norms centre and LG conduct audits.	LG may be a mix of elected and centrally appointed officials. Local officials often tied to national party platforms, There is little discretion. Some local accountability, but strong central orientation. Some political space for local civil society.
Devolution	LG is subject to national norms, but sets local policies, priorities and plans autonomously in response to local preferences and needs. LG. determines own form and structure. Staff are employees of LG which set salaries, numbers assignment and handles hiring and firing. LG determines service mix, modes of provision, eligibility and allocation. LG provides information to local officials and citizens.	LG sets spending priorities, plans, how to meet service delivery obligations given resource availability. LG has a mix of own-source revenues, revenue sharing central transfers. LG may have some authority for debt financing, but subject to a hard budget constraint. LG reports to local officials and citizens on expenditure according to central formulas and norms. LG is responsible for audits, reports results locally and to centre.	The LG is comprised of elected officials, may or may not be linked to national parties, platforms respond to constituent demands and needs. Strong local accountability. LG shapes budget priorities, investments, service mix to fit local preferences and needs. Broad political space for local civil society.

Expected Outcomes

Two broad categories of outcomes anticipated from decentralization are usually identified; those related to deepening democracy and those concerning improved service delivery. The distinction between these two categories is not hard and fast. There is overlap and positive feedback between the democracy and service delivery outcomes; they lie somewhere along a continuum that might go from "pure" democratic deepening to "pure" service delivery improvement.

The concept of democratic deepening emerged from the literature on democratic transition and waves. It generally refers to processes of consolidation and institutionalization such that democracy becomes "the only game in town (Diamond 1997: xvii) or a "meaningful way for diverse sectors of the populace to exercise collective control over the public decisions that affect their lives" (Roberts 1998:2). Democratic deepening concerns not simply the structures and procedures by which democratic governance is exercised, but its quality and substance (Gaventa, 2005). For example, in principle, the existence of formal representatives in parliament provides for political participation for all the citizens from a given constituency. Yet in practice, political parties and elected officials do not cater for the interest of the poor, women and minorities, thus questioning the quality of democracy. Along this vein, subsequent debates emphasize issues of inclusiveness and participation, arguing that deepening democracy requires the active engagement in public affairs of citizens from all socio-economic strata (Fung and Wright, 2003a). Decentralization, particularly its devolutionary variant and political dimension, is recognized in the democracy literature as contributing importantly to democratic deepening, but with the caveat that elite capture is a danger requiring explicit countervailing measures to avoid it (Bardhan and Mookherjee, 2000).

However, much decentralisation literature focusses on the second outcome category, that of service delivery. Major analytical threads focus on how decentralization improves allocative efficiency through matching services with citizen preferences, increase service production efficiency and cost recovery, thus affecting intergovernmental fiscal relations (Azfar et al. 2001, Shah and Thompson 2004). Related threads explore decentralization's impacts on service providers' incentives for accountability, innovation and equitable distribution (Dillinger, 1994).

The outcomes that address deepening democracy and improved service delivery are:

Deepening Democracy

- Improved accountability and responsiveness to a broad range of citizens.
- Improved skills and capacity of citizens to participate effectively in public affairs.
- New and expanded cadres of leaders with democratic skills that can transform the contestability of political markets

Improved Service Delivery

- Better matching of public services to citizens' need and preferences.
- Improved technical efficiency because of "a race to the top" as different jurisdictions competes with each other for taxpaying firms and residents and incentives.
- Increased innovation as problems as solved at the local level and as successes are disseminated.

Community Empowerment Definition

Conceptually, community empowerment is closely allied with citizen participation and shares with literatures the diversity of perspectives that range from normative and prescriptive to empirical and focus on community empowerment as a process or an outcome (Cray and Moyo 1995; Mansuri and Rao, 2004). Just as with participation, numerous analyses seek to parse empowerment in terms of whether it is "real" or "genuine." Empowerment is more viewed in instrumental term, as contributing to achieving particular purposes. There is a wide variety of analytic approaches to empowerment (Narayan, 2005), all dealing in one way or the other with state-society relations. As Uphoff (2005) notes, the core issue at stake is the power dimension.

From its original meaning related to decision making power and authority, the definition has expanded over the years to include: access to having information and resources, having a range of choices beyond yes or no, exercise of "voice" and "exit", an individual or group having a sense of efficacy and mobilizing like-minded others for common goals. These latter elements reflect a perspective on empowerment that encompasses psychological capabilities, including belief in citizenship rights and aspirations for a better future (Cornwell and Gaventa, 2001). Combining community with empowerment emphasizes the essentiality of collective action to the concept. Community empowerment concerns how members of a group are able to act collectively in ways that enhance their influence on, or control over, decisions that affect their interests.

The above definition does not mean that everybody agrees, or that there are not socio-economic divisions or conflicts of interest within the community. Here, no one is equating community empowerment to egalitarian harmony, a theme that Campfens (1997) identifies as one enduring intellectual tradition in the community development literature. Neither does it assume that all members of the community engage equally in collective action.

Communities are made up of individuals, and in practice empowerment is most likely to emerge first among a small group of motivated community members, before expanding to a broader base of citizens through constituency building, education and outreach. Empowered individuals can significantly advance a collective action, beginning with Olson's classic work (1965) and in the international development context pursued by Ostron and her colleagues, who have focused on community management of common pool resources (Ostron 1990). The literature has concentrated on self-governance at the community level and has tended to downplay the connection between the local self-governance institutions and the vertical structures of State governance (Agrawal 2001). The World Bank's research on poverty reduction highlights empowerment as key to meeting the needs and demands of the poor (Narayan 2002) and to enable accountability to the poor (World Bank 2004).

Brinkerhoff and Azfar, (2006) noted that community empowerment operationally can be seen in terms of four elements. These four element were identified as access to information, inclusion and participation in forums where issues are discussed and decisions are made; ability to hold decision-making accountable for their choices and actions and having the capacity and resources to organize to aggregate and express their interests or take on roles as partners with public service delivery agencies. When citizens lack information about what local governments are doing they become powerless to move beyond being passive recipients of whatever public officials provide for them.

Empowerment requires that communities are able to gain entrée to the venues in which deliberations and decisions-making take place, and that they have the capacity to participate effectively. For example, public meetings on community school issues should be scheduled when parents are likely to be available with sufficient advanced notice that they can plan to attend; plus the presentation of issues need to be accessible and comprehensible to non-specialists. Empowerment of communities should give rights to the citizens to hold public officials accountable for their promises and plans. Finally, empowerment calls for sufficient organizational capacity of local groups to take on a variety of functions such as co-producers, planners, operators and agents of service delivery in collaboration with public agencies.

Citizens' Participation /Inclusion
The Rationale for Citizens' Participation in Development.

Talking about peoples' participation in all development processes is an issue of human rights. It is the inalienable right of every person to have a voice and choice in what happens in his or her community. More importantly, every human being needs to be informed and have the right to be involved in the development processes that will determine his or her destiny.

Peoples' participation in development is one of the means of achieving sustainable improvement in the lives of people in the society. It encourages self-reliance, reduces dependence and enhances the commitment of local peoples to the development of their own communities and societies. People's involvement therefore, empowers and mobilizes people to become actors and overseers of their own development.

The mechanisms to foster inclusion and citizens' participation range from legally mandated measures such as a country's constitution or a law on participation in Bolivia and India's quota for women and minorities in local legislatures (Chattopadhyay and Duflo 2003) to procedural routines in public agencies, such as joint planning exercises with communities and service providers. These offer communities the opportunities to give public officials their views before laws are promulgated in their final forms.

Grassroots movements are an example of a community empowerment mechanism that originates outside of local or national government structures. Landless peasant movements pushing for agrarian land reform, such as the "Movimiento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem-Terra," formed in 1984 in Brazil, which used techniques of mass peaceful land occupations to pressure state governments to change land policies (Wright and Wolford 2003).

The New Public Management Theory

The past thirty years mark a rich period of experimentation in public service reforms. Many countries, including most of the developed countries, have undertaken extensive reforms aimed at making government more efficient, more effective, more productive, more transparent and more responsive. The quest to achieve these goals has been pursued by privatization, deregulation, commercialization, or decentralization (Bourgon, 2007). Looking back, we are better able to identify the positive initiatives that show lasting potential and to discard the less successful ventures that had negative effects on the ethos of the public service.

The new public management theory (NPM) takes its intellectual foundations from public choice theory, which looks at government from the stand point of markets and productivity and from managerialism that focuses on management approaches to achieve productive gains. At its core, NPM represents a set of ideas, values and practices aim at emulating private sector practices in the public sector.

According to Gow and Dufour, (2000) NPM has both protagonists and vehement opponents. It has been criticized for the values it promotes, the disaggregation of the concept of a unified public service and the effects of managerialism on democratic values. However, the underlying issues NPM attempts to resolve deserve careful attention.

Three of the most important issues include:

- Citizen – cantered Services;
- Value for taxpayers' money; and
- A responsive public service workforce.

Citizen-centred Services

The most fundamental characteristic of the public service should be its commitment to serve citizens in order to advance the public good. A good public service true to its mission should be recognized for on-going improvement of services and for its respect for the citizens it serves. It should be at the leading edge

in exploring best practices, and should provide co-ordinated and integrated services among department and agencies. In addition, it should use the power of modern information and communication technologies to enable citizens to reclaim their democratic institutions and to access government on their own terms according to their needs. In short, the public service should put citizens first although this is not always the case (Bourgon, 1997).

A citizen-cantered approach to service delivery does not reduce the role of the citizen to that of a customer or mere user of government services. Rather, it embraces a fuller recognition and affirmation of citizen rights and of the breadth of their interest.

A New Public Administration theory should help to reconcile the need for stability with the need to be responsive to citizens' need and expectation.

Value for Taxpayers' Money

Achieving value for money in serving the public good is not in conflict with public service values. On the contrary NPM is focussed on results and on assessing performance and impact is important and should be preserved. Every public sector organization should share a commitment to improving productivity. This is not a minimalist concept of the role of the State. It is a commitment to marshal all available public resources to effectively advance the public interest. It is difficult for individual citizens to determine the quantity and quality of services that they should expect to receive in return for a given level of taxation. It is government's responsibility to provide citizens with comprehensive information. Some government have taken steps to inform their citizens about the services they provide through the adoption of legislation that provides access to information (Bourgon, 2007).

However, disaggregated information does not lead to a better understanding, nor is it a useful base for government public accountability for results. The NPM theory could explore the right of citizens to know and to understand the consequences of government decisions.

A Flexible Public Service Workforce

To better serve the public interest, government must be able to modernize its role and to respond to the changing needs of citizens. This is particularly true in the new global economy and society. Governments must create new ways of delivering services. Public servants are especially responsible citizens who are fiduciaries for the citizenry as a whole (Bowman and Kearney, 2010). They have special roles to play in the society and are given or awarded special status and protection. The privileges and protection help to ensure that public servants can withstand political pressures in performing their duties and resist the temptations of corruption.

The creation, maintenance and development of a meritorious non-partisan and professional public service does not , in itself, require guaranteed employment for life, guaranteed promotions or upward mobility based on security. Nor should it preclude taking actions against poor performance. Consequently, a meritorious public service requires a clear legal framework and an independent oversight agency to protect the merit principle. It requires inter-departmental mobility, diversity of experiences and healthy merit-based competition system for promotion and advancement.

The new Public Management theory is needed to guide the necessary interactions amongst citizens, civil society, public servants, and elected officials. Such a theory should help us to advance harmoniously from a concept of separation to one of democratic interaction and greater integration rooted in greater understanding of and respect for the respective roles of both elected official and administrators.

Opportunities from Citizens' Empowerment

There are many benefits that empowering citizens through decentralization can offer to our societies or communities. These include:

- Improved accountability and responsiveness;
- New and expanded cadres of leaders with democratic skills

- Better matching of public services to citizen needs and preferences;
- Improved technical efficiency; and
- Increased innovation

Improved Accountability and Responsiveness

A core democratic outcome expected from decentralization is improved accountability and responsiveness to increased numbers of citizens through the creation of sub-national jurisdictions. Local governments with delegated and developed powers and authorities deal with issues and services of direct concern to their constituencies, and through elections, referenda and open governmental processes and procedures (town hall meetings, council hearings and committees, "one-stop- shop" service centres and ombudsmen) face pressures to respond to citizens' concerns and to be held accountable for decision taken. These sub-national jurisdictions create in essence, multiple versions of the long route to accountability and shorter ones when compared with citizen connections to national government (World Bank 2004). Decentralization is said to provide better information flows at the local level than at the national level due to proximity between the principals and their agents who furnish citizens with the public goods and services they need and want. Unfortunately, much of the literatures on African decentralization reveal negative or highly circumscribed findings, (Crook 2003). In a comparative study of Uganda and the Philippines, Azfar et al (2001) found little evidence of local election voting being driven by service delivery concerns.

Improved Skills and Capacity to Participate Effectively in Public Affairs

Democratic decentralization that devolves decision-making authority, accompanied by resources to implement decisions (combines revenue-raising capacity with intergovernmental transfers) creates the conditions for local governments to become institutional arenas where citizens learn democratic skills and how to exercise their rights. Deepening democracy requires expanding the numbers of citizens who are able to participate effectively in public affairs and democratic local government offers potential participatory possibilities to larger numbers of citizens. To take advantage of such participatory options, citizens need skills along with motivation (Gaventa, 2005). The experience of deliberating in public forums and voting on issues close to home, such as education, health, street lights and garbage collection; making tax and budget choices and monitoring the results can expand citizens' choices and monitoring the results can expand citizens' skills. These experiences help citizens to learn how governments work to gain confidence in interacting with local officials and to understand how to protect and pursue their political and civil rights.

New and Expanded Cadre of Leaders with Democratic Skills

The above discussion of citizenship skills for communities also applied to local leaders. Through the expanded political space afforded by devolutionary democratic decentralization, local residents have opportunities to develop democratic leadership skills. In some cases, these individuals pursue local political office and thus contribute to an expanded pool of local government leaders. In addition, there can be trickle-up effects in cases where leaders who have gained democratic skills and experience in decentralized local government seek elected office at higher levels of government. Community/citizen empowerment mechanisms such as participatory budgetary, open hearings, joint planning and local councils all provide community leaders and elected officials with opportunities to build their skills and experience in public speaking and debate, managing public meetings, dealing with constituents' demands, mobilizing coalitions and compromising to achieve results. These are all vital skills for election to both local and national positions.

Community/citizen empowerment, through watchdog NGOs, grassroots movements and advocacy campaigns, serves to create citizen leaders who have the skills and motivation to confront public officials, demand accountability and mount pressure to make elected or appointed officials respond.

Better Matching of Public Services to Citizen Needs and Preferences

A classic argument for decentralization is that it leads to better allocative efficiency by the matching of public services to the demands for these services. Local governments are conjectured to gain more access to information about the preferences of local citizens, greater political incentives to provide preferred services and greater flexibility and imagination to do so than a central government (Azfar, 2006). Though the centre may have some knowledge about the differences in demands, local governments are free to decide what to provide to their citizens in truly democratic decentralized administrative units. Azfar et al., (2001) found that in developing countries (districts in Uganda and provinces in the Philippines), there was no evidence that local officials had better knowledge of the preferences of local inhabitants that lower level governments (sub countries in Uganda and municipalities in the Philippines) had only weak knowledge of preferences. As Manor (2006) puts it, there appears to be a lot of distance between local officials and citizens, and only imperfect knowledge transmission. Rao and Ibanez (2003) in a matched community econometric analysis found that the participatory process introduced in Jamaica led to elite domination of decisions on the allocation of social fund investments and decisions taken by the elite.

Improved Technical Efficiency

Another outcome posited for decentralization is improved service delivery resulting from inter-jurisdictional competition and the race to the top. Inter-jurisdictional competition may work by one of two mechanisms or their combination. First governments may vie with each other for tax base and compete to attract labour and capital to their jurisdiction. Second, governments may compete with their neighbours through yardstick competition by providing better services to get re-elected-presuming that voters are more likely to reward governments that do better than their neighbours. Combinations of these two mechanisms' may also work (Bird, 2000; Brinkerhoff and Goldsmith, 2005). The better tax base a government can attract to provide funds for better service prompting the electorates to re-elect the officials. However, the findings of Azfar et al., (2001) in Uganda and Philippines were different. Mobility is very rarely driven by concerns about service delivery. This is because of the dictatorial and corrupt manner in which elections are conducted in most third world countries. Shatkin's (2000) study conducted in Metro Manila in the Philippines suggests that Municipal governments are likely to be more interested in responding to private sector interests than worried about citizens moving away because their needs were not met.

Increased Innovation

Decentralization is expected to improve service delivery through the opportunities it provides for greater innovation at the local level, and through the demonstration effect, whereby other jurisdictions imitate the innovations and spread better practices to other localities. The concept of experimental federalism states that decentralization encourages a few brave municipalities to adopt reforms and then successful reforms are adopted by other localities (Oates 1999). The Welfare Reform Act in the United States of America, which was tried in some states before being widely adopted is one example of experimental federalism (Oates, 2003).

How does community empowerment help the process of innovation? In terms of helping bring fresh ideas into national government, empowerment mechanisms can make fresh ideas subject to critical public debate so they are more likely to be accepted at the central level and in other local jurisdictions.

Adoption of innovation requires dissemination, and information campaigns organized by NGOs can help spread new ideas. Community participation may also make innovation more difficult. Hence, local officials may need to take proactive steps to assure attendance of the poor and marginalized at meetings. Procedures such as targeting excluded groups for invitation to meetings and feeding or paying participants may encourage attendance and mitigate capture.

Issues for Citizens Empowerment that Emerge as Decentralization moves from Deconcentration to Democratic Devolution

Politics clearly influences the potential for creating the anticipated synergies between community empowerment and democratic decentralization. Other important influencing factors include the institutional

dimension and specifically, the balance between local government capacity to supply democratic governance and community capacity to demand. The political and institutional dimensions strongly mediate the prospects for elite capture.

A recurring theme in both decentralization and community empowerment literatures is the potential for elite capture of local governments, empowerment mechanisms and the benefits they produce for citizens (Reinikka and Svensson 2004). Around the world, mature democracies following the rules of universal suffrage, secret ballots and multiparty elections, tend to produce outcomes that are very roughly representative of their citizens' preferences. Representative democracy can result in outcomes that may favour elites. Olson (1982) describes how democracies become more prone to cooptation by organized interests with the passage of time. The issue of which groups in a society have the power to influence public officials to respond to their particular concerns and desires, endemic to any governance system, plays out in democracies through the chains of vertical accountability that connect citizens to elected officials and to executive agencies.

In Uganda, participation is associated with the decentralization policy, which was adopted in 1992. The argument raised in favour of decentralization was that it could promote democratic local governance and local development through popular participation in local elections, improved representation and empowerment, which would spearhead effective local planning, decision-making and implementation of development projects that can increase benefits for all. Uganda's decentralized system of local governance was built on a major assumption that local citizens would participate effectively in making decisions on local development and would be able to enforce responsiveness and accountability from their leaders. It was also assumed that elected leaders would serve the best interest of their electorates, but the reality on the ground shows mixed results (Francis and Roberts, 2003; Kijaga – Nsubuya and Olum, 2009).

Though decentralization has enhanced representation on local government council, especially hitherto marginalized sections of the society like women, youth and persons with disabilities it has not necessarily translated into empowerment schemes for rural development. The central government (CG) is anxious to retain authority and resources, suggest reassertion of central control that impedes effective local decision-making.

Linking Participation, Empowerment and Rural Development

Fox and Meyer (1995; 20) define citizen community participation as;

> The involvement of citizens in a wide range of administrative policy-making activities, including the determination of levels of service, budget priorities, and the acceptability of physical construction projects in order to orient government programs toward community needs, builds public support and encourages a sense of cohesiveness within society.

Brynard (1996; 40) looks at citizen participation as a process wherein the common amateurs of a community exercise power over decisions related to the general affairs of a community. He notes that these common amateurs are the non-elite citizens; persons without paid office, wealth, special information, or other former power source beyond their own numbers; and whose control is gained only from the participatory process.

The notion of empowerment has evolved within the development discourse to emphasize the need to build capacity in societies to respond to the challenges of their political and economic environment. Citizen participation does not necessarily lead to empowerment. Empowerment is a situation where people can participate in a project or program but without having the power to make decisions on the critical issues affecting the project/program. According to Narayan (2002; 14), this requires a process through which people's freedom of choice and action is expanded to enable people to have more control over resources and decisions that affect them. For empowerment to happen, participation must be effective in a way that can enforce accountability and changes in behaviour within the relevant government bureaucracies and ensure changes that make participation more inclusive of the poor and underprivileged (Crook 2003; 4).

Rural development is a multidimensional framework that brings about desired positive changes in the socioeconomic and political lives of the people in the country side or peripheral areas. It involves qualitative

changes in attitudes, customs, improvement in institutional frameworks, resource mobilization and utilization, employment creation, and increased income to better rural lifestyles. Rural development calls for empowerment to enable people to break away from structural disabilities that hinder them from enjoying better living conditions

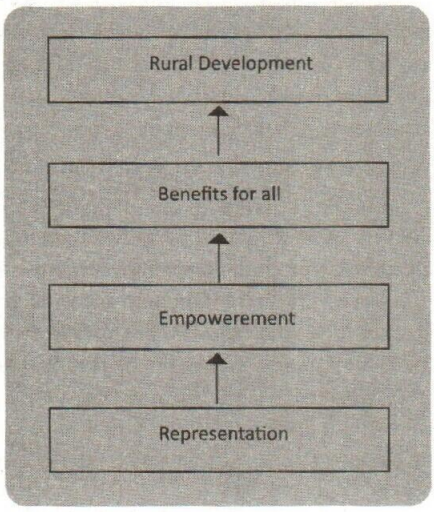

Figure 1: Causal relationship between participation and rural development

Tackling rural development and poverty in predominantly agricultural economies like Uganda and Cameroon, requires increased productivity and returns on produce and increased employment (Crook, 2003). Unfortunately, in Africa, the emphasis on citizens' participation is largely focused on political allegiance to the party in power as opposed to integrating mechanisms that can boost agricultural capacity.

Though many African nations have undertaken substantive reforms through decentralization to promote good governance and development, there is increasing difficulty in translating the reform initiatives into specific operations to support effective planning, capital investment, budgeting and financial management, revenue and resource mobilization and production (Crook, 2003; Olowu, 2003).

The major reasons for this difficulty, according to Wunsch (2001) are a combination of Central governments' reluctance to relinquish authority in key areas and the complexity of organizational redesign to support decentralization, hence in a way, promoting 'recentralization' of decentralization, a situation that has impeded effective citizen participation and empowerment for development in their communities.

Conclusion

Many factors work in favour of greater citizen involvement. Greater involvement can lead to better policy decisions. It helps to ensure that government initiatives meet the needs of the greatest number of citizens and increases the likelihood of successful implementation of projects in a community. Equally important is that greater involvement enhances the legitimacy of government.

Much has been written about declining trust in government. One possible interpretation is the growing frustration of citizens who feel excluded by political systems that are becoming the reserve of professional politicians, powerful lobbyists and campaign managers. Declining trust may also be a signal of declining support for 'power politics' that have been practised in the past and a growing demand for citizen engagement in policy debate, citizen involvement in government services and citizen participation in policy decisions.

The 'politics of citizenship' is the politics of participation of ordinary citizens engaged in dialogue about the directions of society (Pranger, 1968).

To be pragmatic, constitutional law is the source of all powers and authoritative basis for citizens' rights and responsibilities. In most western countries, the position of local government has in recent decades grown in importance. This development was to a fair extent brought about by processes of political decentralization leading to devolution. There has been a shift from local government to local governance. As Denters and Rose (2005: 253) put it, 'public decision-making concerning local issues increasingly involves multiagency working, partnership and policy networks which cut across organizational boundaries. Secondly, different levels of government have increasingly become enmeshed in partnerships. Lately, there has been a tendency towards complex (vertical and horizontal) patterns of multilevel governance.

However, the potential for community empowerment to contribute to democratization and service delivery effectiveness at the level depends upon the extent to which a country's governance structure tend towards the devolutionary end of the decentralization continuum and the existence of a legal and institutional framework. As many studies of decentralization laws, institutions and procedures have shown in Africa, they are incomplete and often weakly implemented, creating an institutional "limbo" where decentralized local government suffers from incoherence, hazy accountability, and poor performance (McNulty, 2006, Crook, 2003). Usually, the gap between what exists "on paper" and in practice are two different worlds, with deleterious effects on community empowerment.

As Manor (2004) points out, even donor efforts to circumvent weak local governments by empowering project-based user communities can instead exacerbate the institutional "limbo", thus impeding prospects for full implementation of decentralization and for more formalized citizen/ community empowerment.

Consequently, a strong civil society, mobilizing the mechanisms in the lower, society-cantered row of the table, is needed to fully exploit other mechanisms. That is initiating decentralization and devolution of authority and resources from bottom-up approach, rather than a top-bottom approach.

Among the clearest example that comes to mind, is the fierce campaign of Indian civil society organizations to gain access to public budget and expenditure data using right-to-information laws in six states, which later culminated in the passage of a national FOIA (Jenkins, 2004).

Nevertheless, an important driver of the effectiveness of community empowerment is community members themselves. We have seen what happened in the Arab countries in recent days. Communities need to be determined, have the capacities and resources to engage in collective action, including belief in empowerment mechanisms to achieve their intended rights and freedom from callous dictators in Africa who hinder them from having better living conditions for their own gains.

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Chapter 5

Local Economic Development: Theory and Practice

Malcolm Wallis

Abstract

The chapter presents an overview of Local Economic Development (LED) with particular reference to the ways in which the concept has been developed in a general sense and the experiences of various countries in applying it in practice. The core argument is that there is great potential in LED as a way of overcoming excessive centralization to unlock economic activity within localities. However, there are several challenges being faced limiting the extent to which success has been achieved. The various challenges are discussed in detail, accompanied by specific examples. The paper closes by commenting on the need for capacity building and the importance of a realistic appraisal of local conditions, rather than relying on models and assumptions which may be incorrect.

Introduction

In recent years, there has been a growing interest in the idea of Local Economic development (LED) which has often been seen as having a potentially beneficial impact on many economies. This paper aims to present some theoretical considerations in relation to LED and discusses various aspects of the experience of its application in several countries.

It is argued that LED is an example of an interesting and promising idea which is yet to produce the results which were intended. However, there are steps to be considered if there is to be a change for the better. An encouraging sign is that, LED is still supported by many national governments and institutions that are present in local settings such as cities and districts (Wallis 2012: 5). It also has some continuing support from the donor community which, by and large, continues to see LED as a way of achieving developmental aims, without falling foul of the excessive centralization associated with development planning that has been seen as problematic for a number of reasons by many observers (UN Habitat 2009).

An assumption made here is that LED has the potential to deliver economic development within localities. It therefore can be seen as a component of what is sometimes referred to as developmental local government. This should also be seen a discussion linked to wider debates on the developmental state which have been taking place in recent years. The paper seeks to make a point which such debates at times obscure – the idea that, for a state to be developmental, it may need to possess the capacity and will to decentralize its structures through local government and other means.

LED is linked to current issues of service delivery in two main ways. First, one avenue by which a local authority can support business is by out sourcing various service functions such as catering, housing, electrical maintenance, drain and bridge construction, security and cleaning. This often also requires giving attention to skills development. Secondly, the stimulation of a local economy through contracting out these and other functions can improve the capacity of a local authority's financial base and standing, thus easing a key constraint often confronting service delivery.

The African experience is highlighted but not at the expense of consideration of what has happened elsewhere in the world. This is of particular importance for two reasons. The first concerns the early history of LED, which can be said to go back to the 1960s (Rogerson and Rogerson 2010: 466). This experience is to be found in such areas as Western Europe and the United States where it was, in large degree, based on approaches in which investment was to be attracted from outside a locality in order to derive economic benefits such as employment and business opportunities. It later became more directly concerned with addressing urban poverty and the needs of disadvantaged communities. The second reason is that, despite different contexts and challenges it has been found that there are global factors and lessons to be learnt which, in a sense, transcend current inequalities in terms of the wealth of nations and other factors which conventionally differentiate states in terms of development.

Methodology

The study is largely based on desk research, drawing on a variety of sources including a number of international agencies such as the World Bank and the United Nations. However, some field work was carried out in South Africa in 2011 and 2012. This research, which focused on the involvement of local authorities in LED, included interviews and workshops; findings from this work, although not reported here directly, inform much of the chapter's content.

Some Conceptual Considerations

LED has been defined in rather different ways, a consequence of which is that it still lacks precision of meaning and no short definition is possible. This can both cloud analytical study and application of the concept in concrete settings. Part of the problem is diversity of context. Can it be meaningfully defined to encompass often very diverse territorial areas such as large capital cities and remote rural communities? Another dimension concerns structures of governance. An emerging theme arising from research is that LED is often

not, as is often assumed, a core responsibility of local government but is more likely to be based on a complex network of actors only some of which may have a local base of any sort. LED, as initially coined by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), is a locally driven process that seeks to identify, harness and utilise resources to stimulate the economy and more importantly create new job opportunities in a locality. It is the sum total of the individual contributions of a broad spectrum of the community (local authority, business, labour, non-governmental organisations and individuals) in improving their economic status by combining their skills, resources and ideas (International Republican Institute and National Business Initiative,1998:2), i.e. it is "an approach towards economic development which allows and encourages local people to work together to achieve sustainable economic growth and development thereby bringing economic benefits and an improved quality of life for all residents in a local municipal area"(Morgenrood,2007:16).

Given the above, LED can be viewed as a cost effective and community empowering process which can be an integral part of local governance. More importantly, there are intended to be tangible benefits for participating communities. Governments have a distinct role to play in the process through inter alia, facilitation, support, funding and devolving control. Rodriguez-Pose and Tijmstra (2005: 37) have highlighted the main differences between traditional and LED approaches, the latter tending to be more locally based and smaller scale with a strong emphasis on interactions with and between local institutions

There is no blueprint for LED which will succeed in every locality as each has its distinct uniqueness in terms of opportunities and challenges. The choice of plans and strategies for LED is determined to a large extent by the availability of such factors as land, infrastructure, natural resources and a skilled workforce. A well – developed LED strategy can strengthen local economic capacity; improve the investment environment; and facilitate an increase in productivity, quality and competitiveness of local businesses (large, medium and small) and workers. (Phutiagae, 2007:140). Success in LED is defined by a community's ability to ensure that all key role players and stakeholders are on board; maximising local resources and current opportunities; identifying and developing future opportunities and harnessing critical external resources and skills.

LED approaches of late have focused on popular participation in development with a view to the mobilisation of internal resources, capacities and skills that will facilitate strong partnerships and implement innovative solutions (Department of Provincial and Local Government - DPLG 2000:21-22). Qualitatively greater social - economic outcomes could be achieved if LED becomes a key component of national strategy at the local level. It can be also viewed as, a decentralisation strategy which enables local and regional governments and communities (business, labour and society) to shape their environments, improve their competitiveness and ensure that infrastructure and services is efficient and effective locally. Investment can be attracted and the citizenry can grow the local economy by retaining income in the area if dynamic LED strategies are adopted (DPLG 2007:9).

The enterprise approach is a relatively new phenomenon whereby municipalities enter into collaborative partnerships to create new jobs and stimulate economic activity in a defined locality. There are different versions of the enterprise growth theory, but they quite often rely on some form of knowledge spill over, i.e. when an enterprise invests in technology and skills, the economic benefits diffuse to other enterprises as when the efficiency gain is transferred to linked enterprises (Martin and Sunley in Perry 2010:80). Three basic themes critical to LED are the importance of entrepreneurship for the economic vitality of a locality; the significance of retaining human capital and reducing out migration in poorer regions; and the potential for inter/intra - firm linkages locally. LED strategy should be an integral part of the broader strategic planning process for a sub - national region, city, town or rural area.

LED is process orientated, possibly requiring the creation of new institutions; the development of alternative industries; enhancement of the capacity to improve quality, identification of new markets, the transfer of knowledge and the nurturing of new companies and enterprises (Harrison et al 2003:178). In this context, there is a need for a new kind of locally based bureaucrat who is as much a facilitator as anything else. Development planning at local level has to then operate not just through the lens of the economist but has to embrace other areas such as motivation, social capital and civil society (Sirolli 1999: pp137-145, Kauzya 2010: 22).

Key Role Players and Stakeholders in the Process

Developing local partnerships will enable municipalities to achieve much more locally with their own resources and at the same time identify and leverage additional resources for development. Municipal partnerships seek to develop a linkage between various local role players and stakeholders that have an interest in LED to ensure that the process is successful and sustainable. The key role players and stakeholders are identified below:

Local Authorities

Local authorities are one of the key actors in the process as they are usually instrumental in service provision and implementing regulations for LED needs. They can facilitate business development, retention and attraction by marketing local products, offering incentives to support business expansion, providing education and training, supporting small business development and improving infrastructure (Swinburne, Goga and Murphy 2006:13). Local government functionaries in concert with the local communities, businesses and government structures at all spheres have to assume responsibility for the development of local economies.

Local authorities have a wide range of regulatory procedures impacting on business namely:

- Analysing the local economy and communicating about it by, for example, researching a locality's assets, strengths and weaknesses to provide economic data and intelligence (South African LED Network 2011: 26).
- Providing leadership for LED through civil society mobilisation/public participation;
- Networking to create partnerships and projects; developing sector linkages and clustering of economic activity;
- Coordinating and funding the implementing of LED projects;
- Ensuring a high standard of service delivery, improving the quality of life and facilitating economic opportunities and providing incentives (fiscal; land development and marketing) to attract private investment and identifying and marketing new economic opportunities while promoting local business development through procurement policies; and
- Ensuring an enabling environment for local businesses through efficient and effective service and infrastructure delivery and stimulating business growth (Swinburne et al 2006:14).

A key issue in any locality that impacts on the ability of enterprises to be competitive is local governance. While it is quite apparent that local governments have a critical to play a critical role in LED, it is usually not their sole prerogative. The municipality leadership role in LED is lately, however, quite marked given its developmental mandate and the new redefined socio-economic context in which it has to operate.

Civil Society

For successful LED processes to be community driven, residents must be fully involved in the local development process. This should:

- Legitimise the process and d –politicise LED projects and ensure long term sustainability. A practical developmental agenda must be adopted by the
- Community which, focuses on realistic and sustainable goals, long term plans and small visible achievements by involving people which is key to empowerment;
- Increase the effectiveness and efficiency of the process by securing a range of
- External resources (material, financial), knowledge and experience.
- Widen support for the LED strategy, thereby strengthening the confidence of potential investors and businesses;
- Incorporate the low – income and informal economy groups and associations into the local leadership process

Private Sector/Business

The private sector has a key role to play. It can:

- increase the understanding of the local economy as businesses have a deeper knowledge of local economic issues and are more likely to be more informed about local problems and opportunities that, could be addressed by the LED strategy(Swinburne et al, 2006:14);
- Recognise the importance of co – operating with government and civil society. It should organise itself to participate appropriately in building the economy by co – operating with government and creating a favourable climate for investment;
- support small local business development through advisory and linkage mechanisms, sub – contracting and tendering; and

National Government

The development of robust and inclusive local economies requires a high – level of intergovernmental co – ordination, both horizontally (between national government departments) and vertically (through all spheres/ tiers of government). It is important that economic policies and strategies, both macro and micro, are clearly understood and articulated so that the key role players and stakeholders can clarify and articulate their thinking. National departments should not only disseminate the relevant information on opportunities and resources available locally, but also ensure that it is properly planned and co – coordinated so that there is a single vision for LED nationally. There should also be access to finance (through grants or loans), particularly for those that are disadvantaged and marginalised. The development of relevant skills should be encouraged and promoted. National tools and instruments that are used to facilitate local growth and development must be used optimally and should include the following:

Good infrastructure which, however, does not guarantee a successful local economy, can make an important contribution to it. Labour and skilled resources are required and short – term jobs can be created. More local enterprises can be awarded contracts thereby ensuring resources remain in the locality; and short – term unskilled labour intensive jobs should be transformed into a skilled workforce and permanent jobs in the community.

In much of Africa, there has been a tendency, inherited from colonial rule, to practise a deconcentrated rather than a devolved form of administration and governance at local level. The main reason for this is to ensure that national government has representation and thus exercise control and direction. In these circumstances, it is essential to factor this into our understanding of how national government contributes to LED as key national departments with developmental portfolios as well as coordinating bodies and officials, such as District Commissioners, have relevant responsibilities at local levels.

Provinces, States and Regions

Provincial, state or regional governments (where they exist) are required to co–ordinate resources transferred to their departments and to ultimately ensure that the priorities and initiatives at the local level are realised. The departments responsible for LED should be adequately capacitated and empowered for developing and stimulating the local economy.

Strategies and Interventions

Drawing mainly on South African studies, eight common LED strategies/interventions have been identified (Reddy and Wallis 2011:14).

- Infrastructural development and service provision is a powerful strategy as the quality of urban governance is dependent on policies affecting the availability of or lack of electricity, transport, telecommunications, sanitation and developable urban land (Phutiagae 2007:143).
- Retention and expansion of existing businesses rather than losing them top other localities.

- Increased spending on locally manufactured products to prevent the outflow of funds from the area.
- Small business development: creates jobs and empowers disadvantaged and marginalised individuals. It has to be based on community economic development initiatives and requires assistance for skills development; marketing, research, financial, infrastructure and technical support.
- Human Capital Development: ensuring that economic development results in social benefits often requires explicit linkages between "living wages", human capital development and productivity.
- Community Economic Development: is based on community self-reliance, through human resource development and skills enhancement. The focus is on empowering the community to develop the sustained provision of basic services as community resources.
- Linking Profitable Growth to Redistributive Development/Financing: private sector should assist disadvantaged and marginalised communities and a combination of strategies and a co-ordinated and coherent approach to meeting development challenges should be adopted. The use of procurement policies and procedures to achieve LED goals has been observed in recent years.

Prospects and Challenges

Whilst there has been a significant amount of documentation related to experience, there has been relatively little work done on the realities of LED in Africa with the possible exception of South Africa.

Impact – in so far as it has been rigorously assessed – has been limited and therefore somewhat disappointing. A number of challenges have been observed. Some of them are very generic, facing local government in most countries, whilst in other cases the issues are confined to only a few. As far as possible, examples are given of where these challenges have arisen and under what conditions. There are also some differences between the experiences of developed and developing states. For example, there are considerable differences between North America and Africa.

LED as an Unfunded/Underfunded Mandate

This appears as a problem in several states where there is a gap between what national governments and society in general may expect of local government and the resources that can be marshalled to enable it to happen. Whilst this is a general problem faced in relation to a wide range of functions such as public health and water supply, this certainly can apply to cases where LED is seen as strategically and even constitutionally or legally required of local authorities but where funding for this purpose is not available. Municipalities are highly dependent on national government for funding to carry out local responsibilities as local taxation is inadequate (where it exists at all). Thus, the mandate to achieve LED objectives such as industrial growth in areas served by municipalities may be unfunded or underfunded as it may be either impossible or extremely difficult to implement because of constrained financial circumstances.

There is a tendency for LED to find its way into constitutional provisions and policies but that does not mean that funding is possible. This challenge is being addressed within the framework of the 2010 Kenya constitution, for example, where county governments are expected to carry out a multitude of functions but it remains to be seen whether the revenue sharing proposals, which appear to depend heavily on central government, will be workable (Republic of Kenya -Committee of Experts on Constitutional Review 2010: 72, Republic of Kenya- Laws of Kenya 2010: 107-108).

Uneven Development and its Consequences

The economic histories of most states have created the phenomenon of uneven development (Cox 2002). This is characterised by there being certain areas within states where industrialization and other forms of economic development have taken root but others where the level economic activity is very different (for example, areas where pastoralism and subsistence agriculture are featured strongly).

In most countries which have been through colonial rule, this has arisen from variations in how this experience influenced economic histories. Examples would be Zambia's 'line of rail' and the Copperbelt geography of development with its associated neglect of areas which fall outside those regions or Guyana where, there

are sharp contrasts between the coastal areas where there is industrial and commercial activity, as well as a history of plantation agriculture, and the inland areas; this contrast is well described by Naipaul who visited the country when it was experiencing its transfer of power from British colonialism to independence in the early 1960s (Naipaul 1981: 86-162).

The challenge is to find ways, if possible, to take development to relatively neglected areas while taking into account controversies such as those which have affected Botswana. In that country, development of some less developed areas at the periphery (especially the Kalahari Desert) as it is seen by government and investors is not necessarily regarded as beneficial by the people who actually live there (Taylor 2003: 84-85).

The choice of geographical location for businesses and households is becoming an increasingly important consideration. Linking this point to urban planning, van Vliet (2002:36) states that, 'Locational features impose certain restrictions but they also provide opportunities for local development choices, allowing cities to take advantage of unique qualities that can be 'marketed''. However, this emphasis on marketing and entrepreneurship in urban development planning can be seen as having a down side: 'cities that do not have the resources to attract outside interest and investment may find themselves even more bereft and impoverished' (van Vliet 2002:37). What is implied here is that, LED carries in its wake, a degree of competition between localities to attract business activity and the outcomes are likely to favour those who are already stronger than others. Turning this phenomenon around is a serious challenge for which there are no easy answers. Some countries have been able to progress on this front more than others. Botswana and Australia are examples where mining opportunities have led to economic transformation in places historically distant from the main urban centres.

LED as Policy Transfer

In so far as LED is a child of the west, and particularly the United States, there are dangers associated with policy transfer which cannot be ignored. It has been noted, with particular reference to the Caribbean, that 'inappropriate transfer may take place and it is seen a major cause of policy failure in many countries' (Sutton 2006: 188) These general points about policy transfer certainly can apply to LED as it cautions against the assumption that what works in countries like the USA and Canada can be replicated in places like Lesotho or Malaysia. It also draws attention to the challenge of ensuring that LED policy and its application are grounded in local realities such as skill attributes of local populations and the investment climate.

There has also been a danger of a rather passive acceptance of donor prescriptions, in general (Moyo 2010). The imperative is for this to be replaced by a more grounded approach, based on local realities which are fully integrated into planning.

Challenges Associated with Rural Local Government

Because many countries are primarily rural, it is important to consider challenging issues pertaining to local government in such areas.

Box 1

Traditional Leaders: An important factor in many countries, especially in Africa, is the role played by traditional leaders in local development initiatives. Leaders of this sort are rarely found in urban settings but frequently need to be taken into account in rural areas. This is because they are often key participants in local authorities, either as ex-officio or elected members. They may have the legitimacy and the power to determine how far development happens, if at all. For instance, land tenure which is a critical factor in development may place such leaders in the position of being able to veto LED initiatives or attempt to enforce conditions related to land tenure which investors may find hard to accept. There are also cases where there are politically fuelled tensions between elected representatives (councillors) and traditional leaders. These tensions can impact negatively on LED. Traditional leaders can play a pivotal role in LED by developing capacity amongst for the youth, women and disabled people who if properly empowered can transform the rural areas; identifying the uniqueness of the rural areas and capitalising on them; managing the exodus of people to urban areas and internationally and ensuring that the natural resources are not depleted.

This has led some to argue that, the only answer is to abolish this form of leadership or at least reform it so that it ceases to be an obstacle. (Africa Report December 2010 – January 2011: 102). Whilst this view may be too strong, there is no doubt that an important issue is being raised.

Another difficulty is that rural areas tend not to have the same scope for economic partnership as may exist in urban settings. Chambers of Commerce, for example, are typically urban oriented. Where there are effective rural cooperatives, there might be exceptions but this is quite unusual.

Historically, the growth of local government in the last two hundred years has been urban biased. Whilst the institutions created in North America and Europe (mainly) were about responding with structures and functions that could meet pressing needs of growing urban populations, less attention was given to rural areas. Thus, the paradigm within which policy makers have operated with in developing countries was largely derived from a mainly urban understanding of the realities to be managed.

One result of this difficulty is the assumption that deconcentration (dispersal of responsibilities and powers to field officials of central government departments), rather than devolution (through elected local government), is a more suitable model for rural areas with local authorities playing minimal roles. This has certainly been the case in most parts of Africa where local authorities are often seen as the' poor relations' of the representatives of central government.

Integration and its Difficulties

LED often involves a need for integrated action by different organizations. For example, within a local authority the building of a substantial complex for small businesses may require inputs from a large number of departments such as architectural services, public health, police, licensing, traffic and transportation and urban design – to name but a few (Dobson, Skinner with Nicholson 2009: 53). This means that close attention has to be given to planning and working inter-departmentally. The challenge posed here is a real one as, a frequently observed problem in development management is that integration is lacking.

In most cases, structures for business development are independent or semi-independent of local government. Chambers of Commerce are examples of the former as are, but to a lesser extent, cooperative societies. Both of these types of organization may support small business but to varying extents. Cooperative societies often exist in order to support small enterprise, although they may ultimately become large enterprises in their own right. Kenya represents an example of this kind of growth; banking and insurance are examples of sectors where this has occurred (Satgar and Williams 2008: 16-27). Given the desirability of Chambers of Commerce and cooperatives being independent, what linkages can nevertheless be created with local government? Whilst in principle, the basis for partnership may be strong, in practice there are likely to be significant areas of tension and conflict especially where political differences form part of the equation.

Box 2

Role of Cooperatives: how far do they need to be linked with local government in situations where they may even be economically stronger institutions than the municipality where they are situated? Kenya offers a good example as it has an explicit statement in the constitution to the effect that cooperatives are a local government responsibility (Laws of Kenya 2010: 177), even though there is a well-established record of many cooperatives being more able to play more developmental roles than local government (Satgar and Williams 2008: 16-30).

There is also an important part to be played by the financial sector. In analysing LED, it is important to stress that commercial banks can only play a role limited by the priority attached to the profit motive. For them, LED projects are often seen as unbankable, as the business risks entailed are seen as excessive. This then brings in the question of other types of bank which have closer links with the public sector. These banks have emerged in a number of countries but have mixed records; the challenges have been considerable as issues such as poor servicing of debt by clients and corrupt practices by staff and management have occurred.

Enterprise Agencies and development boards are also examples of structures to promote enterprise growth at local level; very often a parastatal model is adopted for this purpose. South Africa's Small Enterprise Development Agency, which has links to some local authorities as well as central government, may serve as an example. The challenge here is to find the most appropriate model to the needs and circumstances of particular states. Several questions emerge such as: how decentralized should such structures be and how far can they be accountable to elected local government? These are particularly important to ask in contexts where, highly centralised structures appear to enable elite control and access to business opportunities with very little benefit to anyone else. The Swaziland case illustrates this point, albeit in a rather exceptional way. Dlamini argues that the Tibiyo body has linkages to the monarchy which reinforce this tendency to central control and limited access for those outside the power elite (Dlamini 2010: 67).

Another aspect of this challenge is that, in many countries there is a parallel structuring of local institutions of governance in which elected local government exists side by side with field officials representing central government (trade and industry, agriculture, etc.). There is thus a mixing of deconcentration and devolution. The overall structure is often headed locally by officials playing a combination of coordinating, public order and often political roles. The classical title for this official is the colonial one: the District Commissioner.

Competing Priorities

Within local authorities, there are various functions apart from LED to be performed. The precise mix varies from country to country and often within countries. However, in so far as LED initiatives need to be supported by resource allocation, it can be seen as in competition with other demands on budgets arising from service delivery imperatives where it is often very clear that urgency has to be the order of the day – examples being sanitation and water. This problem of competing priorities is more severe if local authorities are also faced with major challenges in other areas which at various times are often posited as of greater urgency, such as influxes of refugees (both from outside the country and from within) and disaster management in varied forms.

Box 3

Competing Priorities in Lesotho.

A case in point is Lesotho where it has been reported that income generation was treated as a strategy to take place later than infrastructure, health and education within a public works programme sponsored by the Lesotho Fund for Community Development (Monaheng 2005: 33).

The advocates of LED therefore have to ensure that a coherent and convincing case is made so that space can be found for LED in the portfolio of local government functions; otherwise the risk is that it will be marginalised or left out altogether. This advocacy must also be opportunist (in the best sense of that word) by, for example, involving local businesses in reconstruction work following on from disasters or in the more routine forms of service delivery such as water supply (this was the approach suggested in the Lesotho case mentioned earlier).

In a 2009 report, the UN agency, HABITAT, has noted that equity and growth are often 'decoupled' which it sees as unfortunate. In its view, these should not be seen as competing priorities but in practice they do not combine well (UN HABITAT 2009:2). There is thus a tension between the promotion of growth (which may enrich a relatively small number of people but have no effect on inequality except perhaps to exacerbate it) and poverty alleviation imperatives in which LED would be aimed to much more specifically benefit the poor. The evidence suggests that LED may often have limited benefits for the poor; enrichment comes to the local elites and, possibly, outsiders to the locality.

The Need to Develop Business related Skills, Capacity and Attitudes

It has been argued with some force by Kauzya, mainly with reference to Africa, that 'there is need for public administration leadership in local governments which combines inspirational, integrative and entrepreneurial

abilities' and he goes on to focus on the need for **'entrepreneurial leadership'** as an ability which is especially in need of development (Kauzya 2010: 22). In a similar vein, Simpson (2009:23) reviewing the Caribbean experience points out that, there is a general lack of awareness of the roles and responsibilities relative to local government amongst the majority of councillors and there is limited knowledge and expertise to deal with socio – economic issues (Simpson 2009:23).

As part of his argument for new approaches to address poverty, Sachs observes that a 'sound public management plan' is needed if the 'scaling-up' of investment is to happen successfully. It should have six components, two of which are relevant here. First, there is the need for decentralization of investments, the details of which 'will have to be decided at the ground level, in the villages and cities themselves, rather than in the in the capitals or in Washington.' (Sachs 2005: 278). The second point he makes is closely linked to the first and is very much about capacity building.

> 'The public sector at all levels – national, district, village- lacks the talent to oversee the scaling-up process. This is not a case for evading the public sector which will not work, but for building the capacity of the public sector. Training programs (or capacity building) should be part of the overall strategy.' (Sachs 2005: 278).

The need that is emerging includes mind sets and business related skill areas such as marketing, contract management and identification of business opportunities. These have only recently, and to a limited extent, become well understood needs in local government circles.

A challenge for LED in the realm of human resources that it is not always easy to find staff that can carry out LED related tasks. This is especially likely to be the case where local government is under resourced and struggles to compete for scarce skills in the labour market. Under these circumstances, one option is to outsource this function instead of trying to recruit staff with relevant qualifications and experience but there are also difficulties with that approach. These are well known and need to be managed. Another possibility is to equip existing managers with the required skills if they have the potential to develop along the lines needed. Part of this challenge thus concerns educational and training institutions. Not only is it essential to ensure that local authorities have suitably trained staff in place, it is also important that, skills are developed in the work force so that LED does not fall short because of skills shortages.

Research conducted in the public sector can complement business contributions in terms of developing the knowledge base. There is a positive correlation between investment in university research and innovative developments in the local business sector and this can be attributed to localised learning.

It is therefore important to build links by which educational institutions can be urged (since they normally cannot be instructed) to play their part in LED. In this way, it may be possible to make some impact on a major problem: the mismatch between the skills and knowledge acquired by learners and the local economy.

Inter-Governmental Relations: Roles to be played by National and Intermediate Governments and Constitutions

There has not been a great deal of change since the publication of an important study nearly 20 years ago. In discussing development in Africa, the tendency for states to follow an over-centralised approach was critiqued. These writers argue that 'the centralized strategy depends too much upon having appropriate leadership at the centre' (Olowu and Wunsch 1995: 297). They also point to other dangers such as corruption at the centre and capacity constraints. Despite some efforts towards a more decentralised approach, the conventional wisdom adopted by national leaderships and their bureaucratic allies has been to assume that there has to be 'detailed control over the periphery' which applies to local government as well as to other organizations outside of central government (Olowu and Wunsch 1995: 297).

Constitutions are national frameworks for governance which, normally include significant provisions related to the powers and functions of local government. Constitutions are also important because, they entrench

certain rights which have consequences for local authorities including requiring of them a developmental role, especially in recent years as socio-economic rights emerged as of some significance. Also included are likely to be provisions concerning the relations between levels of government including areas of shared competence between two and perhaps three levels. The challenge here is that local governments are often not only obligated to act in certain ways by the relevant legislation, they are also compelled by the constitution to do so. The functions of local government need to be integrated into the national economic objectives of the country and economic development and poverty alleviation needs to be localised.

Planning and Related Obstacles to Development of Enterprises

The generally difficult local and regional development environment in some developing countries combined with the lack or limited funding and government capacity (skills and infrastructure) are likely to impact negatively on the ability of provincial/state and local institutions to develop and implement successful strategies particularly in those areas where capacity constraints are greatest.

The role of local authorities is, at a minimum, to provide an environment in which local enterprise has genuine chances of achieving success. However, it is clear that contradictions, which challenge local authorities, have to be considered as possibilities in this context. There are sensitive and challenging issues at stake such as planning legislation and procedures and environmental impact assessments which can be seen as detrimental to LED. There are frequent comments and complaints made that such processes may be unduly onerous and it can be argued that much development planning, as carried out in local government, is more concerned with regulation than it is with the facilitation of development in localities.

The major challenge here is to find the optimal balance between two positions. To do this is not impossible even though there is an onus on LED actors to accept that proposals which may be desirable from their perspective have to be reconciled with concerns over the environment. This is exacerbated by the phenomenon of urbanization which often has a dual nature: it has both reinforced the need to strengthen LED but it also creates potential serious environmental problems, some of which may pertain to public health or disaster management. There are many cities in Africa and Asia where awareness of this issue is growing.

The Global Financial Crisis and Other International Factors

The financial crisis which made its presence felt in 2007 is still relevant today. However, the effects have not been uniform around the world. What can be said is that for much of Africa the effects have been less dramatic than in Europe and North America (Naude 2010: 49).

The crisis has had an adverse effect on LED in four main ways: it has created a greater scarcity of revenue for public sector spending, local government included; it has created a situation in which private sector investment becomes more difficult to obtain; it has made donors more cautious about how they use their funds for developing countries; and it has made resolution of the long standing and controversial issue of debt relief/cancellation more difficult to achieve.

The reality is, however, one in which there may be opportunities to rethink how economic decisions are taken. For example, much rethinking has already taken place, followed by action, to strengthen state regulation and in some cases this has extended to nationalization of financial institutions. Local government needs to be fully factored into this process.

Conclusion

The main purpose of this paper was to review LED at both a conceptual and experiential level. It is argued that, LED is potentially of great importance because it can enhance local economies. Local authorities, as the main actors in this field, are not always in a position to ensure that this potential is fulfilled. Several challenges are presented. In many cases these are being confronted despite a difficult context. Several key issues have emerged such as, the need for local authorities to build capacity and in particular to become more entrepreneurial. Another is the imperative of ensuring that, effective partnerships are fostered both within government and outside of it. Finally, LED needs to be based on a realistic appraisal of local conditions and not on assumptions which may not always be relevant or correct.

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Chapter 6

Challenges to Effective Decentralization in Africa

Kwamena Ahwoi

Abstract

The pre-independence local government systems bequeathed to independent Africa by the departing colonial powers proved most unsuitable for attaining the developmental objectives of the independent African states. A paradigm shift to a new local governance system, democratic and decentralized, was therefore inevitable. The features of this new system included local level participation in local governance; the devolution of functions and powers, skills, competence, means and resources; the principle of subsidiarity; a decentralized planning system and a system of fiscal decentralization. That shift however had to take account of the risks that decentralization poses to the fragile independent African states as well as the political implications of the shift.

The identified challenges to decentralization in Africa include lack of political will; lack of bureaucratic will; the need for effective local level checks and balances; fiscal decentralization, local level capacity; minimal central control; local level political rivalry; and a defined role for development partners in the decentralization agenda.

Among the recommendations made are for African governments to institutionalise participatory planning and budgeting in their decentralization programmes. Other recommendations are for decentralization commitments to be secured in the Constitution of African countries; a consensual conception of decentralization to be adopted; a strong centre for decentralization implementation; democratic political structures for decentralization; early agreement on devolved functions; a commitment to fiscal decentralization; and a system of checks and balances at the local level.

Introduction

A good starting point to understanding the inadequate efforts by African Governments to engage citizens in governance and development through decentralization of powers, functions and responsibilities as well as resources to autonomous local governments is to identify the challenges to effective decentralization in Africa. This chapter seeks to identify those challenges through an analysis of the history of African local governments, the risks to effective decentralization in Africa which make African Governments reluctant to decentralize, the current and future challenges to decentralization in Africa and draws some conclusions and makes recommendations for dealing with those challenges.

It must be explained that "Africa" as used in this paper principally refers to Sub-Saharan Africa and thus the analysis does not necessarily refer to North Africa or Arab Africa. Although there are significant differences between African states, there are also issues of a general kind, which affect many states and which this paper has identified for discussion

African Decentralization Efforts – The History

A realistic approach to the problem of African political economy must emerge from the perspective of their local governments since they constitute the base and the very foundations of national political and economic development. The roles of the local governments and the management systems adopted by them have a direct bearing on initiatives for political, economic and social development.

African governments appear in the past not to have put any serious premium on local governments as agencies for development because of their very structures, functions and roles inherited at independence and which remained unchanged for a very long time.

First, national public administration itself was highly centralized.

Second was the dependence, or over-dependence, of African local governments on the central government, especially for financial support. Consequently, initiatives to explore and tap potential local resources became the responsibility of the central government.

Third, African local governments had a generally poor and low image. A number of reasons accounted for this:

- The roles assigned to local governments by the colonial authorities and continued by our immediate post-independence governments. Local governments dealt mainly with filth, waste, irritating taxes, levies and rates, cemeteries and burial grounds;
- The relatively poor calibre of staff and their association with misappropriation of funds, embezzlements and other financial malfeasances;
- The lack of attraction in terms of remuneration and other conditions of service and of progression. People generally did not believe that they could build a career in local government, hence it was difficult to entice professionals like accountants, lawyers, development planners, agricultural economists, architects and seasoned administrators.

A fourth characteristic feature of African local governments was that they simply failed to deliver the goods, to live up to the expectations of the people and therefore there was a glaring lack of confidence in them (Ahwoi, 2010).

This failure stemmed from the historical origins of local government in Africa. At birth, Africa's local governments were undemocratic. They were basically colonial structures for indirect rule by paternalistic foreign governments. They were constituted by native authorities which were corrupt or inefficient or which sustained undesirable people in power. They had restricted membership; they had old-fashioned procedures; and they had inadequate resources and staff.

There was always an urgent need for change in African local governments. There had been some tinkering with those undesirable features of the local government system, but much earlier on, it had been realised that

it required much more than tinkering if Africa was to use its local government systems to play the roles that were envisaged for them in the 21st century. These included local governments as efficient urban managers and planners; local governments as front-line agents for development; local governments as catalysts for change; and local governments working with the central government for national development.

The real revolution that was required in African local government systems was one that would see local government as a multi-sectorial activity and that left local government practitioners at the local level with the liberty to do for themselves what their central governments had been trying unsuccessfully to do for them all those years.

Effective Decentralization in Africa: The Risks

Africa's local government reforms are moving in the direction of full decentralization consistent with the principle of subsidiarity. They are also moving in the direction of democratisation and of becoming vehicles for national mobilisation and agents for both local and national development. Countries are however heading in this direction using different strategies and at different paces depending on their own peculiar circumstances. They are undergoing fundamental structural reforms some of which are truly revolutionary. In the main, however, the reforms stress two strategies – Democratisation and Decentralization – and one objective – Development. The most important features of these reforms are the following:

- Democratically elected local governments with provisions for the effective participation of the people in decision-making;
- Effective decentralization, involving the transfer of functions and powers, skills and competence, and means and resources from the central to the local authorities;
- Emphasis on the principle of subsidiarity to ensure that decisions are taken by the people and at the places closest affected by those decisions;
- A change in the development planning systems from centralized "top-down" systems to decentralized "bottom-up" systems;
- A system of fiscal decentralization designed to ensure that it is consistent with the basic decentralization philosophy, "the finances follow the functions".

But there are real risks to decentralization which must be borne in mind especially in African countries which are still struggling to achieve national cohesion and national unity. The following risks must therefore be borne in mind at all times:

- Decentralization could weaken national unity. It is a short step from decentralization to demands for federalism to attempts at secession to the eventual balkanisation and break-up of a country;
- It could create inequality by promoting even more developed regions and districts;
- It could weaken support for nationally and centrally defined priorities;
- The central government could lose power and control over the country;
- Local government boundary demarcation disputes could easily erupt into violence;
- If implemented when the political and administrative structures do not exist, it could create inefficiencies.

Decentralization also has important political implications, among which are the following:

- It has an important impact on the structure and institution of political power within a country, and may be contrary to the established interests of institutions and individuals. Thus in many countries, there is a tendency to pay lip service to decentralization while actually working to make the process ineffective;
- Many national experiences show a tendency to revert to centralization after a period of power transfer from the centre to the lower levels;

- Central governments fear that decentralization may increase divisive tendencies already existing in their countries where ethnic tendencies are relevant;
- A strengthened local government could be at the expense of central government, and thereby weaken the effectiveness of the central government;
- Decentralization, strengthened local governments and partisan politics, especially at the local government level, may not be the most comfortable of bedfellows;
- The fear that donor agencies and external creditors, in seeking to assist African local governments, may introduce the same kinds of conditionalities and performance bench-mark indicators that they have prescribed for African central governments, and thereby make these "conditionalities", even when domestically determined, appear as impositions;
- The need for political commitment at the highest levels of government, indeed at the Presidency itself, to the decentralization reforms (Smith, 1993: 66)

Effective Decentralization in Africa: The Challenges

Lack of Political Will

The first major challenge to effective decentralization in Africa is for politicians to muster the political will to decentralize. Seeing that decentralization involves the diminution of political power as well as the loss of political power from the centre to the local level, African central politicians find it difficult to come to terms with losing some of the power that they have spent money, time, resources and efforts to acquire. Decentralization intrigues and squabbles are therefore more prominent within ruling governments than between governments and opposition political parties, as Ministers find every excuse to prevent their sectors from being decentralized, even though on the electioneering campaign platforms, the same Ministers would have eulogised the advantages of decentralization as a governance system that effectively transfers "power to the people".

Lack of Bureaucratic Will

The second major challenge is for the bureaucrats and technocrats of the civil service to muster the bureaucratic will to decentralize. The exercise of power by central bureaucrats goes with the enjoyment of perks and privileges. Bureaucrats and technocrats who enjoy these perks and privileges are therefore also very reluctant to give up their power to lower level officials and often "invent" excuses for either delaying or stalemating decentralization implementation.

Local Level Checks and Balances

Closely related to the above is the challenge of establishing effective systems of checks and balances at the local level where the functions and powers have been transferred. Effective decentralization also decentralizes the ineffectiveness, administrative injustices, incompetence and corruption associated with the exercise of the power at the central level. It is therefore important that systems to check all those abuses are replicated at the destinations of the decentralized transfers. Unfortunately, central officials often use reasons of cost, human resource and logistical unavailability to fail or refuse to set up such systems, with the result that decentralized local authorities end up appearing to be inefficient, administratively unjust, incompetent and corrupt.

Fiscal Decentralization

The fourth major challenge is the area of fiscal decentralization. Even when governments have transferred functions and functionaries to the local level, they are often reluctant to transfer the accompanying funds. All kinds of excuses are found to justify this reluctance. It is argued that there is no capacity at the local level to manage a substantial allocation of funds. It is argued that the expertise to design and manage programmes and project at the local level is lacking. It is argued that local level supervision is lax. But these are only excuses, for the capacity can be built, the expertise can be developed and the supervision can be strengthened.

Local Level Capacity

It is true that local level capacity is a problem with decentralization generally. But like the proverbial chicken and egg paradox, which comes first? Do you transfer functions in order to build the local capacity or do you

build the local capacity in order to transfer the functions? The answer is that capacity building programmes must be an integral part of all decentralization programmes. The reason a system is centralized is because the best personnel are at the centre. To decentralize, you have to create new best personnel at the local level. A good strategy would be one that says: "Where there is local capacity, use them; where there is trainable local capacity, train them; where there is no local capacity, transfer them or recruit them".

Central Control

All the excuses earlier referred to are what lead to central control of local authorities, which control then becomes the next challenge to effective decentralization in Africa. These controls take several forms. Presidents are allowed to create and abolish districts. They are allowed to dissolve local authorities. Ministers have to approve bye-laws of local authorities. They give financial instructions to local authorities. They impose borrowing limits. They approve budgets. They approve rates and fees. They have power to inspect the books of local authorities at their pleasure (Ghana Local Government Act, 1993). At the end of the day, there are so many central controls that one can legitimately question the raison d'être for the existence of local authorities and for that matter decentralization programmes in Africa at all.

Local Level Political Rivalry

Then there is the vexed issue of local level political rivalry. In all decentralization programmes, when functions and powers are transferred to lower levels, there is a struggle among the local political elites for the control of that power. The tensions can be very severe and centre round issues such as: Who controls the decentralized transfers? Who determines the programmes and projects on which the decentralized transfers are to be utilised? Who determines the pace of execution of the programmes and projects?

The protagonists in the local level political struggle involve the elected councillors, the political heads of the local authority (if they are not elected by the people), the chiefs and traditional authorities; the executives of the political parties (whether the local government system is partisan or not), the Member of Parliament for the area and civil society organisations, community-based organisations, non-governmental organisations and faith-based organisations. If the system does not contain a mechanism for responding to this challenge, it can easily undermine the stability and effectiveness of the decentralization programme.

The Role of Development Partners (DPs)

Finally there is the challenge posed by the role of Development Partners, both bi-lateral and multi-lateral, in the evolution of decentralization policy and the implementation of decentralization programmes. DPs' support to decentralization programmes in African countries used to be fragmented, uncoordinated, unaligned and reflected the development choices and priorities of the DPs. The realization that this was a drawback to effective decentralization led to what has become known as the "Paris Declaration-Accra Agenda for Action" (PD-AAA) under which a consensus has been reached that aid disbursement, reporting and other practices among DPs should be aligned and harmonised to the maximum extent possible to improve aid delivery and effectiveness, taking into consideration the national context of the beneficiary country. The unambiguous conclusion of the PD-AAA is that "development assistance works best when it is fully aligned with national priorities and needs" (Ahwoi, Owusu-Fofie and Sarkodie, 2011:111).

The challenge therefore is for African countries to come up with their own nationally determined decentralization programmes that reflect their national context, their national circumstances, their national priorities and their national needs for the DPs to ensure that their development assistance to the decentralization programmes of African countries reflect these national priorities and national needs.

The Future of Decentralization in Africa

The models of African decentralization reform efforts make interesting reading, but the one lesson they teach is that each country must take account of its own national and local circumstances and peculiarities in coming up with its decentralization programme. However, the following matters which emerge from the models have general relevance for all African countries:

- They seek to make local governments more democratic and accountable;
- They emphasise decentralization as an essential component of the reforms;

- The form of decentralization is more of devolution than any of the other forms of decentralization such as deconcentration, decongestion or delegation;
- They shift focus from the law and order local government systems of the first fifty years of independence to decentralized, functional development and service delivery oriented local government systems with emphasis on Education (Basic), Health, Transportation, Housing, Planning, Water, Sanitation, Social Protection and Environment (Rwanda, 2001).

Two Important Participation Movements

Two important participation movements in the local government sector emanating from Latin America a reference would be helpful hereand which must be of particular interest to African local governments are decentralized participatory planning and participatory budgeting or giving voice to the people in local government financial management.

Decentralized Planning: A Participatory Development Decision-Making Mechanism

Local governments make development plans on an on-going basis – long term, medium term, short-term and annual plans. These development planning decisions – about how we should live our lives, how comfortably or how poorly we should live our lives and when we should have what we want or what we need – are the decisions that affect our everyday existence. They are therefore the decisions the making of which the citizenry must participate in.

Decentralized participatory planning is the mechanism that has most suitably evolved to ensure citizens' participation in the development planning process as well as the content of the development plans. For that, there must be an appropriate legislative framework. That framework must provide for both technical as well as participatory planning and must be sure to cover spatial, physical, settlement as well as economic and fiscal planning. A good beginning has been made with section 3 (1) of Ghana's National Development Planning (System) Act (Ghana, 1994 page?) which provides that:

> "A District Planning Authority shall conduct public hearing in any proposed district development plan and shall consider the views expressed at the hearing before the adoption of the proposed district development plan".

But we must move from mere consideration of views to actual participation of the citizenry in the drawing up of the plans themselves, which would require answers to questions such as the following:

- Which bodies and organisations were involved in the consultations and in the decentralized planning process?
- In how many communities?
- Which officials were involved in the consultation or participatory process conducted?
- What were the subjects discussed?
- Were priorities decided at the consultations?
- If yes, which of the decided priorities were included in the final decentralized community/district/regional/national decentralized development plans?
- Which of the community priorities were included in the final approved plan for implementation?

Participatory Budgeting: Giving Voice to the People in Local Level Financial Management

Local governments also prepare annual budgets which are the financial expressions of the development plans. It is in the budgets that citizens get to know which of the development plans are going to be financed and to

what extent. It is therefore important that citizens participate not only in the budgetary decision-making but also in budget execution, oversight, monitoring and evaluation.

Because of its fairly complex and technical nature, it may be necessary that citizens participate in budgetary decision-making, execution, oversight, monitoring and evaluation through civil society organisations, community-based organisations, faith-based organisations and non-governmental organisations. That also means that these organisations themselves must have the technical competence and capability to participate. Discussions on the budget must be open and the budget document, once it has been read, must be freely available and possibly even translated into the major local languages.

Tracking the budget is the best methodology for these organisations to effectively conduct independent oversight of the budget execution. For the revenue budget it requires for the following checklist of questions to be developed:

- Identification of revenue heads and items;
- Disaggregation of the revenue estimates on a head-by-head and item-by-item basis;
- Determination of which agencies are responsible for the collection of which revenue head and item;
- Whether the estimated monthly collections are on track or there are negative deviations;
- If there are negative deviations, what strategies are the revenue agencies and officials developing to achieve their targets?;
- Whether the revenues are being accounted for as required by the financial rules and regulations;
- What system of checks and balances is in place to ensure that revenue agencies and officials are being transparent and accountable?

A similar checklist of questions could be developed for the expenditure budget as follows:

- Identification of budgetary programmes and projects;
- Time frame for the execution of the programmes and projects;
- Responsible executing agencies;
- Contract awards, procedures and processes;
- Contractors/suppliers on the job;
- Beneficiary communities and settlements;
- Impact of programmes and projects.

The mechanisms for participatory budgeting include the use of the media, especially local FM radio stations, the conduct of Town Hall Meetings to elicit information about central government and local authorities' budgets, and social audits of budget execution. All these strategies are most effective when an appropriate framework for gathering official information exists in the form of a Right to Information Act.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The following conclusions and recommendations are based on the above analysis:

- Local government and decentralization must be secured in the constitutions of the various African countries. Legislation alone is not enough; and much worse is executive direction, as those enable local governments to be turned into a political football with every government kicking it in the direction of any goal it considers easiest to score in;
- There must be consensus both within the Government in power and among political parties on the key concepts and the implementation strategies to be adopted for the local government reform and

decentralization programmes, otherwise, using the football analogy again, Governments will come on the scene and kick the ball in a direction opposite to the one in which it was being kicked by the previous Government. Laws will be changed; structures will be turned upside down; policies will be reversed and morale will be seriously undermined in the process (Ahwoi, 2005). A nationally agreed consensual implementation strategy will ensure that this does not happen;

- For example, it is not enough to secure decentralization in the constitution. There must be agreement as to whether the form of decentralization envisaged under the Constitution is the de-concentration, decongestion, delegation or devolution variety, otherwise decentralized sectors will get re-centralized and transferred functions and powers will get transferred back to the centre (Government of Ghana/ Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development, 2010);

- Decentralization is both a political struggle among politicians of the same and of different political parties and an administrative struggle among bureaucrats. For example, fiscal decentralization is always a tussle between Ministers of Local Government and of Finance; while administrative decentralization is a tussle between whoever is in charge of Decentralization Implementation and the Head of the Civil Service. Whoever is given responsibility for the implementation of any decentralization programme must therefore have the ear of the Head of State and he or she must have a strong and influential personality, must be knowledgeable about the subject, and must be decisive, else decentralization will get lost in endless and interminable debates and Workshops and will never be implemented;

- The political structures to which functions and powers are to be transferred must be democratic. There must be elections to their membership, but the democracy must also take account of the country's cultural and historical realities. Formulae must be designed to enable chiefs and traditional authorities, women, the youth, the disabled and other historically and culturally deprived, disadvantaged and marginalised groups, where appropriate, to participate in the governance processes of those structures;

- There must be discussions all right on the functions and powers to be transferred to the decentralized units of governance on the basis of the principle of subsidiarity, but it requires decisiveness to determine what finally gets transferred. The decision must not be caught up in interminable debate;

- There must be an insistence on fiscal decentralization in the decentralization programmes, with emphasis on revenue-sharing. It is unfair for central governments to monopolise the most lucrative and elastic of revenue sources, leave the least attractive, most inflexible and most difficult to collect taxes for local governments to collect, and preach from the rooftops that local governments should increase local revenue mobilisation. From where; and from whom, if one may ask?

- There must be systems of checks and balances at the local level where the functions and powers have been transferred. Effective decentralization also effectively decentralizes the inefficiencies, injustices and corruption associated with the previously centralized system. It is therefore important that systems to check inefficiency, administrative injustice and corruption are replicated at the destinations of the decentralized transfers;

- In other words, checks and balances established to ensure good governance in the centralized system must be replicated in the decentralized system.

At the end of the day, what Africa's decentralization programmes must be aiming at must be less control and less Central Government interference; less Presidential intervention; more popular participation and more popular say in the decision-making processes and in the system of checks and balances at the district level. That way, we would have made democratic decentralization a reality in Africa.

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Chapter 7

Reflection on Strengthening Public Administration in Local Governments in Africa

John-Mary Kauzya

Abstract

Many countries in Africa have designed and implemented policies of decentralization which have expanded the function, responsibilities and tasks of local governments/authorities and made them critical players in the development process. However, the implementation of such policies has not been accompanied by strengthened capacities of public administration at local level which have remained largely weak. Transforming local governments into effective promoters of local level development requires that their public administration is capable, effective, and intelligent. Capable Local governments/local authorities combine effectiveness and intelligence. In this respect they ought to have strength (capability) in terms of institutions, systems, logistics, facilities, qualified and motivated human resources as well as financial and other materials. They ought to be effective in the sense that they apply their strength to achieve the objectives through successful and efficient execution of their mandated functions. They ought to be intelligent by engineering collective action (from civil society, private sector and other networks) to satisfy the general interest. Strengthening public administration in local governments/authorities should be conceived within the framework of building a capable, effective and intelligent state which means developing public administrations that possess administrative, managerial, entrepreneurial, integrative and operative capabilities. Public Administration at local or central government level constitutes the crust of Public management and of good governance. Therefore, the strengthening of public administration will entail bringing together the best attributes of the three concepts of Public Administration, Public Management, and Good governance. In this sense, public administration capacity building must be approached holistically to go beyond training personnel and include institutional development, systems design, organizational structuring, legal and policy environment, mobilizing financial and other resources and providing facilities and logistics.

Introduction

The article is based on the observation that whereas decentralization has been going on in many African countries strengthening public administration capacities in local governments has not moved at the same pace. There is initial research by the Municipal Development Partnership for Eastern and Southern Africa (MDP-ESA) pointing out that public administration capacity in local governments is generally very weak. This research though seems to take the limited technical capacity view of public administration. The research presents the view that public administration has shifted over time in outlook to include aspect of public management and public governance; something that has made it more complex in terms of the capacities it is expected to possess in order to successfully undertake development tasks especially at local government level. Basing on examples of the objectives of decentralization in Zambia, Namibia, Uganda, South Africa, Rwanda, and Kenya, the research starts by noting that the job of local governments has become bigger and more complex than before. With this in mind the author proposes that public administration in local governments must therefore be very capable. he proposes a an understanding of "capability" that includes not only having functioning institutions, systems and qualifies personnel but also intelligence and effectiveness where intelligence refers to the ability to leverage partnerships from private sector and civil society and effectiveness refers to achieving the objectives of decentralization as well as community development goals. The author alerts local government capacity developers that public administration has become complex to include aspects of public management and public governance and that these need to be taken into account when developing public administration capacities in local government. These capacities include administrative/managerial, entrepreneurial, integrative, and technical. The author however, sounds an alert that the environment in which public administration in local governments is operating has got to be the appropriate. The concluding section of the presentation is an attempt to present the standards by which the capability of public administration in local governments should be judged and a holistic framework for capacity development.

The Job of Local Governments has become bigger and more complex: rationale and objectives of decentralization and local governance in African countries

Big and complex jobs require strong and complex capabilities. Through policies and strategies of decentralization, local governments in Africa are at the fore front of local level development, often with fewer resources. Local level public servants at political, administrative/managerial, and technical levels are under pressure to make and implement decisions on highly complex issues with far reaching implications on the development in their constituencies. As a logical consequence, they must and are expected to be able to deal with everything from personnel law and economic development to land-use planning, running effective meetings, leadership, environment, HIV/AIDS, education, primary healthcare in addition to their more or less traditional functions of local administration.

If one has to determine the reasons why efforts should be dedicated to strengthening public administration at local level in African countries, probably the starting point should be to determine in the first place the objectives that have guided decentralization and local governance in the continent. In other words, the overriding question should be: Strengthening public administration capacity-building to achieve what? Basically, in a general way one can say that clear decentralization policy objectives are a basic element of capacity. The capacity of public administration in local governments is needed to achieve socio-politico-economic development objectives at local level and to cause positive change in the lives of grass-roots people who in most cases suffer the blunt of abject poverty. It is imperative therefore that the objectives of decentralization in African countries be explored to determine the rationale for strengthening public administration at local level. According to the Guide to decentralization of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (January 2001), in a general way decentralization can be used to pursue a number of objectives that can be grouped into three broad categories: (i): Improving relationships between the State and its people, (ii) Improving the effectiveness of governmental services, and (iii) Improving the effectiveness of governmental services, Improving relationships between the State and its people

- More political legitimacy of the State, also the central state;
- Enhanced (democratic) participation of the local population, of minorities and women in Political opinion-building processes;
- Improved social integration of women and marginal groups;
- More control of power through the broader division of political power among various actors;
- The strengthening of decentralized structures of civil society to better play a role as a local counterbalance;
- The protection of minorities and their specific interests and needs.

Improving the effectiveness of governmental services

- Governmental tasks are performed at the level which is optimally suited to carry out the assignment. In line with the subsidiarity principle those tasks which primarily require local know-how and involvement should be performed by local authorities;
- Public services are provided by governmental or non-governmental actors, depending on competence and qualifications;
- More and better local services which also benefit the poor;
- More effective use of resources tanks to enhanced transparency, clearer distribution of responsibilities and accountability;
- Services better responding to local needs;
- The mobilization of additional local resources.

Promoting local development

- More context-adapted development programs and projects;
- Greater utilization of local development potentials;
- Improved economic balance between the centre and the periphery;
- Growing competence and capacities at the local level;
- More local ownership.

At Inter-governmental level (Africa Union level), Ministers responsible for decentralization and Local Development in member States of the African Union are constituted by the decision of the Assembly of the Africa Union (Assembly/Au/Dec. 158 into All Africa Ministerial Conference on Decentralization and Local Development (AMCOD) as a specialized technical committee of the African Union in matters of decentralization and local development. AMCOD was established with the following objectives:

i. Promote decentralization, local governance and participation of citizens and social groups in designing and implementing development policies;

ii. Include decentralization and local development in priorities of African government action;

iii. Sensitize all stakeholders of civil society to the primordial place of decentralization in the economic, social and cultural development of every nation;

iv. Provide intermediation between all African local authorities and their governments on all issues relating to decentralization and local development;

v. Develop research and various studies in the area of decentralization and local development;

vi. Mobilize endogenous resources or resources from external partners for the execution of decentralization and local development programs;

vii. Formulate proposals for governments, for the optimal implementation of decentralization and the pursuit of local development in the African Union Member States;

viii. Encourage and support sub-regional groupings for the promotion of decentralization and local development.

Below are the stated objectives of decentralization in a number of African countries including Uganda, South Africa, Rwanda, Kenya, Zambia, Ghana, Senegal, Cameroun, and Namibia. While this is hardly exhaustive of all the African countries, these can serve as examples from which the rationale for decentralization can be deduced. The purpose is to highlight the complex job decentralized entities are being assigned.

Uganda (Government of Uganda: 1997)

i. The transfer of real power to Local Governments with the aim of reducing the load of work on remote and under-resourced central officials

ii. Bringing political and administrative control over services at the point where they are actually delivered, thereby improving accountability and effectiveness, and promoting people's feeling of "ownership" of programmes and projects executed in their Local Governments.

iii. Freeing local managers from central constraints and enabling them to develop, effective and sustainable organizational structures tailored to local circumstances in the long-term.

iv. Improving financial accountability and responsibility by establishing a clear link between the payment of taxes and the provision of services they finance.

v. Improving the capacity of local authorities to plan, finance and manage the delivery of services to users

South Africa (Shabbir, Londinelli: 2007)

i. Provide democratic and accountable government for local communities.

ii. Ensure the provision of services to communities in a sustainable manner.

iii. Promote social and economic development.

iv. Promote a safe and healthy environment.

v. Encourage the involvement of communities and community organizations in the matters of local government

Rwanda (Government of Rwanda: 2000)

i. To enable and re-activate local people to participate in initiating, making, implementing, and monitoring decisions and plans that concern them taking into consideration their local needs, priorities, capacities and resources by transferring power, authority and resources from central to local government and lower levels.

ii. To strengthen accountability and transparency in Rwanda by making local leaders directly accountable to the communities they serve and by establishing a clear linkage between the taxes they pay and the services that are financed by these taxes.

iii. To enhance the sensitivity and responsiveness of public administration to the local environment by placing the planning, financing, management and control of service provision at the point where services are provided and by enabling local leadership develop organization structures and capacities that take into consideration the local environment and needs.

iv. To develop sustainable economic planning and management capacity at local levels that will serve as the driving motor for planning, mobilization and implementation of social, political and economic development to alleviate poverty.

v. To enhance effectiveness and efficiency in the planning, monitoring and delivery of services by reducing the burden from central government officials who are distanced from the point where needs are felt and services delivered

The following quotation from the Decentralization policy documents of the Government of Rwanda demonstrates how governments are putting a lot of premium on decentralization as a structural vehicle fordevelopment;

> "With the above objectives the government of Rwanda is taking decentralization as an instrument for people's political empowerment, a platform for sustainable democratization, a structural arrangement for mobilization of economic development energies, initiatives, and resources, and as a weapon for people's reconciliation social integration and well-being. Overall, it is a vehicle for the promotion of a culture of good governance in the country (political, economic, civic, and managerial/administrative good governance). The hope for the development of Rwanda lies in the will and power of its people. The decentralization policy is intended to give the power to the people and enable them execute their will for self-development. Decentralization will evolve institutions that are not only democratic, accountable, and transparent but also efficient and effective in service provision and community development".

Kenya (Government of Kenya: 2010)

i. To promote democratic and accountable exercise of power;
ii. To foster national unity by recognizing diversity;
iii. To give powers of self-governance to the people and enhance the participation of the people inthe exercise of the powers of the State and in making decisions affecting them;
iv. To recognize the right of communities to manage their own affairs and to further theirdevelopment;
v. To protect and promote the interests and rights of minorities and marginalized communities;
vi. To promote social and economic development and the provision of proximate, easily accessibleservices throughout Kenya;
vii. To ensure equitable sharing of national and local resources throughout Kenya;
viii. To facilitate the decentralization of State organs, their functions and services, from the capital of Kenya; and
ix. To enhance checks and balances and the separation of powers.

Zambia

The vision of Government for decentralization is "to achieve a fully decentralized and democratically elected system of governance characterized by open, predictable and transparent policy making and implementation processes, effective community participation in decision-making, development and administration of their local affairs while maintaining sufficient linkages between the centre and the periphery" (Ministry of Local Government and Housing:2007)

The Objectives of decentralization are:

i. Empower local communities by devolving decision-making authority, functions and resources from the centre to the lowest level with matching financial resources in order to improve efficiency and effectiveness in the delivery of services;
ii. Design and implement mechanisms to ensure a "bottom-up" flow of integrated development planning and budgeting from the District to the Central Government;
iii. Enhance political and administrative authority in order to effectively and efficiently deliver services to the lowest level;

iv. Promote accountability and transparency in the management and utilization of resources;
v. Develop the capacity of Councils and communities in development planning, financing, coordinating and managing the delivery of services in their areas;
vi. Build capacity for development and maintenance of infrastructure at local level;
vii. Introduce an integrated budget for district development and management; and
viii. Provide a legal and institutional framework to promote autonomy in decision-making at local level.

Ghana (Government of Ghana: 2003)

i. Devolve political and state power in order to promote participatory democracy through local level institutions.
ii. Devolve administration development planning and implementation to the District Assemblies (local government units).
iii. Introduce an effective system of fiscal decentralization which gives the district assemblies control over substantial portion of their revenues.
iv. Establish a national development planning system to integrate and coordinate development planning at all levels in all sectors.
v. Incorporate economic social spatial and environmental issues into the development planning process on an integrated and comprehensive basis.
vi. Create access to the communal resources of the country for all communities and every individual.
vii. Promote transparency and accountability.

Senegal (Loi 1996: 1996)

i. To create structures between the central Government and local communities that can undertake economic, socio, and cultural development planning and coordination between local governments and Central Governments;
ii. To deepen decentralization and limit a posteriori legal auditing of local plans and central government approvals;
iii. To ensure a better harmonization of local development;
iv. To assign to the representatives of Central Government at local authority level new missions of control related to rule of law and fiscal and financial orthodoxy;

Cameroon (Cosmas: 2007)

i. To enable the populations concerned to become resolutely involved in defining and managing affairs of their regional and local authorities;
ii. To foster and promote the harmonious development of regional and local authorities on the basis of national solidarity, regional potential and inter-regional balance;
iii. To place our country in line with constitutional and international requirements in the area of decentralization
iv. Enhance political and administrative authority in order to effectively and efficiently deliver services to the lowest level;
v. Promote accountability and transparency in the management and utilization of resources;
vi. Develop the capacity of Councils and communities in development planning, financing, coordinating and managing the delivery of services in their areas;
vii. Build capacity for development and maintenance of infrastructure at local level;
viii. Introduce an integrated budget for district development and management; and
ix. Provide a legal and institutional framework to promote autonomy in decision-making at local level.

Objectives of Decentralization in Namibia (Ministry of Local Government and Housing: 2007)

Decentralization in Namibia aims toensure economic, cultural and socio-economicdevelopment; providepeople at the grassroots-level the opportunityto participate in their owndecision making and extend democracy to them as a right based on nationalideals and values.Decentralization is therefore designed to achieve the following objectives:

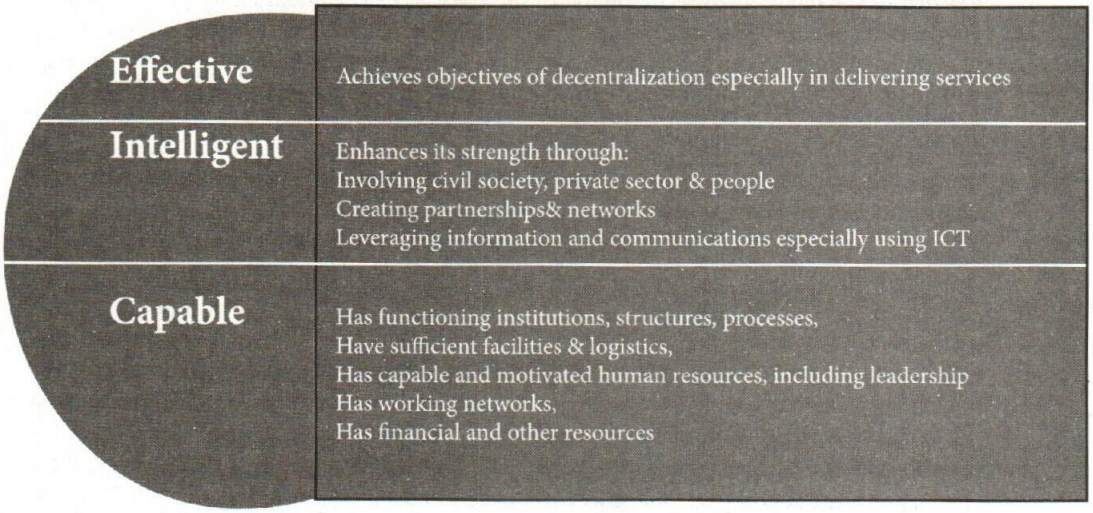
i. To extend, enhance and guaranteeparticipatory democracy;
ii. To ensure and safeguard rapid sustainabledevelopment;
iii. To transfer power to the regionalcouncils and local authorities based onnational ideals and values, and;
iv. To improve capacity of regional andlocal government councils to plan,implement, manage and monitor deliveryof services for their constituents

All these illustrations point to a very important reality in as far as the development of local communities is concerned. Public Administration in local governments must be more capable than it has have ever been and must undertake more than basic capability improvement efforts to sustain and increase whatever development is to be achieved! However, capability may not be an obvious concept. What exactly is public administration capability in a local government?

What is a Capable Public Administration in a Local Government?

Strengthening public administration in local governments would be aiming at building capable governments/ authorities at local level. A capable local government/authority combines effectiveness and intelligence as illustrated in the diagram below.

Diagram 1: Illustrating the relationship between capability, intelligence and effectiveness of a local government/authority



Given the huge and numerous challenges confronting African countries in their quest for development, and efforts to build capable states, it is not enough to decentralize. It must be compounded with building capable, effective and intelligent local governments as part and parcel of effective and intelligent states. In the issue

paper on "The Role of the State and Africa's Development Challenge" prepared for the 7th Africa Governance Forum held in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso in 2007, the author argued that,

> "An intelligent State bent on fighting poverty should also promote a sharp focus on the needs of the poor; intolerance on corruption; transparency and accountability in the management of public affairs; participation by all citizens in the decisions that affect their lives; creation of an enabling environment for the private sector and civil society;promotion of social justice, universal access to quality services and productive assets; creation of an enabling environment for people-centered development; public and private sector partnerships in the promotion of business with emphasis on micro-industries and small and medium size enterprises; access to information; promotion of technological and infrastructure development" (UNDESA: 2002).

He added that, "if Africa has got to get its people out of the poverty trap, there has to be significant sustained improvements in the capability, intelligence and effectiveness of the State in each country and that it is the role of the State to continuously improve its capability, intelligence and effectiveness"(Afrimap).

It must be emphasized that strengthening public administration in local governments/authorities should be conceived within this same frame of building a capable, effective and intelligent state. The question then becomes the following: What Public Administration would best serve to build capable, effective, and intelligent local governments/authorities? Africa's political, managerial, administrative, technical and intellectual leaders discussing how to strengthen public administration in local governments/authorities must consider how to build capable, effective, and intelligent local governments. An answer to this question would provide the framework for developing public administration capacity in local governments.

Capability refers to the state of strength while effectiveness refers to the dynamic application of strength to achieve the intended objectives through successful and efficient performance of the necessary tasks. A capable local government/authority will be an effective one only when its capability is used intelligently to engineer collective action to satisfy the general interest. In other words, a local government/authority may be capable but not effective if its capability is not used in society's interest. One would say that an effective local government is one that applies its capability intelligently by focusing its capability on the fundamental objectives of decentralization and the tasks it must perform while relieving its capacity shortfalls by creating partnerships, collaboration and networks with private sector and civil society. An effective local government/ authority will not only be capable but intelligent as well.

In the context of the challenges facing the development of local level communities in most African countries, an intelligent local government/authority is one which goes beyond playing the traditional roles, functions and institutional structures of public administration. A capable, effective and intelligent local government/ authority will work with actors in the private and civil society sectors to redefine and agree its strategic missions and objectives as derived from an understanding of its legal mandates as well as the socio-politico-economic development challenges facing the communities the local government/authority serves. At the same time the sharing of responsibilities and means of collaboration and participatory action among all sectors (public, private and civil society sectors) must be negotiated and agreed. The local government/authority then would have a basis for mobilising resources and action for implementing the agreed development objectives.

Public Administration in a Capable, Effective, and Intelligent Local Government/Authority

From a policy perspective as shown in the examples above, in a number of African countries, it is demonstrable that a huge chunk of development work at local level has been cut out for lower levels of governance through decentralization. Decentralization has generated an important shift in public administration responsibilities and competences and can therefore be regarded as one of the structural arrangements that may in the long run contribute to the development of public administration and governance capacity in African countries.

However, this does not concern just transferring public administration capacities from central to local governments following the transfer of functions and responsibilities. What is needed is the transformation of the concept, outlook, competence, and operational readiness to turn public administration at local level into an instrument that adequately blends administrative professionalism, management effectiveness and efficiency, leadership acumen and governance aptitude. This certainly is an administration that goes beyond the traditional public administration professionals.

There was a time in the history of modern governance in African countries, even well after independence, when local governments were just organizational instruments for collecting taxes and administering simple peasants in rural areas or providing simple services such as garbage collection and keeping law and order in urban areas. This simplified type of local level public administration, in the 1960's and 70's received a lot of support from the international community. It served the purpose of replacing the departed colonial administration. But it could not address the emerging heavy tasks of mobilizing resources and engaging the local people in planning and implementing their development. Local governance has become more complex and so has public administration at the center of this governance. Not only does it handle the provision of a wider range of services, most importantly it addresses peoples' greater socio-politico-economic development expectations both in rural and urban areas. The population has become more complex in their understanding of what they should expect from their public administrators and local leaders, how they should express the expectations, demand accountability and improved services, and link the taxes they pay with the quality, quantity, and timeliness of the services they receive from public administration. Further to this, the population has become more democracy-minded and demand for a greater say in the decisions that their public administrators and leaders take that will influence their lives. Even in the remotest of rural areas, people have progressively shifted from being followers of their leaders to being supporters and participants in the whole act of governance. This phenomenon testifies to the changed nature and even concept of public administration.

In the recent trend of thinking and discourse on managing public affairs there has been a cumulative paradigm movementfrom traditional Public Administration to Governance via Public Management (United Nations Committee of Experts in Public Administration:2004) It is observable that following these trends and paradigm shifts there have been complementarities among the three concepts and practices (public administration, public management, and governance) but also losses and gains for Public Administration as an institution, a structural organization, a set of practices and a domain of values and principles through which the State prepares, makes, implements, monitors, controls, and evaluates its decisions and policies as well as its performance of the full range of its functions including the delivery of services that are critical to human development.

Public Administration, being bureaucratic, is conceived to work within a set of rules with legitimate delegated legal rational authority, expertise, impartiality, continuity, speed and accuracy, predictability, standardization, integrity and professionalism, to satisfy the general public interest. As an instrument of State (The administrative apparatus of the State:1991), it is expected to be the grantor of the fundamental basis of human development and security including freedom of individuals, protection of life and property, justice, protection of basic human rights, stability, and peaceful resolution of conflict whether in allocation and distribution of resources or otherwise. In this light effective Public administration, including at local government level would be indispensable for the sustainability of the rule of law and accountability.

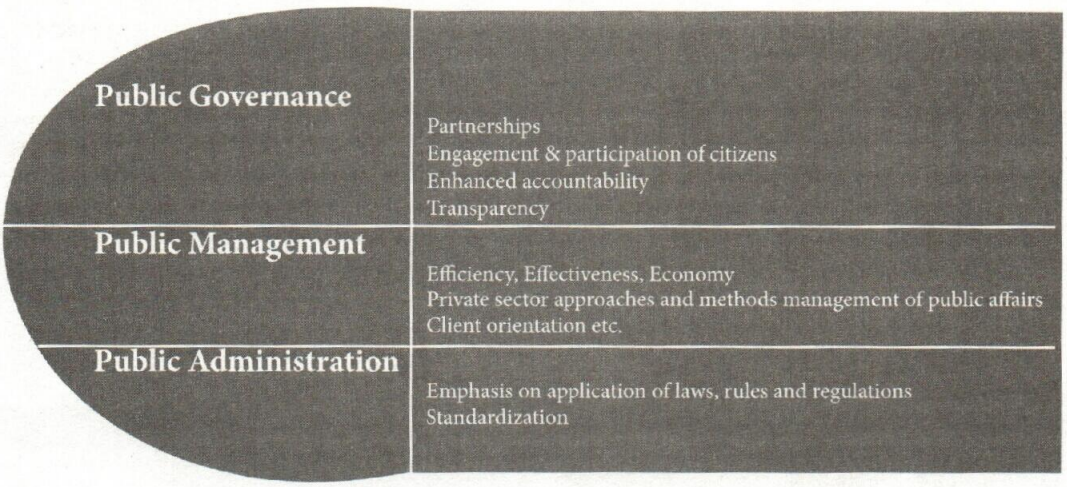
However, from the last part of the 1970s, Public Administration came under intensive attack from those that advocated for an elevated emphasis on the role of the private enterprise in development. Criticism highlighted public administration practices characterized by red tape, sluggishness, insensitivity to public needs, wasteful utilization of Public resources, undue focus on process and procedure rather than on results, etc. The whole instrument of the State (Public Administration) was projected negatively as a big burden on the tax payer. A school of thought emerged which believed that the functions of managing Public Affairs would best be performed through the application of private enterprise management principles and practices paying particular attention to efficiency and economy in the utilization of resources, effectiveness, customer focus and reliance

on market forces especially in matters of economic decisions. Increasing the role and influence of the private sector called for rolling back the frontiers of the State in effect pushing for minimizing the size of the Public Sector and narrowing down the field of operation of Public Administration. Instead of Public Administration the common term used became Public Management. It even stretched to "New Public Management" (NPM) and included aspects such as application of competition to organizations in the public sector.

However, in the 1990s the negative effects of undue emphasis on efficiency and economy in the running of public affairs started to manifest themselves in the deterioration of the delivery of Public services especially those that are closely linked to the satisfaction of the general public interest or that could be referred to as public goods. Such goods and services could not be adequately provided through strict adherence to the practices and dictates of market forces. Where the Public Administrator had paid too much attention to the rules, regulations, controls, procedures, and processes at the expense of providing effective services to the public, the public manager gave excessive focus on efficiency, competition and economy in the utilization of resources, again to the detriment of the service to the citizen. Lapses in regulation and controls provided avenues for increased corruption in Public offices, private sector practices in management of human resources (such as contracting) eroded commitment to public service values and favored employment rather than careers in many countries. Ultimately the public did not get the satisfaction expected as it became apparent that there is a great difference between market forces and public interest and that the market forces did not necessarily always decide in favour of public interest. Nor did they always call up on the public to participate in deciding, planning, monitoring and evaluation of government action to ensure that the interest of the public remains at the center of government action.

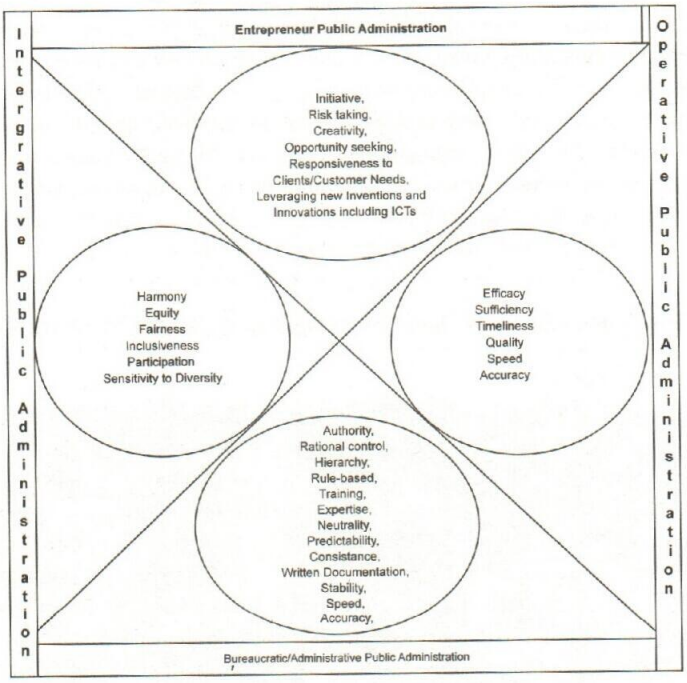
In the search for a stronger say and role of the citizen in influencing the way Public managers planned and implemented the functioning of the State and its institutions with equity, transparency and accountability, the concept of governance emerged to emphasize the participation and interest of the public as well as strong accountability of public officials at the center of public management. The concept of good governance introduced important elements of partnerships, participation, citizen engagement, and shared accountability whereby various stakeholders in the public, private and civil society sectors at local, national, regional, and global levels come together and complement each other to complete the act of managing public affairs in the development process. Looking at the above synopsis of the trend and conceptual mutations the question that imposes itself concerns what does strengthening Public Administration in local governments/authorities entail? What would a strengthened public administration in local governments look like? We need to adopt a critical eye and mind here. The diagram below gives a conceptual relationship between the three (public administration, public management and public governance) which illustrates that they are not mutually exclusive.

Diagram 2: Illustrating the relationship between Public Administration, Public Management and Public Governance



Conceptually Public Administration constitutes the crust of Public management as well as of good governance. The historical fault in the trends outlined above was for those who advocated for New Public Management, as well as those who are advocating for good governance to perceive Public administration as something outside these two. A closer analysis shows that it forms an inner circle without which the two cannot be effective. It is this central position of Public administration that needs to be refocused and repositioned in the process of strengthening public administration at local government/authority level. In the process of strengthening public administration capacity for effective local governance, public administration must not retract to its archaic self of exclusive regulatory control and paternalistic and monopolistic approaches to service delivery. Public administration must recognize and embrace the value and virtue of partnerships among the various sectors so that it joins hands with actors in the private and civil society sectors at local, national, regional and global levels to galvanize and leverage experiences, knowledge, skills as well as resources for effective response to public needs. Partnerships will constitute a major ingredient in giving strength to Public Administration. In other words, the strengthening of public administration will entail bringing together the best attributes of the three concepts of Public Administration, Public Management, and Good governance to construct a sharp instrument for effective, efficient, responsive, transparent, accountable and well networked functioning of the State and its subsidiary entities including local governments/authorities With this in mind, there is a need to focus on the various capacities such a sharp instrument of capable, effective and intelligent local governments must have. This would allow capacity builders to focus on developing such capacities in strengthening public administration at local government level. The diagram below illustrates an integrated view of such a public administration that embraces entrepreneurial, integrative, administrative/managerial, and operative/technical capacity

Diagram 3: Illustrating elements of the capacities of a capable, effective, and intelligent public administration in local government



Entrepreneurial Public Administration for Creativity, and Innovation

In many African countries, with decentralization policies geared towards local level development and people empowerment, a fairly big portion of the development task has been passed on to local governments. Development is essentially about positive change and it requires understanding the needs of the people, vision, the challenges and opportunities of the environment, the future aspirations of the communities, creative thinking strategizing, resource mobilization, persistence in pursuit of agreed objectives etc. In addition to specific unfailing concern for the socio-politico-economic well-being of local populations, entrepreneurial local level public administration must master operating in an increasingly complex world. In other words, within the context of globalization, local level public administration cannot afford to be inward looking only. It must in addition, take on a predominantly global nature of responsible decision making and the international ethical imperatives of leadership, professionalism and rule based public management, transparency and accountability. Public administrators at local level must undertake extensive efforts to lead through consultation and participation of the majority of the people expand their knowledge continuously, adapt new technologies especially in the field of Information and Communications Technologies (ICT). To this must be added the always needed competences of critical thinking, communication, quantitative skills, and negotiation skills, necessary for policy analysis, formulation and decision. Great changes demand great entrepreneurial, innovative, and transformational public policy leadership that is capable of foreseeing needed change, analyzing its constituents and imperatives, planning its trajectories, and guiding its implementation and ensure positive development beneficial to all.

There is a general tendency to take entrepreneurial leadership to be a feature of private sector businesses and the assumption is that entrepreneurs are self-employed. Because of this there is little readiness to accept that public policy leadership (e.g. in local governments) especially for change and transformation in the public administration must take up aspects of entrepreneurial leadership. However, a critical understanding of what entrepreneurs do, shows that if change and transformation have to be managed especially at local government level, public administrators at this level need to be able and ready to scan the environment, identify opportunities and challenges, take initiative, be creative, take calculated risks, accept responsibility for action and consequences, and above all have the interests of stakeholders (the public) at heart. The task of local level entrepreneurial public administration becomes more complicated because public administrators at this level have to juggle the needs and pressure of local population and political leaders with the accountability demands from central governments and policy imperatives that are rooted in global forces. The attributes of the entrepreneurial public administrators are numerous and complex.

Public Administration for Rule of Law and Orderly Development

Effective local governments require high levels of effective administrate ability to uphold the rule of law, professionalism, ethical management, and respect for the public good at local level. Administrative ability is necessary for following and respecting laws, rules, regulations, procedures, due process and prudent utilization of scarce resources not only for accountability purposes but most for orderly productivity. There is acclaimed need for sustained rule of law. But everyone must accept that rule of law does not descend from heaven. It is planned, implemented and sustained by leaders who have the propensity for order, discipline, regulation, acknowledging and accepting limits and boundaries in every relationship and action, as well as belief in controlled power. When administrative ability is weak, as is the case in some countries, it lets loose unlimited use of discretion in bureaucracies, chaotic political competition, corruption, lack of accountability, and a situation of "survival for the fittest" which leaves many individuals in society vulnerable to all sorts of selfish forces and eventually to violence. This is not good for development. When administrative ability is not mastered to ensure effective rule of law, the ugly and negative side of the human factor manifests itself in chaos destroying development achievements and prospects. Administrative ability is therefore very necessary for creating an environment of order and predictability as well as disciplined and impartial action of public servants. Strengthening public administration in Africa's local governments must therefore pay particular attention to the administrative ability of public officials in local governments.

However, Africa is not one country (not as yet?). Some countries have just emerged out of conflict or are still grappling with how to end violent conflict. One of the particularities of such countries is that when violent conflict gets prolonged habits of disrespect for laws, rules, regulations processes, procedures, public property, professionalism, ethics, transparency and accountability, and due process develop and grow to uncontrollable proportions and get embedded into daily-life behavior of public servants. People get used to struggling not only to survive in terms of food, shelter, medicine, etc., but especially in terms of how to remain alive. After conflict, many programs and projects for strengthening public administration capacity focus on institutions and replacing people in the Public sector institutions. What is rarely taken into account is how to reverse these habits developed during periods of violent conflict. It is important to realize that violent conflict takes more than people's lives and property. Conflict changes more than regimes. Conflict distorts people's behavior and psychic. Public administration in post-conflict situations needs to be more apt to work with professionalism, laws, rules and regulations not less because a break down in administrative ability will put more fire on conflict and chaos. As countries emerging from conflict implement policies of decentralization as part of their efforts to reform and strengthen public administration systems, they need to pay particular attention to the administrative abilities of local governments especially in areas of financial management, budgetary management and expenditure controls, procurement management, managing the human resource, facilities management etc.

Integrative Public Administration for Harmonious Development

One thing that is not needed at local level in the process of forging development is conflict and absence of togetherness. Integrative public administration has to do with bringing together people, minds, cultures, traditions, knowledge, skills, beliefs, resources, needs, interests, etc. (however, contradictory these may be) to forge an agreed direction, path and action for socio-politico-economic development. Even in localities that are seemingly homogeneous, there is diversity on close analysis that if not paid attention to can bring about disruptive conflict. On the other hand if every element of this diversity is well harnessed, all can contribute to the needed and agreed development. Integrative public administration has to do with making and implementing policies that take into account the general interest within a local, national, regional and global outlook. Integrative public administration consults people, makes people participate in policy making, recognizes and utilizes institutions and practices of democracy without having to act under the pressure demanding for such institutions, creates institutionalized channels for voicing diverse interests as well as the general interest and public concerns, is aware of global forces and how these impact on public policies at local level and works to respond to them. Integrative public administration foresees the conflicts that may be generated by public policies and the way these policies may collide with political, religious, economic, social, etc. interests and works to iron these out before they erupt into violent expressions.

An integrative Public Administration will see the socio-politico-economic interests of the various components of the local community or communities, mobilize consensus from them into an agreed local interest, harmonize that with the national interest and galvanize support for pursuing them rather than pursuing parochial interests which are divisive and prone to building mistrust. Integrative public administration is most likely to distribute equally the fruits of development across the local community thus creating an environment that builds trust. An integrative public administration will ensure inter-generation equity by paying attention to the way resources are utilized today so that the generations of tomorrow do not suffer the consequences of the actions of today. This may be in the way the environment is exploited or preserved, the way the local government manages debt and funds in general, the way the local government invests in education, health, transport infrastructure etc. Some of the abilities associated with integrative public administration include:

- Overcoming the challenges that local public administrators face as they advance to more strategic local government managerial and administrative levels where they have to cope with increasing complexity, paradoxes, and conflicting interests;
- Overcoming the tendency of people to abdicate conflict upwards to high levels of local government authorities instead of resolving it amongst the communities at the level where the conflict is occurring;

- Ensuring that as many as possible interests, however conflicting and contradictory, are put on the table for discussion and preventing unstated concerns and agendas from derailing decision making and undermining the effectiveness of execution of agreed strategies and decisions;
- Overcoming the tendency for people to operate in silos and defend their own interests rather than optimising local government and community-wide synergies and allocation of resources;
- Enabling local level public administration to tap into and harness the full spectrum of diversity of style, contributions, perspectives and information;
- Identifying and addressing "hidden agendas" and dynamics that can retard and even sabotage progress in executing complex initiatives;
- Enabling local level public administration to work with the ambiguities and paradoxes inherent to complex local and national governance and to influence performance in areas that are not under their direct control especially in central government institutions, private sector enterprises, and civil society organisation.

Basically integrative public administration is premised on the acknowledgement and understanding of the reality that the socio-politico-economic development of a community does not depend on the success or otherwise of public administration in the local government alone.

Operative/technical public administration for sustained effective execution of development work

When everything is said and done, most demands at local government/authority level in many countries are about delivery of services and development. This boils down to public policy implementation and the enjoyment of policy outcomes. Therefore a local level public administration that does not go all the way to ensure implementation of expected and agreed policy to deliver services and satisfy the interests of the public is likely to be creating more recipes for turbulence. Local level public administration operates at the contact point between government and the people and lapses in the delivery of services can easily cause sparks in the relationship between government and the people. For this reason public servants working at local level need and must have high levels of technical capacities of achievement. At this level the entire personnel of public administration is represented including political, managerial/administrative and technical level. There is a technical aspect on each of these and every one must be technically capable to execute their piece of the work if public administration has to be seen to be capable. What has been often witnessed is that in many respects public administration at local level lacks technical capabilities in many technical fields including financial management and accounting, human resource management, procurement and contract management, facilities management, project planning and management, auditing and performance management, negotiation, administrative communication, political interfacing, resource mobilization, even before one takes into consideration technical capabilities related to the delivery of essential services such as health, education, environment, road construction, etc. There is a general tendency to disassociate such technical competencies from public administration. Yet in reality, when it comes to the service delivery side of public administration such technical capabilities are as much of public administration as the administrative competences themselves. Otherwise how would public administration delivery services such as education without teachers, school inspectors, education officers, head teachers? Or how would public administration deliver health services without doctors, nurses, midwives, medical superintendents, etc.? The tendency to separate public administration from all these technical capacities is just superficial when it comes to the delivery of services. Consequently the efforts of strengthening public administration in local governments should include all these technical capabilities because without them, the effectiveness of public administration at local level in delivering service is simply impossible.

By what standards should Public Administration in local governments/ authorities be measured and assessed?

Those who are engaged in strengthening public administration in local governments will need to have some guide in form of standards and indicators by which they can decide the extent to which their efforts to strengthen public administration are succeeding or not. In June 2011 at the University of Roma in Rome, Italy, an Ad Hoc Expert Group Meeting jointly organized by the Division for Public Administration and Development management (DPADM) of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) and the International Association of Institutes and School of Administration focused on the issue of how to straighten the public administration and leadership capacities of local governments for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) at local level. One of the issues that emerged concerned the standards by which one can judge the capacity of public administration. The conclusion was that this issue is so critical that it requires further reflection and consultations with the various stakeholders and actors of local governments from all over the world. Recommendations were made to the effect that DPADM/UNDESA and IASIA put together an International Taskforce to conduct such a reflection and make the necessary consultations to come up with "Standards of Excellence in public administration in local governments. The formation and establishment of the taskforce is on-going. However, the reflection itself is going on in various circles. This presents an opportunity to the public sector leaders charged with Local Governments in Africa to engage in reflection on this.

Following what has been presented in the paper the following could be the areas around which the development of standards should be pursued.

Standards related to administrative/managerial competence (Administrative/managerial Capability): A public administration should demonstrate its ability to exercise administrative and technical authority with rationality, control, respect for orderly use of power, respect for rule of law, due process, expertise, neutrality, predictability, consistency, stability, etc. The outcome of such exercise of authority would be seen in the professionalism, ethics, integrity, transparency and accountability with which the local governments' political, administrative, managerial and technical public servants carry out their work. This would be finally reflected in the trust the local government in question would enjoy from the public it serves.

Standards related to entrepreneurship (Entrepreneurial Capability): A public administration should demonstrate its ability to assess the past, manage the present and prepare for the future. In other words, it should demonstrate its ability to find the solutions of tomorrow's problems and overcome the challenges of the future today. Such capability could be demonstrated through the initiative, risk taking, creativity, opportunity seeking, responsiveness to clients/customer needs, leveraging new inventions and innovations, and application of modern technologies including Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) to improve their performance and the development of the local government they manage. It would further be reflected in the strategic plans they make as well as in the participatory manner, through which such plans are developed, implemented, monitored, and evaluated involving all the stakeholders and actors especially the communities in the processes. Seeking better ways of satisfying the needs of the communities would be a natural characteristic of such a public administration. The extent to which the local government embraces research and learning to improve its work in terms of the capacity of its political, administrative/managerial and technical personnel, the quality and quantity of the services they provide, the systems and procedures through which such services are delivered, etc. Embracing research and learning would be further reflected in the way a local government creates partnerships and collaboration with research institutions and institutions of higher learning including Universities and tertiary institutions to ensure that the concerns of local governments' capacity development are included in the teaching and research programs of such institutions.

Standards related to operational/technical competence (Technical Capability): A public administration should demonstrate its ability to deploy capable technical personnel service delivery systems and processes that register high levels of effectiveness in achieving set objectives and in the delivery of expected services to satisfy the needs of the public they serve. While some standards could be related to processes and systems

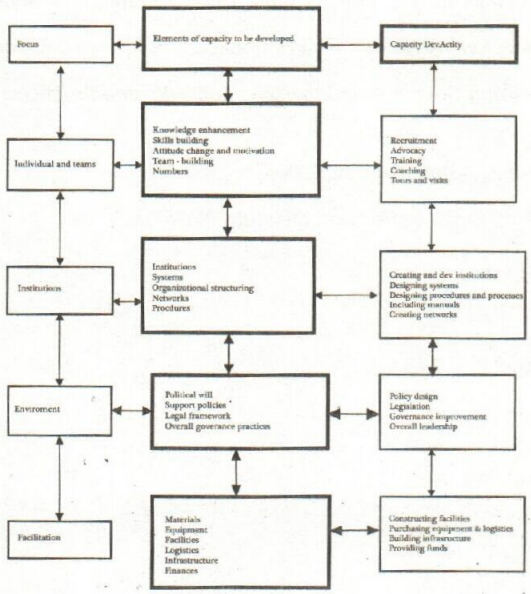
as well as to the numbers and qualifications if the personnel in the various relevant fields of service delivery (education, health, accounting, inspection, auditing, procurement, personnel etc.), the ultimate standards should be in the effectiveness of the delivery of services in the quantities, quality, and timeliness required. The extent to which the communities are involved in determining and expressing their appreciation of the services needs to be itself taken into account. Clearly it should not be the very Public servants to determine the effectiveness of the delivery of services.

Standards related to integrative competence: (integrative capability):A public administration should demonstrate its ability to bring the local governments to work in harmony with the community ensuringEquity, Fairness, Inclusiveness, Participation, Sensitivity to diversity (e.g. including women and all gender aspects in the administration, the youth, people with disabilities, minority groups, ethnic and religious groupings, political parties, interest groups, etc.). This is what would make an intelligent public administration. Integrative ability would also be demonstrated through evidence of equity in the consumption of goods and services in the communities served by the local government as well as in the way development initiatives, projects, programs and resources are distributed evenly across the constituency of the local government. Further, local governments that claim integrative ability would demonstrate concern and success in addressing the challenges that are likely to confront future generations. This would be in areas such as the way the local government addresses issues of environment as it undertakes development, the way it allocates investment resources (e.g. investing in education, health, energy development, and physical infrastructure). In other words the concerns and challenges of future generations need to be seen to be integrated in the plans and actions of today. Finally integrative capability of a local government would be demonstrated through the extent to which global and regional concerns and programs are integrated in the development strategies of the local governments. Examples are global concerns such as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and regional objectives such as the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD).

Conclusion

Standards related to the environment in which local public administration is operating: (environment capability): A local government public administration can only be as good as the environment in which it is operating dictates or allows. Therefore some standards need to be demonstrated in the quality of the overall governance and public administration in the country, the nature of the decentralization policy and legal framework that is guiding the operations of the local government etc.

Comprehensive framework for developing public administration capabilities in Africa's local governments (Shabbir C., Dennis L: 2007)



The above diagram represents a holistic framework for developing capacities. It avoids the popular mistake of equating capacity development with training which should be just one of the components of comprehensive capacity development strategic activities. The concluding hope of this paper is that various stakeholders in local governments in Africa will reflect on these and provide inputs on the questions: By what standards should public administration in local governments in Africa be judged and what indicators could be used?

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Chapter 8

Decentralization and Citizen Engagement in Malawi

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Abstract

This paper interrogates the claims that decentralisation, as a process of shifting focus from the centre to the periphery, leads to empowerment of citizens through participation. Using a case of natural resource management from Malawi, the assumptions that lead to this claim are analysed by focusing on the concepts of 'efficiency' and 'empowerment' as the central tenets of decentralisation. An anthropological approach using ethnographic methods to data collection was used in the study. Both primary and secondary data was collected and analysed thematically. The study was conducted in Lilongwe, central Malawi. The study reveals that decentralisation in practice is precarious and complex as governments in collaboration with non-state actors grapple with service delivery in resource limited contexts. Through the historical and current state and citizens power relations in forest management, the study highlights the conundrums of transferring responsibilities before authority especially where the human resources have limited qualifications; the politics of decentralisation by representation where there are no elected representatives (councillors); and elite capture of resources. New forms and institutions of forest governance, such as Village Natural resource Management Committees (VNRMCs), Village Forest Clubs (VFCs) and Community Based Organisations (CBOs) are the arena where the power wrestling in terms of definitions and legitimations take place. The study concludes that the only way that decentralisation can lead to empowerment through indirect participation, as in representation, is when those who are representing others are accountable and responsive: accountable in the sense that they can be sanctioned by those they are representing, and responsive in the sense that they listen to what the citizens need and these needs are transformed into policy or action.

Introduction

Decentralisation has, since the early 1990s, been touted as a means of achieving sustainability and efficiency in the delivery of services and political empowerment in developing countries (Hobley and Shah, 1996). The global drive for democratic systems of government and market liberalisation are among the key factors for decentralisation. As a concept, it has several definitions, all of which share a commonality in shifting the focus of attention from the centre to the periphery. It is viewed as a process by which the locus of administrative, fiscal and political decision-making power moves away from the centre to sub-national governments (Carney, 1995; Richards, Navarro et al. 1996; Hadiz, 2004). As Hobley (1996: 12) argues, decentralisation has elements of politics (who benefits), organisation theory (structural changes) and bureaucratic reorientation (changes in tasks, roles, attitudes and behaviour orientation). The typology of decentralisation provided by Carney (1995) and Rondinelli (2003) is dependent on the varying degrees to which the supposed changes in politics, organisation and bureaucratic reorientation have taken place.

The objective of this paper is therefore to interrogate the claims that decentralisation leads to the empowerment of citizens through participation. The paper reviews decentralisation as a concept and links the debates to participation, efficiency and empowerment. A case study of natural resource management in Malawi is used to shed more light on the practicalities of implementing decentralisation and the resultant empowerment of citizens that is claimed.

Research Methodology

The research was conducted using an anthropological approach to research by employing ethnographic methods, including moderate participant observation and in-depth interviews using a checklist as a tool for data collection. Targeted sampling was used, identifying those who were most likely to provide the relevant data. A case study design to research was used (Yin, 1993; Gillham, 2000). Both primary and secondary data were collected. Secondary data was collected through desk research by reviewing various relevant documents including policies and legal frameworks, programme documents and reports. Primary data collection was done over a period of six months in Lilongwe district, central Malawi. Specifically, the researcher was based at Katete Forest Plantation, which was a vantage location, enabling constant interaction with the local communities surrounding the Lilongwe River catchment area.

Four villages (Kauzilila, Mbalame, Bwakatantha, and Sinyala) were selected as domains for the purpose of understanding the processes of forming and running village forest clubs/committees. Long (2001: 58-59) uses the concept of domain to identify areas of social life that are organised by reference to a central core or cluster of values which, even if they are not perceived in exactly the same way by those involved, are nevertheless recognised as a locus of certain rules, norms and values implying a degree of social commitment, e.g. family, market, community, state. Of these four villages, one village –Kauzilila - was selected for in-depth and extended case study (nested case study) for the purposes of understanding the social relations and interactions among the village members themselves and how this affects the forestry activities in the village. The overarching umbrella body, a community-based organisation that coordinates the activities of the village forestry clubs, was also another domain studied in order to understand the processes of its formation and subsequent operations, with the aim of developing an understanding of the interactions between the forestry staff at the local level and the local communities and their relations with other 'external' social actors. At village level, both men and women were targeted. This was based on the assumption that there would be differences in views and experiences based on gender. Village heads and members of the community who are in natural resource management committees were also targeted with the assumption that they might have different views from those of ordinary village members. A detailed description of the research location is provided below.

Participation, Efficiency and Empowerment through Decentralisation

Decentralisation is promoted for two main reasons that are not, with a cursory analysis, at odds with each other and these are 'efficiency' and 'empowerment'. Those concerned with efficiency aim at reducing

national state governments' expenditures by bringing services closer to those who need and use them. Rural development, it is argued, should be driven by those who will benefit from it. In forestry, this is reinforced by the fact that forests are, in most cases, closer to the people who use and benefit directly from them, especially in terms of forest products.

Related to this is the issue of good governance, seen in other quarters as a way of tempering the wave of anti-statism initiated in the stabilisation and structural adjustment programs in the 1980s in response to the debt crisis. Governments were therefore encouraged to decentralise some of their functions as a way of showing that they are accountable and responsive to local people's needs, hence the 'empowerment' objective.

Empowerment, as a reason for decentralisation, is mainly embraced by activist groups, academicians and the civil society who are concerned with citizens' rights and justice, and indigenous people's rights (Hobley and Shah 1996). Some international financial institutions (IFIs) like the World Bank (2000/01) have also joined in the efforts to empower citizens, albeit through a different approach from that employed by those of a welfare orientation. Empowerment is promoted on the premise that the citizens are the ones who know their own needs best and therefore they should be given the power and responsibility over resource management. This view assumes that the citizens are more responsible and will manage resources sustainably. Empowerment is therefore considered a means of giving the citizens freedom to exercise their rights. Issues of democracy also come into consideration, particularly when the transfer of power and responsibilities is supposed to be to the representatives of the citizens, hence the assumption that decentralisation brings good governance and democracy because of increased transparency and accountability (Hadiz, 2004: 699).

Decentralisation also calls for the participation of the stakeholders in development. However, participation has been considered costly, particularly when there is need to consult and negotiate with large sections of the public; it may take a lot of time and resources to get representative decisions, hence the introduction of methods such as Participatory Poverty Assessments, which include Rapid Rural Appraisal and Participatory Rural Appraisal (Chambers 1983; Chambers 1997).

As pointed out above, efficiency and empowerment appear at a glance to be non-competing objectives. However, critical analysis brings to light the tension that is inherent in trying to achieve both empowerment and efficiency at the same time. Efficiency by definition aims to achieve goals at as minimum a cost as possible. Empowerment, however, requires participation by citizens in issues that matter to them. Participation involves consultation and negotiations, which takes a lot of time and sometimes even more of other resources. Bringing to the fore the issue of participation then throws into doubt the possibility that decentralisation will reduce costs and promote efficiency. This realisation has been one of the many sources of criticisms levelled against decentralisation. More specifically, the question that comes up is to do with how empowered are the citizens or to what extent are they empowered.

Decentralisation in Malawi: the Practice

In Malawi, various legal and policy frameworks at national level embrace decentralisation as a strategy towards national development, though to varying degrees. The Constitution of 1995 recognises a viable local government system as an integral building block of a functional democracy, service delivery system, and economic development. To this end, the Constitution enshrines decentralisation as a state objective and Chapter XIV of the Constitution clearly strengthens local government institutions and makes them responsible for welfare provision; the promotion of democratic institutions and participation; the promotion of infrastructural and economic development through the formulation and execution of local development plans; and the representation to central government of local development plans (Malawi Government, 1995; Chiweza, 2010). Following this, the National Decentralisation Policy (1998) was launched together with the enactment of the Local Government Act (1998). These provided the framework within which decentralisation could be pursued.

To operationalize the implementation of decentralisation, the National Decentralization Programme (NDP I) was formulated to run from 2001 – 2004. The programme focused on seven components, namely:

Legal Reforms, Institutional Development and Capacity Building, Building a Democratic Culture, Fiscal Decentralisation, Accounting and Financial Management, Sector Devolution, Local Development Planning and Financing Mechanisms. During this period, several strides were made towards decentralisation, including the formulation of the District Devolution Plans, the District Development Planning System and devolution of 14 sectors. The NDP I provided a forum for mobilisation of resources from various stakeholders. Several sectors partially devolved their functions from the centre to the district level.

In 2004, the Malawi Economic Growth Strategy (MEGS) was developed to complement the MPRS (2002) in achieving high and sustainable economic growth, focusing on stimulation of investment by focusing on mining, cotton, agro processing and eco-tourism. In 2006, another overarching development policy was formulated: the Malawi Growth and Development Strategy (MGDS I). This policy recognised that broad based economic growth could not be achieved without good governance. Although decentralisation was still seen as a means of delivering better services and strengthening democratic institutions and participation at local level (Chiweza, 2010), in practice, there were challenges with strengthening local government institutions and devolving authority to the District Councils manifested by partial devolution of functions and the inability of the government to hold Local Government Elections (LGE) after the term of office for the Councillors who were elected in 2000 expired. This sent a message to stakeholders that government had grown cold feet regarding decentralisation. To this end, the NDP II, a successor programme to NDP I, never took off as it became difficult for the Ministry of Local Government to mobilise resources from donors when there were no councillors, an important element of representative democracy and decentralised governance. Currently, the NDP II is being implemented with the following as major components: Sector Devolution; Institutional Development and Capacity Building; Fiscal Devolution and Financial Management; and Local Development planning and Financing Mechanisms. The NDP II runs from 2008 to 2013 and Local Government Elections are scheduled for May 2014.

Decentralised Forestry Governance

As far as forestry is concerned, Malawi is using the Forest Policy of 1996 and Forestry Act of 1997. The policy brought in a major shift in approach, from state controlled and managed forests, to some sharing of responsibilities with the citizens. In addition, the forestry sector is guided by two more documents:

- The National Forestry Programme (2001), a mechanism to guide the implementation of policy, *'to translate good intentions into real results'* (Government of Malawi, 2005: 1), which embodies decentralisation as one of the sector wide approaches advocated by the World Bank.
- Decentralisation in Forestry- Moving Forward Together (2006) which operationalizes the devolution plans.

The forestry sector has been dogged with challenges in as far as decentralisation and community-based forestry is concerned. Although the process of decentralisation required that the District Forestry Officer (DFO) should be in the Directorate of Agriculture, Environmental Affairs and Natural Resources under the leadership of the District Agricultural Development Officer (DADO), the DFOs were not yet part of this because the Department of Forestry argued that they were not ready to facilitate this move as their DFOs were not at par with officers from the other sectors in terms of position/rank. This would have meant that the DFOs may not be able to represent the needs of the department in a situation where they are of a junior rank relative to their counterparts in other sectors. This is similar to what Hillhorst (2008) observed in a study conducted in Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger, that Forest Departments stand apart from other departments or ministries involved in rural development. For example, an attempt in Mali to merge the Forestry Ministry with ministries working on agriculture and livestock at the end of the 1990s did not succeed. Within a few years, foresters were working again in their own department.

The fiscal situation has also made it more difficult for the DFOs to work, particularly when the Forestry Department is not providing them with enough financial resources to carry out their work, especially extension. The money available most of the time is only for administrative purposes and payment of salaries.

Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and other social actors involved in forestry most of the times employ their own officers to deal with forestry issues. The DFOs' ability to take any lead in the forestry activities taking place within the district is therefore compromised. While this may be alright under decentralisation and multiple social actors in the forestry sector, there might be problems when the NGOs or donors decide to work in collaboration with the government-employed frontline staff on the ground, by-passing the DFO, yet the DFO is supposed to supervise the frontline staff. The power struggles that emanate out of these interplays among the various actors trying to implement decentralised and community-based forestry are therefore worth exploring. Fiscal decentralisation has been compounded by the general donor reluctance to fund the process of decentralisation. This weakened the state at a point when the civil society was not even strong enough to carry out the said functions. While the processes of decentralisation were being consolidated, the forestry sector had already started experimenting with 'participation' of the local communities (most of whom are smallholder farmers) in forestry activities due to the realisation that forests were important for the provision of the population's basic needs. However, there was no mechanism in place to ensure a strong attempt at putting into practice the concept of 'participation', as is clear in the analysis of local level forestry governance provided below.

The Study Location

All the four villages (Kauzilila, Bwakatantha, Mbalame and Sinyala) in which the research took place are located outside the forest reserve and plantations; and two of them (Kauzilila and Bwakatantha) share a boundary with Katete Forest Plantation.

The Lilongwe section of the Dzalanyama range is also the source of Lilongwe River. The Lilongwe River runs from Dzalanyama range (state-owned land), through villages on customary land, and ends up in Lake Malawi. The river is the sole source of water supply to the residents of Lilongwe city. To this end, the Lilongwe Water Board (LWB), the company responsible for supplying tap water to Lilongwe city residents, is also interested in the activities taking place in this area. The Lilongwe Water Board has constructed two dams on the river – Kamuzu Dam I and Kamuzu Dam II respectively. Kamuzu Dam I was constructed in 1966 and has a storage capacity of 4.5 million m^3, whereas Kamuzu Dam II was constructed in 1992 and has a storage capacity of 19.3 million m^3. The water is supplied to both industrial and domestic customers in Lilongwe City at an average output of 72,000 m^3 per day.

In view of the location of the river and its source, the Lilongwe Water Board declared the entire Malingunde area a 'catchment area'. The LWB is therefore interested in the anthropogenic activities in this area such as farming practices by the smallholder farmers on the customary land within the catchments area and along the river banks, soil and water conservation practices, and forestry. To deal with the immediate area along the river banks, the LWB has put in place a buffer zone of 50m to 100m along both sides of the river. Buffer zone is a defence or barrier zone because no-one is allowed to cultivate, there let alone build a house. The Water Resources Act (1995) made the enforcement of this buffer zone legal so that this land is now privately owned by the LWB.

Box 1: Overview of the Research Area

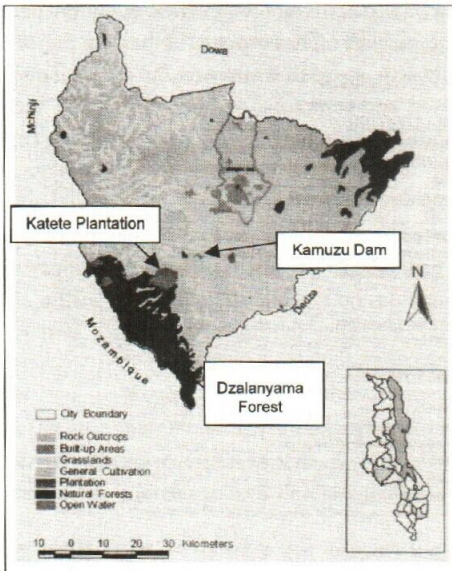

Figure: Map of Lilongwe District showing location of research area, Source: Lilongwe District Socio-Economic Profile, 2002: pp 34

Malingunde is located 40km South-West of Lilongwe city and within the areas of jurisdiction of Traditional Authorities Masula and Masumbankhunda. This area is important because of its natural resources endowment. Dzalanyama forest reserve which is located on Dzalanyama Range was gazetted in 1922 thereby making it state owned public land. The forest covers a total land area of 98,909 hectares (ha) in a total of three districts – Lilongwe (61,909 ha), Mchinji (1,400 ha), and Dedza (35,600 ha). Dzalanyama forest reserve comprises of natural trees of miombo type of vegetation whose species are mainly Brachystegia and Julbernadia species. In the 1980s, through a wood energy project, two plantations were established – Dzalanyama plantation (1,700 ha) and Katete Plantation (3,204 ha) – to provide fuel wood to city residents for fear of the perceived looming energy shortage. The Dzalanyama plantations are covered with the exotic species Pinus patula whereas Katete plantation, which is covered with Eucalyptus species, was specifically established to protect Dzalanyama Forest so that the wood energy needs are provided from elsewhere rather than from the river source. The ownership rights of these forest plantations are vested in the state, with local communities allowed rights of access and withdrawal depending on the purpose of the products withdrawn. Because of the difference in species composition in the forests (natural trees in Dzalanyama Forest Reserve and exotic trees in the plantations), the access arrangements also differ Local communities are allowed to collect only non-timber forest products from the natural forest whereas they are allowed collection of timber products from the plantations.

Smallholder farmers who were living on this land were displaced, the land of those whose dimba gardens were located on this zone was expropriated as far back as 1970. The affected individuals were compensated then. However, the LWB has had to make double compensation because the current generation of smallholder farmers argued that they were not compensated. The records of the 1970 compensation were kept in the

District Commissioner's office and they went missing, leaving the LWB with no evidence of the compensation and no option but to pay out another compensation of MK4.5 million. However, the smallholders still cultivate this land because this is the only area they can grow crops in the dry season - thereby ensure that they are food secure in between the usual rainy seasons when water is scarce - as well as grow vegetables which they sell at the market to earn some income. As for the river source, the LWB has an agreement with the State Forestry Department to ensure that the Forest Reserve is protected by keeping out the local communities from accessing the forest and cutting down trees.

Malingunde area's environmental importance means that there are various social actors operating in the area. The citizens in this area are largely smallholder farmers whose claim to land on this area dates back to several centuries for some and only decades for others who have just moved into area. Their landholdings are very small (for example, in Kauzilila village, the average landholding size is 0.99 ha per household, whereas for Malingunde area, it is 1.14ha, compared to 1.21 ha for Lilongwe district). They largely grow their own food for consumption (e.g. maize – the staple food, groundnuts, sweet potatoes, beans, and fresh vegetables in dimba gardens along the river banks). The smallholder farmers depend on natural resources, especially the forests on both customary (individual and communally-owned) and state-owned land for different needs. They use fuel wood for cooking and heating (there is no electricity connected to the area), building houses to live in and kraals for animals. Their rights of access to these resources are crucial in their interaction with the other social actors like the Forestry Department, the Lilongwe Water Board.

The history of the interaction between the state and the citizens in Malawi indicates that the state exercises power over the citizens by wielding the instrument of recognition and legitimation through defining the rights that can be held by the latter on land and forests. The state continues to wield these instruments and the struggle for the control of rights to land and forests continues to unfold during the implementation of the policy for decentralised and community-based forestry. At the interface, where different social actors interact to turn policy into action, there are struggles for meanings, with the state trying to get the smallholder farmers to accept particular frames of meanings and winning them over to its point of view about the management of forests on customary land, access to resources and control of the right to define these rights of access.

Forestry governance at the local level involves managing the supply and demand for forest products on both customary and state-owned land (forest reserves). While the approach before the change in forest policy involved more violent clashes, frontline forestry staff confiscating equipment used for extracting forest products, the current approaches are more subtle, aimed at encouraging the local communities to govern themselves. To accomplish this, there is an implicit attempt by the state to ensure that professional forestry is still the superior knowledge or science as far as forest management is concerned.

New Forms of Forest Governance on Customary Land

The new approaches to forest governance have ushered in the creation of structures within which all community forestry activities are to be conducted. I will first discuss the Village Natural Resource Management Committees (VNRMCs) which are preferred by the state Forestry Department, and then the Village Forestry Clubs (VFCs), which are preferred by the local communities, and also the Community-Based Organisation (CBO) which serves as an umbrella body for the VFCs and VNRMCs. The power relations are biased against the local communities, especially those who are interested in Village Forestry Clubs (VFCs) as the state employs politics of recognition and legitimation through choosing which organisations are to be legally recognised. According to Ribot et al (2008: 2-5), recognition of local institutions or authorities confers power and legitimacy and cultivates identities and forms of belonging. Through 'decentralisation reforms,' central actors are choosing powers to transfer and local institutions to transfer the powers to. Governments and international organisations choose local authorities by transferring powers to them and conducting joint activities or soliciting their input.

In all the four villages included in this research, there were attempts by the frontline forestry staff to form

VNRMCs. While in the three villages: Kauzilila, Bwakatantha, and Mbalame, Village Forestry Clubs were formed, in Sinyala village, a VNRMC was formed. The difference between the three villages and Sinyala village is that in the latter, there was already in existence, a natural forest – a Village Forest Area (VFA), whereas in the former three, there was no such kind of forest.

Village Natural Resources Management Committees (VNRMCs)

Underpinned by principles of democracy and representation, the Forestry Department stipulates that citizens should be mobilised to elect representatives at the village level to form Village Natural Resources Management Committees (VNRMCs), despite evidence that there are some that already do have socially-embedded structures for this function, e.g. village headmen. The state wields the instruments of 'recognition' – both formal and legal (legitimation) – to ensure that it maintains power over the forestry governance taking place on communal customary land by instituting elaborate procedures for the formation of the VNRMCs, their constitution and operations in management of forests, if these are to be recognised legally by the state. The VNRMC is supposed to be a governing council at village level responsible for forests, water, and land. However, this stipulation ignores that at sectoral level, the Forestry Department is not an overarching institution for the management of other natural resources. To this end, it is not uncommon to find that within the same village, other sectors of natural resource committees are formed, e.g. village water committees, village beach committees (where fisheries activities take place). Regardless of this, the Forestry Department still insists that each village should have one committee. Democratic elections are also one of the criteria that have to be met by the local communities in order for their committees to be recognised formally by the state Forestry Department. The frontline forestry staff has to ensure that elections are free and fair and that the elected executive committee members are representative of the community that has elected them. The composition of the VNRMC is such that there is a chairman, vice chairman, secretary, vice secretary, treasurer, vice treasurer, and four to six other executive members. There is supposed to be universal suffrage at village level – with all members expected to participate in electing the representatives (committee members). The elections are usually held after the village members have been trained on what qualities they should look for in a leader, e.g. trustworthy members of their community. In practice, this has however proved to be difficult because in most cases, the meeting to elect the committee members takes place when some of the village members are not present, therefore they end up electing the members who are present, who may not necessarily be the ones meeting the stipulated criteria.

The village headman is an ex-officio member of the VNRMC executive committee so as to accommodate his authority over matters occurring within the village. This arrangement results in the Village headman, who represents traditional institutions, to be the de facto decision maker in the VNRMC with most of the decisions requiring his approval. Hara (2007) also reports of the same contradictions and struggles for power between the village headmen as traditional leaders and the elected leaders of the Beach Village Committees (BVCs) in the lakeshore district of Mangochi in Malawi where community-based fisheries management under decentralisation policy is being implemented. The arrangement also poses problems when there are intra-lineage conflicts over the village headmanship whereby some sections of the village would not want to be under the current leadership as was the case in Kauzilila Village. In other cases, when the meeting is conducted at the village headman's house, and if there are intra-village conflicts, the other members do not attend these meetings thereby ending up with only relatives of the village headman being elected into the committees – which has been the case in Sinyala village, with the close relatives (mother, wife, brother) of the village headman ending up as committee members. Such events bring distrust in the committee and lead to the village members shunning forestry activities. Incidents of committees being made up of relations to the village headman have also been reported in the Blantyre City Fuelwood Project (BCFP) Area where the state has transferred management of Eucalyptus forest plantations to the communities surrounding the plantation (Kaarhus et al, 2003).

The state also stipulates that the entire village works together under the leadership of the VNRMCs during the processes of raising tree seedlings from nursery until the time of out planting to a communal woodlot. A

lot of time commitment has to be put into this process because trees take a long time to mature to a stage whereby they can be used by the members of the village. Because the village members' needs for forests are immediate and at the same time different (some of the needs for forest products may be met by accessing other forests and some members' needs are different from others), it becomes difficult for some members to justify investing so much time on these activities when they would rather be earning a living by doing something else. The other issue that arises as a consequence of differential commitments to the management of the trees is the certainty of access i.e. security of use rights to these trees is precarious because the state has the tendency to take over the control of well managed forest stands on customary land - Sinyala village's Chikuluti Village Forest Area being a case in point. In addition to this, communal woodlots are usually used for communal functions, such as funerals and customary celebrations rather than individual use. One has to make a strong case for the need of forest products from communal woodlots raised through a VNRMC. There are always accusations of the village headman favouring those whom s/he is related to in granting of access to the forests.

Community-based forestry has been conflated with the activities of planting more trees as opposed to managing the already existing trees in areas where this is the case; to such an extent that those who are simply managing an already existing forest are not recognised for their efforts.

Village Forestry Clubs

Due to the limitations that the local communities identify with the VNRMCs, they have resorted to forming Forestry Clubs, which are different in composition and jurisdiction to the VNRMCs. The Village Forestry Clubs (VFCs) are adaptations that the smallholder farmers have made to the Ministry of Agriculture's smallholder farmers' credit clubs which were introduced under the Smallholder Agricultural Credit scheme by the World Bank under the Structural Adjustment Programs. In forming VFCs, collectives engage in processes of what Cleaver (2002) refers to as 'bricolage', picking some old, socially embedded practices and new ideas from projects, and mixing them up to constitute institutions that are valid and legitimate to them. The village members prefer the clubs because they comprise of individuals with largely similar interests – ready to commit to the task of raising trees from nursery up to the time of out-planting. This does not however mean that there are no conflicts in the clubs, or that they are homogenous communities. The principle of universal suffrage at village level does not apply to Village Forestry Clubs (VFCs) when electing the executive committee members, they only apply to VNRMCs. Each VFC has an executive committee comprising of a Chairman, Vice Chairman, Secretary, and Vice Secretary, Treasurer, Vice Treasurer, and another four to six executive members, which is similar to the VNRMCs. However, the VFCs are clubs which one has to ascribe to, and the authority of the elected representatives applies only to members of the club and not to the entire village.

Activities within the clubs are therefore performed only by members, and so do the sharing of benefits. Village Forestry Clubs, therefore, have a characteristic of 'exclusivity' in the sense that the benefits that accrue to members of the club are strictly for them (and their families when they decide to share with them) and not everybody else in the village. For this reason, the Forestry Department refuses to recognise them, arguing that they are not democratic and representative of the village population.

Those villages that do not meet the criteria set by the Forestry Department as discussed above, are not 'formally recognised' and therefore do not stand a chance of legally managing forest resources, even when their ability to do so is not questionable. It is up to the frontline forestry staff, the Forestry Assistant and the Forest Guards, to ensure that each village has formed a VNRMC for the management of natural resources, specifically forests. Frontline forestry staff, particularly the Forestry Assistant, have problems in handling this situation because the local communities have mostly formed VFCs as opposed to VNRMCs.

Different meanings are attached to the same VNRMCs and VFCs by the different social actors and the struggle for imposing one's meanings on the same objects is played out in the forestry arena, with the Forestry

Assistant in the middle of it all as he tries to straddle between these differing positions. The Forestry Assistant therefore ends up playing the game in such a way that when he is among the local communities, he talks of VFCs, and when in the presence of his superiors at the District Forestry Office and the Forestry Department headquarters, refers to them as VNRMCs.

The Community-Based Organisation (CBO)

With guidance from the Forestry Assistant, the local communities in Malingunde established the Malingunde Environmental Conservation and Development Organisation (MECDO). According to the FA of the area, the MECDO CBO was established:

> " with the general aim of promoting sustainable management of the environment in Malingunde area, including Kamuzu Dams I and II; Malingunde hills, forest areas on customary land, both communal and individual, as well as general development of the area in terms of improving the local communities livelihood" .

The MECDO has the characteristics of both a private entity and a community-based entity. It is a private entity in comparison to being a state entity, i.e. it is one of the non-state actors. It is community-based because it is, on paper, supposed to be led and 'owned' by the local communities from within the area. While its community-based nature would imply that it is led by the local communities with guidance from the forestry staff; in practice, the organisation is led and directed by the forestry staff, with the community members simply following orders of the forestry staff.

The executive committee of the MECDO CBO was elected from amongst the members of Village Forestry Clubs within the areas of the two Traditional Authorities – not universal suffrage of all village members. There was one exception, the wife of the Village Headman Sinyala who was involved in the elections despite the village where she came from not being invited. She was called to the meeting because of the interest she had shown during the Participatory Forest Resource Assessment (PFRA) of Chikuluti VFA (she is educated up to O-level equivalent and had worked as a data recording assistant during the PFRA exercise). In the elections that were held, she was elected to the position of secretary of the CBO.

The executive committee of the CBO has a different structure from that of VNRMC or VFC executive committees, with the Chairman, who is also the Finance and Administrative Officer, Secretary and Treasurer, and their deputies and six committee members. In addition to these members, there are several additional executive members to assist in the running of the CBO: a Stores Lady who is responsible for the safekeeping of implements that have been bought and are awaiting distribution among the forestry clubs; an Accounts Assistant to keep records of the CBO's accounts, especially in its bid to be accountable to the donors; Field Coordinators responsible for HIV/AIDS issues, water and sanitation, food security, income generating activities, and guarding Malingunde Hills so that there is forest regeneration. Some members also work as volunteers in assisting the other committee members in their respective areas of work. The differences between the Field Coordinators and Volunteers are twofold: firstly, those elected to the positions of Field Coordinator were those who had an educational qualification of at least O-level equivalent whereas volunteers' education levels were lower than this. Secondly, the Field Coordinators are entitled to a day's pay when they work at the CBO, for example if they are involved in distribution of implements and fruit tree seedlings among the members of the CBO, whereas the Volunteers are not paid.

Issues of opportunism and entrepreneurship arise, especially when the financial incentives cannot be equitably distributed among the participants due to their differentials in the authority and power, an issue which was also observed by Cleaver and Toner (2006) in reference to community water governance in Uchira, Tanzania. Whereas the executive members or community representatives from within the community were elected, the frontline forestry staff allocated amongst themselves the positions of Director (for the Forestry Assistant) and Deputy Director/Field Operations Officer (for the Senior Forest Guard). The other Forest Guards were appointed as Field Coordinators to assist and provide guidance to the elected Field Coordinators in the overall sections, without being attached to a specific section like water and sanitation. Creating such a

parallel structure of frontline forestry staff to the one comprising of elected community members and then subordinating the latter to the former bolsters the position of power occupied by the frontline forestry staff, particularly the Forestry Assistant who requires that all the members are accountable to him as he is the one who initiated the whole idea of creating a CBO. This arrangement leads to the concentration of power in the hands of the Forestry Assistant as he becomes the centre of all the activities – liaison with donors, making decisions on what should happen and when. Effectively, the Forestry Assistant changes from being an extension officer to the boss of the local community to whom they have to be accountable.

In terms of activities, the CBO is also involved in water management, agricultural activities (cassava farming and guinea fowl rearing), and apiculture (bee-keeping). As a consequence of decentralisation and the concomitant lack of resources from the central government to the lower levels of government, the Forestry Department headquarters has opened up opportunities for frontline staff to deal directly with donors and other non-state actors, e.g. Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), in securing financial resources for the running of forestry activities on the ground. The process of implementing community-based forestry activities has always depended on donor funding as most of the donors are eager to fund activities that aimed at local communities' participation. Fairhead and Leach (2003: 227), using examples of forest governance in Guinea and Trinidad, argue that apparent localisation of forest governance frequently become means to pursue goals defined nationally or globally and to further internationalised approaches. The Forestry Assistant is therefore expected to ensure that there are resources for conducting forestry activities on customary land in an era which emphasises on planting more and more trees even in areas where there already exist forests that can suffice the needs of the local communities like in the case of Sinyala Village discussed above. This requires that the local communities are provided with implements for the nursery such as polythene tubes, seeds, panga knives, hoes and shovels. Due to resource constraints, there is no more financial support available from the Forestry Department for the local communities to continue with the establishment of woodlots and the operations on the ground are limited. Without such support, the duties of the frontline forestry staff were limited since they could no longer police the use of forests without being challenged by the local communities who are by now used to the idea that forests are for the people and not the Forestry Department statements which were being produced by forestry staff in a bid to get the local communities to look after their forests.

In order to make the MECDO CBO operational, there is therefore a need for financial assistance from external partners. This financial assistance is tied to conditions stipulated by the donors. Through this dependency, the MECDO has become an entry point for other organisations that are interested in environmental conservation: the Lilongwe Water Board (LWB), which is specifically interested in Malingunde area due to its being a catchments area as discussed above, and the Malawi Environmental Endowment Trust (MEET), which is interested in national environmental conservation.

The MEET and LWB have collaborated to work together in ensuring the conservation of the Malingunde area by providing the financial support, which is required to conduct community-based forestry. The project therefore appears to work well for all of the external parties concerned: the LWB and the MEET will have the control over the activities that the local communities are involved. The FA's work, therefore, is to make sure that the area is not degraded, which has to be achieved through keeping the local communities off the already existing forests, encourage them to plant more trees, and train them in other income generating activities that will replace fuelwood sales.

Whereas the LWB was ready to work with the forestry clubs, MEET on the other hand had more requirements that needed to be met by the local communities. MEET requires that the community form an organisation that is legally registered with the Registrar General's office. Legal registration requires MK7500, which is a lot of money for the smallholder farmers of Malingunde to afford. Due to this, the MECDO CBO does not qualify to receive financial assistance from the MEET directly. An arrangement was therefore reached which allowed the MECDO CBO to get MEET funding through the LWB, i.e. MEET deposits money into LWB's bank account which is then given to the MECDO CBO.

The Forestry Assistant's accountability to the local communities and the Forestry Department becomes diminished while his accountability to the external donors (MEET and LWB) is stronger. All the communication between the LWB/MEET and the local communities goes through the Director. From informal individual interviews with the members of the executive committee of the CBO, they related that they are not in direct contact with the donors. The only time the Chairman and Secretary met the LWB officials was when they went to collect the cheques to conduct training of VFCs because they are signatories to the accounts. After cashing the cheque, all the money is taken by the Director/Forestry Assistant, this, despite the CBO having a Treasurer, Vice Treasurer and an Accounts Assistant. The Treasurer views this action as arising out of the fact that she is female and is perhaps being protected from thieves who may ambush her if she is known to be carrying large sums of money to her home. However, some view this as lack of transparency and accountability on the part of the Director of the CBO. Accountability and transparency are issues at the centre of decentralised and community-based forestry and I discuss these issues in the next section.

Representation and Accountability

While there have been strong proponents of participation through institutions which has led to insistence by the state and donors alike on the mobilisation of communities into some organisations, recently such approaches have come under criticism for the treatment of both institutions and participation (Cooke and Kothari 2001).

Firstly, formal institutions which are in most cases externally sponsored, like VNRMCs and the MECDO CBO, have been overly emphasised to such a point that there has been little consideration of whether or not there have already been other forms of institutions that have been in operation before the externally-sponsored institutions came in. Informal institutions or socially embedded institutions, such as the ones where the Village Headmen have the power to control access to forest products, have been shown to work equally well in some situations. The Village headmen formulated rules of access and use of the trees therein and the VFA has survived for decades without a 'committee to manage it. Apart from this VFA, most highly forested areas in Malingunde are graveyards which are under the village headman's jurisdiction and are considered sacred places. The village headman is the one who grants access to the graveyards such that although there is a norm that one cannot get fuelwood from there, during funerals, the village headman grants access to the graveyard so that fuelwood for use at the funeral can be collected. This is not only restricted to funeral times, but also when there is a collective need for trees like building a kraal for the forestry club's guinea fowls. This is in consonance with what Kayambazinthu et al (2003) observed in the Southern African region, that there are traditional institutions that are still at work, and in some cases, they coexist with the externally sponsored institutions.

Secondly, the formal institutions have mostly taken the shape of hierarchical bureaucracies, a blue-print form of organisation, which may not necessarily fit in with the contexts at the local level. There is a top-down approach to decision making and commands. The principles guiding the formation of such institutions are based on representation, that a few people, who may be the local elites, be elected to represent and act on behalf of the majority. This has resulted in two problems: on one hand, the need for participation (which is not explicit on whether the participation required is of the individual or the community and in what activities; and on the other hand there is the clientelistic politics. This observation is in consonance with what Cleaver (2001) questions in terms of whether participation is framed as direct individual participation or indirect (represented) participation.

In indirect participation leads to the problem of excluding those who are not in the 'core team of representatives' (the executive committee members) and even those who are outside the CBO altogether. Beginning with the principles of representation, Ribot (2004) argues that democratic decentralisation, in other words, devolution, occurs when the powers and functions are transferred to representatives of the local people. Thus electing representatives is a very central tenet to devolution. As has been explained above in the case of the MECDO, the community representatives were elected from a group of people who were not representatives of the community at large, but from the executive committee members of village forestry clubs. However, Village Forestry Clubs are composed of only those members of the village who have shown an interest in forestry which means that the CBO executive committee representatives have an even thinner mandate to represent

the community at large. Thus, while participation is supposed to be an 'inclusive' phenomenon in the sense that it calls for the involvement of each and every individual, representation – as an indirect form of participation – turns out to be an 'exclusive' form of participation, with those who are representing others feeling justified to get the benefits individually since they are the ones 'who have worked to bring the benefits in'.

Yet claims to empowerment of the local people through decentralisation are premised on the assumption that they will participate in the relevant activities, though this is not explicit as to whether the participation is direct or indirect (through representation). The only way that decentralisation can lead to empowerment through indirect participation, as in representation, is when those who are representing others are accountable and responsive: accountable in the sense that they can be sanctioned by those they are representing, and responsive in the sense that they listen to what the constituents need and these needs are transformed into policy or action.

Conclusion

This paper has, using a practical example of decentralised natural resource management, which is aimed at rural development in Malawi, questioned the claims that decentralisation can lead to empowerment of citizens. Through a review of the literature on decentralisation and empowerment, as well as linking it to the policy and practice of decentralisation at local level in Malawi, the paper has demonstrated that power relations among the various actors involved in rural development, including the citizens, particularly in natural resource management, need to be critically analysed to understand the empowering ability of decentralisation approaches.

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Chapter 9

Les technologies mobiles au service de la décentralisation des services de santé : une étude de cas au Mali

Ly Ousmane

Résumé

La décentralisation est née de la volonté de l'Etat Malien d'améliorer la gouvernance en rapprochant la prise de décision au plus près des populations. C'est ainsi que l'Etat a décidé de transférer une partie des compétences qu'il exerce aux collectivités territoriales. Ce transfert doit être accompagné de renforcement de capacités et de transfert de ressources liées à chaque compétence transférée. Ce qui permet aux autorités locales d'exercer pleinement les rôles qui leurs sont dévolus au terme du processus. Mais force est de reconnaître que pour prendre les meilleurs décision au niveau local, les responsables ont besoins d'informations complètes et de bonnes qualités, car les décisions doivent être prise sur une base factuelle (le système d'information essentielle pour la commune a été développé pour cela avec l'appuis de la coopération néerlandaise dans la région sanitaire de Koulikoro). Les technologies mobiles sont une bonne alternative pour permettre aux autorités locales de récolter la bonne information, de l'utiliser pour la prise de décision et surtout de le rediffuser vers la communauté dans le cadre du principe d'imputabilité et de redevabilité. Au delà de l'aspect amélioration de la disponibilité de l'information, les technologies permettent aussi de délivrer des services de santé de proximité au sein de la communauté. Ce concept a été expérimenté au Mali dans le cadre de deux projets pilotes de suivis de la santé des mères et des enfants grâce au téléphone mobile. Les deux programmes mis en œuvre sont PESINET et Front Line SMS Medic.

Ces programmes consistent au suivi des mères et des enfants grâce à l'utilisation du téléphone mobile et d'Internet. PESINET est un projet de télédiagnostic pédiatrique simple basé sur le suivi régulier des courbes de poids des enfants de 0 à 5 ans, complété par un dispositif d'accès incluant consultations médicales et médicaments courants. Quant à Frontline SMS Medic, le fonctionnement est similaire la différence se trouve au niveau de la technologie utilisée, le sms à la place du GPRS et la population cible qui comprend les femmes en plus des enfants.

Les résultats enregistrés ont prouvé qu'on peut délivrer des services de santé de qualité à la communauté grâce à l'utilisation de la téléphonie mobile.

Cela a ouvert de nouvelles perspectives pour mieux soutenir le processus de décentralisation en cours au Mali.

Ainsi l'Agence Nationale d'Informatique Médicale (ANTIM) est entrain de mettre en place une flotte de téléphone mobile pour l'ensemble du système de santé qui va permettre le passage à échelle des initiatives pilotes mis en œuvre.

Cette infrastructure de communication permettra de faire profiter à l'ensemble des élus locaux du Mali de l'outil de prise de décision ayant fait ses preuves dans la région sanitaire de Koulikoro dans le cadre du processus de décentralisation: le système d'information essentielle pour la commune (SIEC).

En conclusion le processus de décentralisation dans les pays en développement comme le Mali va tirer les meilleurs partis de l'utilisation des TIC, surtout les technologies mobiles.

Introduction

La décentralisation est née de la volonté de l'Etat malien de développer la gouvernance locale en rapprochant la prise de décision le plus près des populations. C'est ainsi que l'Etat a décidé de transférer une partie des compétences qu'il exerce aux collectivités territoriales. Ce transfert doit être accompagné de transfert de ressources liées à chaque compétence transférée.

Face à la complexité du processus de décentralisation, trois secteurs prioritaires (Santé, Education et Hydraulique) ont été identifiés pour démarrer le transfert des compétences et des ressources.

Décentralisation et secteur de la santé au Mali

Certains secteurs comme la santé et l'éducation dans le cadre de l'administration centrale, ont développé des approches de développement visant à rapprocher les prestations le plus près possible des populations bénéficiaires. Cette approche a permis au secteur de la santé de développer un système de santé décentralisé basé sur l'approche populationnelle à travers le découpage géographique en aire de santé, unité géographique et administrative de base du système de santé.

Pour une meilleure prise en charge des problèmes de santé par les élus en respect de la nouvelle politique de décentralisation, l'état a transféré certaines de ses compétences aux collectivités territoriales des niveaux Commune et Cercle en matière de santé.

Ainsi les textes législatifs suivants ont été adoptés

- La loi n°93-008 du 11 février 1993, modifiée, déterminant les conditions de la libre administration des Collectivités Territoriales
- La loi n° 95-034 du 12 avril 1995 (modifiée par la loi n° 98-066 du 30 décembre 1998) portant code des collectivités territoriales

Ainsi la mise en œuvre du transfert de compétences de l'Etat aux Collectivités Territoriales en matière de santé a entraîné la mise en place d'outils d'accompagnement nécessaires permettant à l'ensemble des acteurs impliqués de mieux collaborer en vue d'une amélioration continue de la santé des populations aux niveaux commune et cercle.

Ces outils sont

- le décret n°02-314 du 04 juin 2002 fixant le détail des compétences transférées de l'Etat aux communes et cercles en matière de santé précise davantage les responsabilités de la commune et du cercle en matière de santé.
- Le décret n°05- 299 / P-RM du 28 juin 2005 fixant les conditions de création et les principes fondamentaux de fonctionnement des centres de santé communautaire.
- La convention d'assistance mutuelle commune/ASACO précise les obligations réciproques des parties prenantes pour la gestion des CSCOM.

Le fonctionnement correct de ces outils mis en place va permettre aux autorités locales d'exercer pleinement les rôles qui leurs sont dévolus au terme du processus de décentralisation.

Mais force est de reconnaître que pour prendre les meilleurs décisions au niveau local, les responsables ont besoin d'informations complètes et de bonne qualité, car les décisions doivent être prises sur une base factuelle, c'est-à-dire à partir de preuves scientifiques.

Les technologies mobiles sont une bonne alternative pour permettre aux autorités locales de récolter la bonne information, de l'utiliser pour la prise de décision et surtout de le rediffuser vers la communauté dans le cadre du principe d'imputabilité et de redevabilité.

Au delà de l'aspect amélioration de la disponibilité de l'information, les technologies permettent aussi de délivrer des services de santé de proximité au sein de la communauté.

Suivi de la santé des enfants basé sur l'utilisation du téléphone mobile

Le concept a été expérimenté au Mali dans le cadre de deux projets pilotes de suivi de la santé des mères et des enfants grâce au téléphone mobile.

Le projet consiste au suivi des enfants grâce à l'utilisation du téléphone mobile et d'Internet. C'est un projet de télédiagnostic pédiatrique simple basé sur le suivi régulier des courbes de poids des enfants de 0 à 5 ans, complété par un dispositif d'accès incluant consultations médicales et médicaments courants.

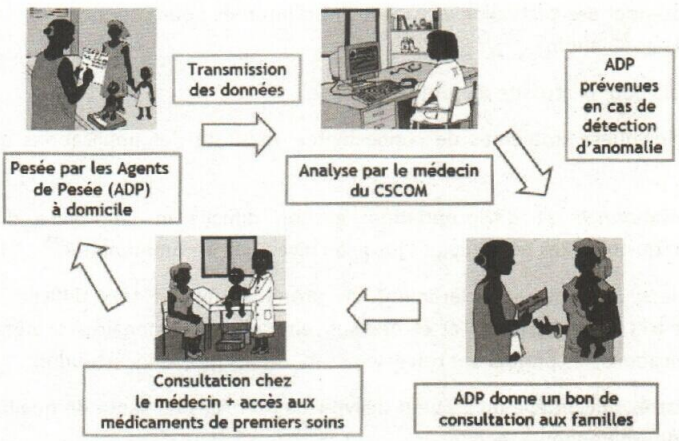
Il a été développé suite au constat qu'un grand nombre d'enfants meurent de maladies souvent bénignes que la prévention, le suivi et la détection précoce pourraient empêcher de devenir mortelles.

Dans la pratique, des Relais Communautaires effectuent des visites dans les familles abonnées et enregistrent sur un téléphone mobile le poids, la taille et d'autres données relatives à l'état de santé des enfants (vomissements, diarrhées,...). Ces données sont enregistrées sur le téléphone portable, puis transmises, via le réseau GPRS ou par SMS, à une base de données centrale.

Le médecin accède à ces informations via la plateforme web Pesinet soit à travers le module FrontlineSMSMedic. Il pose son diagnostic sur la base des courbes de Poids, de la taille ainsi que sur les informations complémentaires recueillies par le Relai. En cas de détection d'une situation anormale un SMS est envoyé à ce dernier pour convoquer l'enfant au centre de Santé pour une consultation. L'enfant bénéficie de la consultation gratuitement et d'une remise de 50% ou 100% sur la prise en charge des frais de médicaments.

Les services spécifiques dont les utilisateurs ont accès sont: un service médical abordable permettant de prévenir, détecter et traiter à temps les pathologies simples grâce au suivi régulier de données sanitaires essentielles, l'accès au médicament à tarifs préférentiels. L'enfant enrôlé bénéficie d'une prise en charge gratuite de toute urgence.

Figure 1 : Schéma organisationnel du système de prise en charge



Ceci a permis d'obtenir des résultats prometteurs lors de l'évaluation de PESINET en 2010 qui donnait les statistiques suivantes:

- 390 enfants sont abonnés au service,
- 2 agents et 1 coordinateur ont été recrutés à temps plein,
- Un médecin local travaille 10 heures par semaine pour Pesinet,

- 90% de taux de recouvrement des abonnements,
- 30% des enfants abonnés sont consultés suite à une alerte du médecin chaque mois ou pour des consultations de suivi.

Le pilote a permis de valider le modèle opératoire et économique de Pesinet et l'impact sanitaire du service.

Une évaluation menée sur un échantillon de 96 mamans abonnées, par un étudiant en thèse de médecine sous la direction de l'Agence Nationale de Télésanté et d'Informatique Médicale du Mali, indique que:

- 96% des mamans abonnées sont satisfaites du service
- 99% souhaitent le recommander à des proches
- 97% trouvent le service « très peu cher »
- 78% des mamans abonnées ont un niveau d'éducation très bas (non-scolarisées ou éducation en école primaire seulement)
- 90% ont un revenu instable ou moyennement stable
- 95% voient comme principal avantage du service le « Bon suivi sanitaire et le coût abordable ».

Ces résultats nous permettent de dire que l'utilisation de la téléphonie mobile pour délivrer des soins de santé est une révolution technologique qui va changer la donne pour l'atteinte des OMD.

Les applications mobiles ont contribué à:

- Réduire la mortalité infantile par une détection précoce des maladies bénignes et une prise en charge médicale rapide des enfants de 0 à 5 ans; ce qui concours à l'atteinte des Objectifs du Millénaire pour Développement 4, 5.
- Améliorer l'accès aux soins de santé par une approche communautaire où les relais se déplacent vers les familles;
- Sensibiliser et responsabiliser les bénéficiaires sur les notions de prévention et de suivi médical.
- Utiliser le potentiel des technologies mobiles et d'Internet pour supporter les services de santé au bénéfice de la population.

Mais les défis majeurs pour la réussite du projet on été:

- Défis technologiques: problèmes de connectivités, maturité des applications qui se sont souvent plantés.
- Défis Organisationnels et d'Appropriation: gestion difficile et laborieuse du changement par l'introduction de nouvelles technologies jusqu'au niveau de la communauté.
- Défis financiers: soutenir financièrement un projet social est très difficile, d'où l'intervention publique est très nécessaire. (A l'arrêt des subventions des partenaires comme les opérateurs de télécommunications, les projets ont traversé des moments forts d'incertitude).

Les résultats enregistrés ont prouvé qu'on peut délivrer des services de santé de qualité à la communauté grâce à l'utilisation de la téléphonie mobile.

Cela a ouvert de nouvelles perspectives pour mieux soutenir le processus de décentralisation en cours au Mali.

Une synergie entre acteurs locaux et pouvoir central pour mettre en place le projet

C'est une collaboration entre l'Agence Nationale de Télésanté et d'Informatique Médicale du Ministère de la Santé du Mali, la direction régionale de la santé du district de Bamako qui est sous tutelle administrative

de la mairie du District de Bamako, de la fédération locale des associations de santé communautaires et deux ONG opérant sur le terrain. Il s'agit de l'association française PESINET et de L'ONG américaine Mali HealthOrganization Project (MHOP).

L'Agence Nationale de Télésanté et d'Informatique Médicale ANTIM est un Etablissement Publique à Caractère Scientifique et Technologique (EPST). Elle a été créée en 2008 et relève du Ministère de la santé du Mali. L'ANTIM a pour mission de promouvoir et de développer la Cybersanté et l'informatique Médicale au Mali. Cette mission est exécutée à travers des activités de recherche, de formation, de communication sur la Cybersanté, d'appui technique aux structures de santé et de prestations de service.

L'Agence est également en charge d'harmoniser et de normaliser l'ensemble des processus et procédures liés à une utilisation efficiente des TIC dans le secteur de la santé ainsi que des matériels et logiciels y afférant.

L'agence en tant que structure centrale, soutient technologiquement les applications déployées sur le terrain par les deux structures (PESINET et MHOP), évalue leur potentiel et prépare la phase d'extension et de pérennité des concepts testés et ayant donné des résultats probants.

La mairie du district de Bamako a accompagné le projet en soutenant la direction régionale de la santé du district de Bamako qui est la structure technique qui conseille la municipalité en termes de questions sanitaires.

La fédération locale de santé communautaire, fédération de l'ensemble des associations de santé communautaire d'une région sanitaire a activement accompagné le processus en étant présente à toutes les réunions et en mobilisant les communautés.

PESINET et MHOP ont effectué en parfaite harmonie avec les autorités locales, la communauté (implication parfaite des chefs de quartiers, autorités coutumiers reconnus par la communauté) une sensibilisation au projet aboutissant à une adhésion de la majorité des populations cibles.

L'ANTIM en tant que structure du gouvernement central initiatrice du projet a mis en place un processus participatif, permettant de tenir compte des sensibilités des différents acteurs du projet, surtout ceux des intervenants locaux (Mairie du district de Bamako et représentants de la communauté).

Il est important de rappeler que ceci a pris un certain temps avant de devenir totalement opérationnel. Car cela demande beaucoup d'effort en termes de réunion et de concertation pour aboutir a un consensus acceptable pour tous.

De tels projets ne doivent pas être figés, ils doivent être dynamiques pour s'adapter à l'environnement d'intervention qui est très souvent en perpétuel changement. Les gestionnaires ne doivent pas ignorer le potentiel des organisations locales et de certaines règles traditionnelles qui peuvent être de puissants leviers pour faire avancer les projets. Typiquement dans le cadre de notre projet, au début les communicateurs traditionnels n'ont pas été impliqués, on a préféré passer les informations par les radios et les affiches. L'enrôlement des enfants est ainsi resté timide, mais dès qu'on a passé les informations par le canal du crieur public et des griots de quartier avec l'aval du chef de quartier, les enrôlements ont augmenté.

Nous retenons de cela que les administrations qu'elles soient locales ou centrales doivent tenir compte des structures traditionnelles établies dans une communauté pour toutes activités qu'ils décident d'entreprendre pour le bénéfice de cette communauté, car la réussite en dépend.

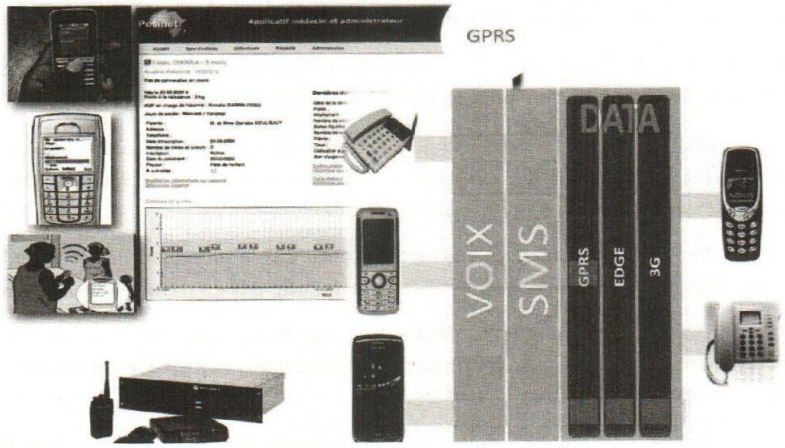
Perspective pour le passage à échelle

L'Agence Nationale de Télésanté et d'Informatique Médicale (ANTIM) est entrain de mettre en place une flotte de téléphone mobile pour l'ensemble du système de santé qui va permettre le passage à échelle des initiatives pilotes mis en œuvre.

La flotte mobile fonctionne sous forme de réseau privé de communication à travers lequel tous les appareils de la flotte communiquent entre eux à un coût forfaitaire.

Les terminaux mobiles se trouvent à tous les niveaux de la pyramide. Plus précisément, il s'agit d'équiper l'ensemble des Centres de santé Communautaire (CSCom), des Centres de santé de référence (CSRéf) et leurs ambulances, les Etablissements Publics Hospitaliers (EPH) ainsi que des Agents de Santé Communautaires. Les RAC numériques seront déployés dans les zones non couvertes par la téléphonie mobile et intégrés dans l'Intranet de la Santé pour en faire une infrastructure unique de communication numérique unifiée.

Figure 2 : Schéma fonctionnel du réseau physique de la flotte



Des formulaires spécifiques seront développés et installés sur les terminaux mobiles pour faciliter le recueil d'information. Les données seront envoyées par SMS ou par Internet à des serveurs qui seront accessibles à qui de droit via un navigateur web. Le traitement des données sera automatisé. Chaque niveau de la pyramide pourra alors exploiter les informations selon ses besoins et suivant ses privilèges préalablement définis par tous les acteurs du système d'information.

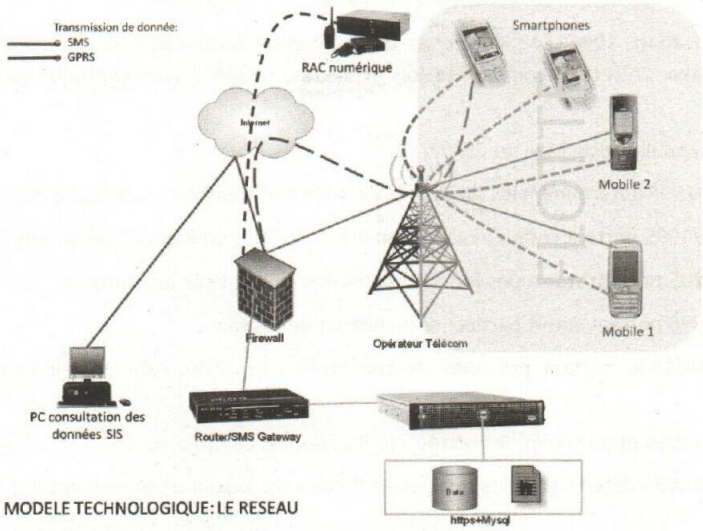
L'automatisation du processus aura pour avantage de rendre toute la chaine du traitement de l'information instantanée ; c'est-à-dire, une information envoyée est aussi tôt traitée à la réception. Aux cas critiques identifiés par les acteurs du système d'information, y seront associés des alertes qui seront immédiatement envoyées par SMS et par courriel à qui de droit. Cela va entrainer une prise de décision à temps et optimiser le système de riposte par rapport aux épidémies et catastrophes.

Par ailleurs la mise en place de cette infrastructure va permettre le passage à échelle des initiatives pilotes en programme intégré aux activités de routines du système de santé.

A la date d'aujourd'hui l'ANTIM en collaboration avec les services financiers du Ministère de la Santé du Mali, ont lancé un appel d'offre de fourniture d'un service de flotte mobile de 2000 lignes auprès des opérateurs du Mali. Et à partir du dernier trimestre de l'année 2011, c'est 800 lignes qui vont être gracieusement opérationnelles dans le cadre du partenariat entre l'ANTIM et l'opérateur Orange Mali soutenu par le programme de responsabilité sociale d'entreprise de cet opérateur.

Figure 3: applications et équipements utilisés par la flotte

La mise en place de cette flotte mobile doit permettre de faire valoir le concept de prise de décision basé sur



MODELE TECHNOLOGIQUE: LE RESEAU

les faits pour les collectivités décentralisées. Surtout que le Mali dans sa loi de décentralisation a commencé par transférer les responsabilités sur les questions de santé aux communes. Alors comment un maire d'une commune va appréhender les questions sanitaires de sa commune et prendre la meilleure décision pour sa communauté?

La solution pourrait venir de l'expérience qui a consisté à mettre en place le système d'information essentielle pour la commune en santé (SIEC-S), qui a très bien fonctionné dans le district sanitaire de Dioïla, région administrative de Koulikoro au Mali. Ce dispositif consistait à résumer l'information sanitaire en des indicateurs essentiels dans un langage accessible et faisant du sens pour les élus locaux du conseil communal, afin qu'ils décident des priorités.

L'utilisation de la flotte mobile pour la santé va permettre surement de reproduire ce modèle en mettant en place un Bulletin de Retro-Information Communal en Santé (BRICS) à l'attention des élus locaux et des professionnels de santé et du développement social.

Le BRICS ne devra contenir que les informations essentielles formatées dans un langage accessible pour les élus locaux.

Conclusion

En conclusion le processus de décentralisation dans les pays en développement comme le Mali va tirer le meilleur parti de l'utilisation des TIC, surtout les technologies mobiles

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Chapter 10

Ghana's Experience with Decentralization and Citizen Engagement since 1982

Stephen Adei and Kwamena Ahwoi

Abstract

Following several abortive attempts at decentralizing Ghana's public administration system from independence in 1957, decentralization was finally anchored in the country's Fourth Republican Constitution of 1992 as a constitutional imperative to be implemented by all elected Governments. In an all-embracing programme of political, administrative and fiscal decentralization as well as decentralized planning, the Constitution seeks to involve local people in decision-making through a process of elected and appointed members of local authorities referred to as Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies (MMDAs). It also seeks to establish competence and skills at the local level by converting the deconcentrated Departments of State at the district level into devolved Departments of the MMDAs. Decentralized planning is sought to be achieved by the introduction of a bottom-up planning system and fiscal decentralization through a novel decentralized transfer system called the District Assemblies Common Fund.

Though a framework for citizens' engagement in decentralization exists, it has not worked very well in practice largely on account of the structural difficulty of implementing a governance system of a partisan Central Government superimposed on a non-partisan Local Government system and also on account of financial constraints which disable the elected local representatives from meaningfully engaging with their constituents on issues of local level governance. There is also a glaring omission of a defined role for Civil Society Organisations/Community-Based Organisations/Non-Governmental Organisations/Faith-Based Organisations in the local governance system.

Decentralization nevertheless has chalked up significant successes by ensuring that local deliverables in the areas of basic education, primary health, electricity, water and sanitation, spatial planning and market management are attained.

Introduction

This paper seeks to share Ghana's experience with decentralization and citizen engagement since 1982 when the programme of decentralization was introduced by the then Government of the Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC). It is largely a desk-top study account of the process involving an analysis of the Constitution and the legal framework for the implementation of decentralization. It is also partly based on the practical knowledge and experience of one of the authors (Professor Kwamena Ahwoi) as the Minister of Local Government who was responsible for initiating and implementing the programme in 1988.

Ghana has had its own experience with decentralization efforts since independence and in the process has become familiar with the conceptual disagreements over what decentralization means. The disagreements persist until today, but a new consensual Decentralization Policy Framework adopted in 2010 identifies national level decentralization as a level of ministerial restructuring; the regional level as a level of de-concentration (decongestion); the district level as a level of devolution; and the sub-district level as a level of delegation (Ghana/MLGRD 2012).

Remy Prud'homme (1989) makes the argument for decentralization as including the assumption that the demand for local public services vary from place to place because tastes and willingness to pay differ for geographic, cultural, ethnic and historic reasons, which means that the central provision of services is not likely to please anybody. Only the decentralized provision of local services will adjust to the many-faceted demands.

His second argument for decentralization is based on efficiency. Locally financed and provided services will be produced at lower costs because time will be saved; local resources will be used; responsibility and oversight will be exercised and as a consequence costs will be lowered relative to what they would be if the same services were provided by the central government.

The third argument, which is political, is that local governments are training grounds for democracy and that stronger local or regional governments can control the natural tendency of central governments to become all-powerful.

A final institutional argument in favour of decentralization is that local services are best coordinated at the local level. Local public services cannot or should not be treated independently from each other. Water pipes have to be provided together with streets and this coordination can much more easily be achieved when local public services are provided by local rather than by central governments.

Against decentralization, and in favour of centralization, the argument is made that a centralized system is potentially more equitable because income distribution is a basic function of government which is much better performed at the central than at the local level. Besides, centralization makes it possible to equalize levels of publicly provided services over space, but even if it is not, it is inherently redistributive by redistributing income from the richer areas to the poorer ones.

Secondly, centralization makes it easier to conduct macro-economic policies. The control of the allocation of resources and of overall demand is a major objective of public policy that is achieved by the use of fiscal and monetary instruments. The larger the share of local governments in terms of taxes and expenditures, the more difficult it is to utilize those instruments.

Thirdly, centralization ensures better accountability because central level bureaucrats are better able to resist pressures of vested local interests than locally elected officials. They are likely to be technically more competent; they do not have to run for re-election; they can be controlled by their hierarchy; and they are usually foreign to the area.

Ghanaian Decentralization: The Backdrop

It was against this backdrop and the violent struggle for independence in Ghana which divided the Ghanaian political class into pro-federalists (decentralists) and pro-unitarists (centralists) that the Independence Constitution of Ghana was promulgated in 1957, representing a compromise between the two positions.

Thus Ghana's first attempt at decentralized governance was under the 1957 Independence Constitution which provided for a large measure of devolution to the envisaged Regional Assemblies (Ghana, 1957). The Convention Peoples Party (CPP) Government, which was never enamoured of regional level devolution, however dismantled that attempt by dissolving the Regional Assemblies and by the time the one-party state was legitimized under the Constitution (Amendment) Act of 1964 (Ghana, 1964), decentralization had disappeared from the lexicon of the country's governance vocabulary.

Decentralization was resurrected through the various commissions established after the coup d'état of 1966 had overthrown the Government of the CPP (Ghana, 1967-1968), but it was not until 1982 that the PNDC fully restored decentralization to the front burner of Ghana's governance agenda (Ghana/PNDC, 1982).

The 1982 PNDC Policy Guidelines

The new Government of the Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC) established after the coup d'état of 1981 made the boldest commitment yet to a programme of decentralization when it stated in its Policy Guidelines of May 1982 as follows:

> "The urgent need for Participatory Democracy to ensure that the bane of remote government that had afflicted Ghanaians since Independence is done away with effectively, to render government truly responsive and accountable to the governed. The assumption of power by the people cannot be complete unless a truly decentralized government system is introduced, that is, Central Government, in all its ministerial manifestations, should empower Local Government Councils to initiate, co-ordinate, manage and execute policies in all matters affecting them within their localities" (Ghana/PNDC, 1982:88)

This was followed by a period of grassroots consultations with the chiefs, traditional authorities and opinion leaders with a view to re-demarcating the district boundaries and increasing the number of districts as part of the process of restoring "power to the people", an important aspect of the political component of the decentralization programme.

The Public Administration Restructuring and Decentralization Implementation Committee (PARDIC)

Alongside the programme of political decentralization was a programme of administrative decentralization which began with the establishment of the Public Administration Restructuring and Decentralization Implementation Committee (PARDIC) in 1983. PARDIC developed the technical component of the decentralization programme by working on the details of the functions and powers, skills and competences, and means and resources from the Central Government to the local authorities. Its work finally culminated in the administrative decentralization component of the decentralization programme, reflected currently in the Local Government Service Act (Ghana, 2003) and the National Development Planning (System) Act (Ghana, 1994).

District Political Authorities and Modalities for District Level Elections (The Blue Book)

Renewed fillip was given to the political decentralization component of the decentralization programme when the Government of the PNDC put together the "Akuse Group" to produce a blueprint for decentralization (Ghana/PNDC, 1987). The outcome was the "District Political Authorities and Modalities for District Level Elections", a new blueprint for political decentralization that was immediately dubbed the "Blue Book" on account of the colour of its cover. The Blue Book outlined the following innovative proposals which have become the pivots of Ghana's decentralization programme:

- Local authorities with reduced geographical jurisdictions and expanded membership called the "District Assemblies";
- Membership of the local authorities to be determined through a system of universal adult suffrage;

- Identification and removal of previous obstacles to participation in local governance;
- State-sponsored and therefore free local government elections;
- A decentralized and participatory local government system
- A novel funding mechanism for local government that became known as "Ceded Revenue";
- A system of sub-district structures comprising Urban, Zonal, Town and Area Councils (UZTACs) and Unit Committees (UCs).

Local Government Law, 1988, PNDCL 207 and Matters Arising

The Blue Book was subjected to intensive national consultations through a series of regional fora conducted by the National Commission for Democracy (NCD) at which several suggestions for modifications were made. It was subsequently converted into the Local Government Law, 1988, PNDCL 207, as the first major legislation on decentralized local government in post-independent Ghana. This was followed by the Local Government (Urban, Zonal and Town Councils and Unit Committees) (Establishment) Instrument (Ghana, 1991), as the subsidiary legislation on the sub-district structures.

The first District Level Elections under PNDCL 207 were conducted from November 1988 to January 1989 and the first District Assemblies composed of two-thirds elected and one-third appointed members/councillors who wereinaugurated in March 1989. When the new 1992 Constitution ushered in the Fourth Republic in Ghana, it contained Chapter 20 on "Decentralization and Local Government"; this was the first time that decentralization as a concept had been used in any post-independent Ghanaian Constitution.

Decentralization under the 1992 Constitution

Chapter 20, Article 240 of the 1992 Constitution provides the framework for Ghana's decentralization. Signaling the component of political decentralization as one of participatory elements of local governance, the Article provides that "-----people in particular local government areas shall, as far as practicable, be afforded the opportunity to participate effectively in their governance". It captures administrative decentralization through the provision that "as far as practicable, persons in the service of local government shall be subject to the effective control; of local authorities". "Decentralized planning" is covered in the provision requiring that "Parliament shall be law provide for the taking of such measures as are necessary to enhance the capacity of local government authorities to plan ----- and execute policies n respect of all matters affecting the people within their areas". "Fiscal decentralization" is also covered under the provision that "there shall be established for each local government unit a sound financial base with adequate and reliable sources of revenue". Constitution 1992:150

The Local Government Act and Other Supporting Legislation

The constitutional provisions have since been buttressed by a series of legislative measures designed to give effect to them and to put flesh on the skeletal framework of decentralization contained in the Constitution. The Local Government Act of 1993 establishes the District Assemblies as the political structures for decentralization and provides for their composition, functions, financing and relationships with other structures of government.

The Local Government Service Act of 2003 provides for administrative decentralization. It establishes the deconcentrated departments of state at the district level as devolved departments of the District Assemblies and migrates the functionaries of the affected departments from the Civil Service to a newly-established Local Government Service.

The National Development Planning (System) Act of 1994 introduces a new decentralized planning system with provisions for public hearings in the formulation of the plan, and the District Assemblies Common Fund (DACF) Act of 1993 regulates the operation of the DACF as a feature of fiscal decentralization.

These parent enactments are supported by the Local Government (Urban, Zonal and Town Councils and Unit Committees) (Establishment) Instrument of 2010 which establishes and regulates the operations of the

sub-district structures and the Local Government (Departments of District Assemblies) (Commencement) Instrument of 2009 which commences the operation of the deconcentrated district level Departments as Departments of the District Assemblies.

Decentralization and Citizens' Engagement in Ghana

The major arrangement for local governments to engage citizens is contained in the parts of the local government system that have removed the previous obstacles to the participation and engagement of citizens in local government. Four main such obstacles were identified by the Akuse Group that put together the blueprint for decentralization, the Blue Book. These were literacy in English, poverty, hijacking of the local authorities by the urban elite and partisanship in local government.

Past local government legislation required that candidates for local government elections should be able to speak and write English (because that was the official language of the District Councils' deliberations and proceedings). As a result, almost 50 per cent of the population was legislated out of the local government system since about 50 per cent of the population was said not to be literate in English.

The new requirement that Assembly proceedings could be conducted in languages other than English and therefore literacy in English would not be an election qualification criterion opened the floodgates to participation by ordinary people, and this was reflected in the kind of people who filed to contest the first District Level Elections held in 1988/89.

The next important obstacle to participation that was identified was poverty. With about 50 per cent of the people earning less than US$1 per day, it was not to be expected that such people who simply worked to eke out a living would want to commit resources that they did not have in the first place to political campaigns to get themselves elected as Assembly members. The decision to make all local government elections state-sponsored and therefore free removed this obstacle.

The third obstacle took the following form. In the past, local government elections had been hijacked by the urban elite. Mainly for purposes of prestige, urban dwellers would go to contest local government elections in villages where they "hailed from" and use their monies to get elected, only for them to return to the cities and forget about the problems and he needs of the villagers. What the new local government system was looking for was a representative who lived in the electoral area, who suffered the same deprivations as the electorate, and who could therefore articulate the needs and concerns of the electorate with a passion that could never be matched by the urban dweller. The requirement that the prospective Assembly member must be "ordinarily resident" in the electoral area took care of this concern.

Local governments also used to be hijacked by political parties who "imposed" candidates on the people who were not necessarily the choices of the people. This occurred as a result of the party "primaries" which resulted in the choices of the political parties becoming the candidates. In the end, whoever won the election was more the choice of the party than the choice of the people. The District Councils therefore became microcosms of the national parliament where issues are decided on a partisan basis rather than community priorities. By making local government elections non-partisan where for example political parties are not allowed to sponsor candidates for local government elections; neither can candidates for local government elections use the symbols or slogans of political parties, the electorate was enabled to make choices based on the acceptability, conduct and performance of the candidate and not on the political party he or she represented.

The closest signal for a role to be defined for ordinary people, Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), Community-Based Organisations (CBOs), Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and Faith-Based Organisations (FBOs) in local government in Ghana is given in the constitutional provision that "to ensure the accountability of local government authorities, people in particular local government areas shall, as far as practicable, be afforded the opportunity to participate effectively in their governance" Constitution 1992:150. It has also been taken up in the Local Government Act in the provisions on the duties of Assembly members; the participatory revocation of the mandate of the Assembly members; the indirect participation in the passage of a vote

of no confidence in the District Chief Executive (DCE); and in the public hearing provisions of the National Development Planning (System) Act.

To allow the local people to participate in local governance, the Local Government Act imposes specific duties on Assembly members. It is required that members should maintain contact with the electorate and that they hold mandatory meetings with the electorate before and after Assembly meetings, gathering their views for transmission to the Assembly and reporting the decisions of the Assembly to them respectively.

Power is also vested in the electorate to revoke the mandate of an Assembly member even before the end of his or her four-year tenure of office. Under this provision, at least 25 per cent of the registered voters of an electoral area may petition the Electoral Commission (EC) for the revocation of the mandate of an Assembly member. In the ensuing referendum to be organized by the EC, at least 40 per cent of the registered voters must vote and of those voting, at least 60 per cent must vote in favour of the revocation of the Assembly member's mandate.

The District Assembly itself, acting like a kind of Electoral College, can also pass a vote of no confidence in the District Chief Executive (DCE) which automatically terminates his or her tenure of office. The detailed procedure for this to happen is provided in the Model Standing Orders for MMDAs.

Another feature of the participation of the people in local governance is provided in the National Development Planning (System) Act under the requirement for the conduct of public hearings in the preparation of district development plans. Under this Act, the District Assembly as the District Planning Authority is mandatorily required to conduct public hearings on any proposed district development plan and consider the views expressed at the hearing before the adoption of the proposed district development plan. Local communities are likewise required to conduct public hearings in the preparation of sub-district or local action plans.

Finally, participation is enhanced through the establishment of the sub-district structures of the UZTACs and the UCs which are a reflection of the political slogan of "power to the people" o bringing governance to the doorsteps of the people. The UCs especially are the clearest manifestation of the principle of subsidiarity at work in Ghana. The geographical jurisdiction of the Unit represented by the Electoral Area is small enough to be accessed by the five members of the Unit Committee such that they will be both audible and visible to their electorate. The functions assigned to the UCs also clearly reflect the concern that local matters are what must be the concern of local people under the principle of subsidiarity.

Decentralization, Citizens' Engagement and Service Delivery

Decentralization through citizens' engagement has achieved a lot in terms of service delivery. A massive national and rural electrification programme under decentralization has seen more than 70 per cent of the country connected to the national electricity grid. Rehabilitation and upgrading of other social and economic infrastructure such as roads, water, telecommunication and television coverage to enhance productivity and quality of life have seen massive boost, especially in the rural areas. Employment creation has intensified through local authorities' promotion of cottage industries and modernised agricultural practices. There has also been a massive increase in the rehabilitation and construction of educational and health facilities. Housing is the next targeted basic need the decentralization programme is to focus on.

Decentralization and Citizens' Engagement: A Critique

One of the unintended though anticipated consequences of the removal of the previous obstacles to participation in local governance in Ghana have been a lowering in the quality of Assembly members. Because literacy in English is not a requirement and the cost of the elections is borne by the state, ordinary, uneducated and very poor people who are nevertheless very popular in their electoral areas get elected to the District Assemblies, resulting in a lowering in the quality of debate, interminable delays to allow for translations and interpretation, and an inability of such members to comprehend the technical aspects of the debate on subjects such as budgets and technical works plans. It was to deal with this problem that 30 per cent of the members of the Assemblies were appointed so as to infuse expertise and experience into the Assemblies besides raising the quality of debate and performance.

The requirement for Assembly members to meet with their electorate before and after Assembly meetings has also not quite worked out well in practice. This has largely been on account of the fact that the Assembly members are not adequately compensated for their services and are not provided with any resources or facilities to enable them to perform these roles.

The provision on the revocation of mandates has also not been made much use of in practice. It is possible that most of the population is not aware of the power that it has; it is possible that the procedure for the exercise of that power is too cumbersome; but the net result is that this important provision for ensuring local level accountability by local politicians has been kept more in the breach than in the observance.

Similarly, the provision that allows the District Assembly itself to pass a vote of no confidence in the District Chief Executive has not been made much use of. Invariably, the appointed members of the Assembly, out of a misplaced sense of loyalty to the President who appoints them, have seen any threat of a no confidence vote as a vote of no confidence in the President himself and have been quick to rally round to the defence of the District Chief Executive to prevent his or her removal from office through that mechanism.

Engagement through public hearings in the planning process has not been very effective either on account of resource constraints. Similarly, engagement through the sub-district structures has suffered because the sub-district structures have remained largely dysfunctional or non-functional on account of the reluctance or the refusal of the District Assemblies to delegate responsibilities to them.

On the whole therefore, citizens' engagement with the decentralized structures and participation in local governance has not been very effective. Despite all the reasons that have been given for this state of affairs, however, the fundamental reason is structural. Ghana's decentralized local government system does not prescribe any real role or procedure for the citizens to engage with the local authorities or participate in local governance in any way. One of the authors (Professor Kwamena Ahwoi) put it this way on another occasion:

> "A glaring omission from Ghana's decentralization programme is the absence of any clear-cut role for CSOs, CBOs, NGOs and FBOs in the local governance system. Though these organizations exist at the local level, there is no acknowledgement given of their existence and therefore no role carved for them. Yet without them, participatory planning and budgeting cannot be effectively implemented. It is also due to the lack of their acknowledgement that so little demand is made of decentralization from the local levels such that instead of decentralization being a demand-driven programme from below, it has become a supply-driven policy instrument from above, with the Central Government behaving as if it is doing District Assemblies a favour any time a policy decision is taken in favour of the Assemblies. That explains the controls, the tardiness and sometimes the clearly unconstitutional measures implemented in the local government and decentralization sector by central institutions of state which they get away with" (Ahwoi, 2011).

Conclusion

It is true that Ghana has made great strides in decentralization implementation, particularly in the four components of political, administrative and fiscal decentralization and decentralized planning. However, great challenges remain in achieving true subsidiarity through effective sub-district structures, an effective system of participatory planning and budgeting; and the strengthening and making relevant of local level CSOs, CBOs, NGOs and FBOs to institutionalize citizens' engagement with local authorities within the framework of the decentralized local government system.

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Chapter 11

Contesting the Political Space of Decentralization and Development Planning in Rural Malawi: Insights from Project Selection in Mulanje and Mwanza Districts

George Abel Mhango

Abstract

Malawi has been implementing a nation-wide decentralization in the form of devolution since 2000 with the aim of meaningfully involving communities in the process of generating locally relevant development plans. Through decentralized planning, it was hoped that the much needed space for grassroots participation in local decision making had been realized. The rationale was that direct involvement of local people would afford them an advantage to animate the available spaces of decision making in order to shape their own futures. However, experience of decentralized planning in rural Malawi indicates that the question of participation is not a foregone conclusion as it is marked with complex relations in the contest of local decision making. Hence, using the political space approach, this paper interrogates the interplay of decentralized planning and citizenship participation in shaping local people's agency for contesting project selection in rural Malawi. It argues that decentralized planning is essentially a political process that sustains dynamic interactions of actors with competing interests who employ various incentives to manipulate resource allocation in their favour. This leaves local people at the margins of decision making where their prospects of moving from 'clients' to 'agents' of power are limited.

Keywords: decentralized planning, political space, political agency, citizenship participation

Introduction

The third democratic wave, with its emphasis on building and strengthening local institutions, has brought the role of the state in sharp focus. Failure of neo-liberal assumptions has led to a re-focus on development interventions in the developing nations, prompting experts and scholars to reconsider the role of the state and civil society in development. Contrary to the 'market efficiency' dictum, it has been increasingly noted that local people continue looking at the state to intervene and solve their problems when it comes to the fulfilment of basic needs and conditions of dignified living (Bratton and Mattes, 2003; Mohanty, 2007). This is evidenced by the fact that most governments in developing countries have embarked on decentralization as an institutional innovation through which the state links up with the grassroots in order to improve local service delivery. Central to this approach is the art of making local development plans, a process known as decentralized development planning.

Malawi has experimented with various forms of decentralization since the colonial era. The country started with a brief period of devolution in the 1960s, followed by a long spell of deconcentration (from the late 1960s to the 1990s) and finally a return to devolution in 1998. In fact earnest efforts towards a return to democratic local governance through devolution began in 1995, succinctly placing primacy on local people as vanguards of development. One key characteristic of the reforms was the pursuit of decentralized planning as a means of democratizing local decision making. This implied that local communities would be recognized as a key stakeholder in the process of drawing development plans together with their local governments in a manner that was considered to be locally relevant (Bornstein 2000). This was aimed at creating participatory spaces where people could express their aspirations regarding socio-economic development.

By 2000, Malawi had embarked on a nationwide decentralized planning. This came after the establishment of the legal framework for devolution through the Local Government Act and Decentralization Policy of 1998. However, 13 years into the implementation of decentralized planning, local communities are yet to meaningfully influence local decision making as practice keeps indicating that they are being dislocated from the process. The practice of decentralized planning indicates that, the process has been shaping around local elites such as political leaders, opinion leaders, traditional leaders and technocrats (Chingaipe 2007; Chinsinga 2007; Chinsinga and Dzimadzi 2001; Chiweza 2006; Hindson et al 2008; Hussein 2004). Paradoxically, Afrobarometer surveys of 2003, 2005 and 2008 suggest that Malawians are most likely to contest decision making. The surveys consistently showed that over 70% of Malawians were likely to make their leaders account for their decisions as indicated in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Likelihood to Question Decisions Made by Leaders

	2003	2005	2008
Will question	82%	71%	75%
Will not question	17%	27%	22%
Neither	0%	1%	2%
Don't Know	1%	1%	1%

Source: Afrobarometer Surveys (Rounds 2,3 and 4)

This dissonance between perception and practice motivates an enquiry into the potential for local communities to challenge elitist elements that dominate or contest local decision-making in participatory spaces of decentralized service provision in Malawi. Therefore, this paper investigates how local people contest project selection and the interests of actors involved in the process.

Political Space and Decentralized Planning

In framing the political economy of decentralized planning, the political space framework serves as a crucial lens for exploring the politics of local decision making. The rationale is that political spaces subsist within the interaction of institutions, interests, incentives and ideologies which underpin the decentralization

imperative. According to Grindle and Thomas cited in Cornwall (2002, p. 2), political space represents spheres of negotiation and contestation, shaped through the exercise of political agency, in which a diversity of actors, knowledge and interests interact to influence resource allocation, where also room can be made for alternatives. The spaces provide opportunities and moments where citizens can act to potentially influence policies, discourses, decisions and relationships that affect their lives and interests (Gaventa 2006; Lefebvre 1991).

Political space conceives of participation as having a spatial dimension whereby efforts to involve local people lead to the creation of new spaces that enable better participation in decision- making. It is on this basis that political space is understood on three key dimensions namely:

The institutional channels through which policy formulation and implementation can be accessed, controlled or contested by local people; the particular discourses in which local decision making is understood and; the social and political practices of local people which may be a basis for influencing decision making (Webster and Engberg-Pedersen 2002).

Institutional channels comprise all possible forums available for decision making, largely perceived as avenues offering marginalized groups a chance to engage with levers of power as shapers of decisions. Discourses represent not only ways people think, act and speak but also how power is understood to be dispersed in a particular context (Cornwall 2002). They shape and convey meanings that constitute a political space by facilitating the production and replication of local power relations within institutional spaces, which serve as means of domination and control (Mahmud 2007). Hence, by formally or informally specifying whose knowledge and meanings count, a discourse may enable or hinder what is said and how it is understood in a particular space (Foucault, cited in Fischer 2006). Social and political practices relate to collective memory of historical attempts to access and contest local political processes (Engberg-Pedersen and Webster 2002). It is on this basis that political space emphasizes the role of political agency. The rationale is that local people are not victims but agents of their own recovery, since they are knowledgeable about their circumstances and are able to author their own development (Hickey 2003, p. 17).

Political space assumes that there is perpetual contest for power and resources within a particular deliberative sphere. Local actors who do not subscribe to orientations of the prevailing political space seek to change the institutional channels and reconstruct social and political practices (Engberg-Pedersen and Webster 2002). This leads to antagonism as dominant actors systematically manipulate discourses and practices in order to safeguard their positions thereby turning the available political space into an arena of power contestations and political exclusion.

Political space, therefore, serves as a lens for interrogating local power relations, their dynamic nature and how these relations sustain a micro-politics in which there is a symbiosis between agents and clients of power. It provides a platform for examining the signifying practices through which identities, social relations and rules are contested, subverted and possibly transformed. By emphasizing the discursive construction of meanings and identities enshrined in actors, institutions and practices inherent to a particular space , political space succeeds in exhuming patterns of inclusion and exclusion central to a micro-politics of participation that enables some actions while, at the same time, constraining others(Jordon and Weedon, cited in Fischer 2006).

Based on the foregoing conceptualization of political space, it must be noted that while decentralization provides opportunities for local people to influence local decision-making, these sites tend to threaten existing power structures at the grassroots. Consequently, they become arenas of power struggles as citizens contest decision-making. The grassroots, purported to be the direct beneficiary of services, tend to be configured within somewhat polarised relations of the strong and the weak, advantaged and marginalized, rich and poor, patrons and clients among others. This intricates the balance between a state of being an 'agent' and a 'client' of power, consequently framing a micro-politics represented by the ensemble of practices, discourses and institutions that are located within local people's struggles for power and resources in a community (Mouffe 1993). Thus the terrain of local engagement subjects the process of resource allocation to a series of contests and conflicts such that planning and implementation of decentralized planning remains a daunting task.

Decentralized Planning and Citizen Participation

Citizen participation connects citizens to local governments through institutions that connect them and the state by, recasting citizenship as a practice rather than as a set of prescribed rights given by the state, thereby broadening the agenda around which people can mobilize and make demands (Cornwall and Gaventa 2001). Citizen participation suggests a more active notion of citizenship by recognizing them as 'makers and shapers' rather than as 'users and choosers' of interventions or services designed by others (Cornwall and Gaventa 2000). It conveys an understanding of rights as created by citizens themselves through their political agency and actions that shape their lives. This implies that, rights are shaped through struggles informed by people's own understanding of what they are justly entitled to (Nyamu-Musembi 2005). It gives local people the capacity to create their own spaces and enact their own strategies for change. Thus citizen participation serves as the bedrock for expression of political agency as aptly captured by Cornwall and Coelho (2007, p.8) who argue that,

> ... for people to be able to exercise their political agency, they need first to recognize themselves as citizens rather than see themselves as beneficiaries or clients. Acquiring the means to participate equally demands processes of popular education and mobilization that can enhance the skills and confidence of marginalized and excluded groups, enabling them to enter and engage in participatory arenas ... Participatory sphere institutions are also spaces for creating citizenship, where through learning to participate citizens cut their political teeth and acquire skills that can be transferred to other spheres.

Further, citizen participation accounts for the cultural or identity-based dimension of political agency in local decision-making. By looking at "ways in which the social valorisation of political space influences basic discursive processes such as who speaks, how knowledge is constituted, what can be said, and who decides" (Fischer 2006, p. 19), citizen participation provides a deeper understanding of the cultural meaning of political identity in the practice of participatory governance.

Methodology

The paper benefits from research that was conducted in Mulanje and Mwanza districts between 2009 and 2010. For purposes of triangulation, the study employed mixed methods approach with the qualitative tradition being dominant. The sample generated 175 people of which 120 were sampled using multistage random sampling while the remaining (55) were purposively sampled. 120 questionnaires were administered to gather data on a range of topical issues of local decision-making. These were supplemented by 15 key informant interviews and 4 focus group discussions (FGDs). Document review complemented the primary data sources, and was crucial for the appreciation of the institutional, technical and legal framework of the district and sub district aspects of decentralization reforms. Quantitative data was analysed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) and Excel programs whereby bivariate analysis was employed. Qualitative data was analysed through content analysis. The study conformed to research ethics by seeking consent and permission from authorities and participants and respecting the respondents' privacy.

Contesting Project Selection in Rural Malawi

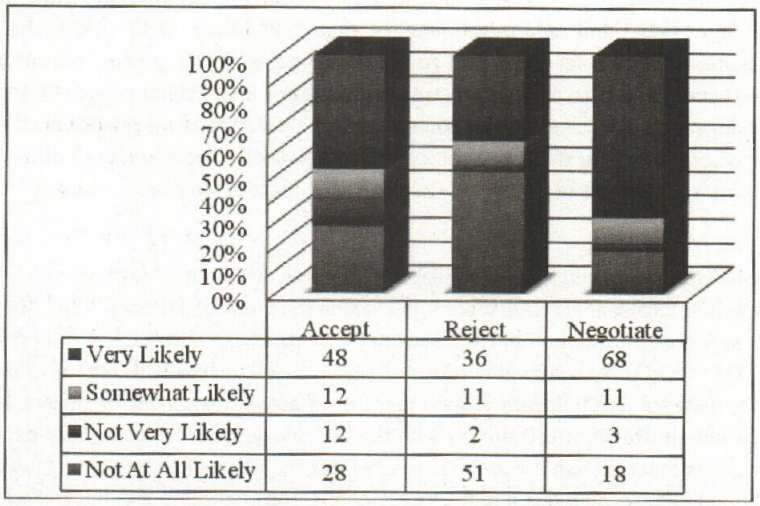
Expression of Political Agency by Communities during Project Selection

Engberg-Pedersen and Webster (2002) argue that it is logical for the powerful to make attempts to deny the political agency of local people. However, it is the reciprocities of the relations involved that render the control of power open to negotiation and contest. Hence, to assess local people's ability to contest project selection, the study asked whether local people were likely to exercise their assertiveness against project choices that were imposed on them by local elites. To achieve this, three different scenarios were presented to the respondents namely; whether they would accept projects imposed on them, (whether they would reject). This is similar to the first variable, and finally, whether they would negotiate with the elites over the decision. Out of the 120 respondents that were interviewed, it was observed that if a project was imposed,

48% were likely to accept, 36% were likely to reject, while 68% were likely to negotiate with local leaders on a project decision, as indicated in Figure 1 below. What this means is that most people prefer negotiating project choices that are imposed rather than rejecting them.

Figure 1: Likelihood to Contest Imposed Project Choices

Source: Field data



	Accept	Reject	Negotiate
Very Likely	48	36	68
Somewhat Likely	12	11	11
Not Very Likely	12	2	3
Not At All Likely	28	51	18

However, to fully substantiate whether the perceptions from the survey shaped reality, an attempt was made to explore actual experiences of contesting project selection. The rationale was to determine the extent to which reciprocities of power relations in the political space motivated expressions of local people's agency. Qualitative interviews that pursued this question indicated that it is not easy to negotiate project selection in practice. For successful negotiation, local people need to have institutional backing. Otherwise acting on their own, their agency wanes in the face of local elites.

The experience of local communities around the area of Group Village Headman Nyizelera in Mulanje district demonstrates these dynamics. It is on record (District Commissioner:) that at one point, in Nyizelera, the village headman unilaterally declared his village a planning area, had a vision for improved social services including a new school and a health centre. This was done despite the village already having a Village Action Plan (VAP) in which it had made other priorities such as treadle pumps for winter cropping, boreholes and dairy cows. When the community learnt about the plan by their chief, with assistance of National Initiative for Civic Education (NICE), they mobilized themselves and went to complain to the District Commissioner and further enquired whether their chief was operating on government advice. When summoned to explain himself, the chief admitted that he did not consult with his community, neither was he operating on government instruction, hence withdrew his intentions. Hence, through NICE volunteers providing awareness on rights-based development approach, the community was able to seek a redress at the District Commissioner's office.

The foregoing case demonstrates that the ability of communities to contest project selection depends much on how they connect with institutions that have the capacity to shape their agency. It is important to note that contesting local decision-making has less to do with individual agency than it has with collective agency. This confirms Engberg-Pedersen and Webster (2002) observation that the notion of political agency on the part of local people does not pre-suppose high levels of mobilization, is individualized in nature and frequently informal. This probably explains why despite showing much individual willingness to contest project selection, not many people manifest agency for the same. It all depends on whether the community is able to generate the critical mass for collective agency at a material point. However, without external stimulus coming through institutions collective agency remains only latent.

Contested Role of Local Leaders

The experience of decentralized development planning in Malawi reveals the pre-ponderance of elitist decision-making. This reflects in power differentials between the resource-strapped communities and their 'capital-endowed' elites whereby the latter use the weight of their material prowess to galvanise their influence in local decision-making. In most parts of Malawi, chiefs continue to influence participatory spaces for decentralized project selection. This is true for community development structures such as the Village Development Committees (VDC) and Area Development Committees (ADC). Furthermore, this struggle for political space percolates to various levels of local governance ranging from conflicts between Members of Parliament (MPs) and ward councillors, chiefs and ward councillors and finally chiefs against their communities (Chasukwa and Chinsinga 2013; Chinsinga 2006). What is implicit in these tenuous relations is the diversity of interests among the actors who enter the participatory space with diverse expectations which, in most cases, run counter to the earnest objectives of the space. Consequently, there is temptation to exploit the space for self-gain.

> A comparison of Chabweza and Njanjama villages in Mwanza district provide important lessons regarding whether local leaders have a place in shaping the political agency of their subjects. Firstly, both areas have a tradition of NGO activity (Red Cross in Chabweza, and Action Aid in Njanjama). But they display contrasting forms of citizen assertiveness with regard to project selection. For instance, in Chabweza village, there is an active movement of citizens led by the village headman. This contrasts greatly with the orthodoxy of participatory local decision-making that posits that traditional leaders dominate local decision making and as a result derail the development agenda, diverting it to their own means. The engagement between Red Cross and the community is such that local people are actively involved in local decision-making and this has created a sense of ownership and room for expressing political agency in project selection. In fact, when asked about project selection, one respondent from the village said;

If we feel that a particular proposal will be beneficial to our community we agree to it. Our consenting is not based on coercion. In fact, if leaders still subscribe to the proposal, we bring it back to the group where we scrutinize it again (Chabweza FGD).

Paradoxically, the VDC of the area was not elected but appointed and chaired by the Village Headman. The reasoning behind the appointments was that elected representatives of VDC were not committed to development. Hence there was need to appoint capable people with a good track record to assist the village headman in development. It was such people 'with special skills and expertise' that finally ascended to positions of the VDC. Special skills and expertise in this case referred to a track record of working with development forums in the area, experience of working as NGO volunteers and a demonstrable commitment to the development of the area. The GVH used these criteria to appoint representatives of the VDC. Notably though is the contrast on the unorthodox combination of appointed VDC representatives (whose legitimacy is questionable) against the superior performance that results from their efforts. This success has been attributed to a sound working relationship between the chief and his subjects.

Chabweza's experience contrasted with Njanjama village, where there was not so much citizen participation as the community complained of being side-lined in the process of development planning. The VDC of the area was also appointed, but seldom conducted meetings and rarely followed up on development requests. As such the community did not find much merit in participating in VDC activities, even at the compulsion of the chief. Paradoxically, ActionAid had (until 2009) a rights-based development programme in the area. But instead of working with VDCs, ActionAid opted for community based organizations (CBOs) with the reasoning that CBOs had visible structures on the ground (such as child care centres) for easy communication as opposed to VDCs. Consequently, a culture of dependence on the NGO was created. And with regard to the expression of political agency in choosing projects, one respondent retorted;

There is nothing we can do. ActionAid does everything...we just see development projects coming to our area (Njanjama FGD).

The implication of the foregoing is that the ability of a participatory space to serve as a crucible for shaping local people's political agency rests on what strategies the people choose and how they use their power and influence to contest decision making. From seemingly similar settings in the above case, what comes out is starkly different. The experience in Chabweza recasts the whole question regarding the role of chiefs in project selection. While we cannot provide a sweeping conclusion that chiefs have an immutable role in project selection, the case of Chabweza provides a point of reflection, if not, departure in rethinking decentralized development planning.

Role of Discourses

It was revealed in the study that most respondents expressed fear of reprisals that may follow their contesting decision making. It was observed that this fear is enveloped in the cultural norms that emphasize respect for elders and leaders in the community. The point is that people at the grassroots are unwilling to challenge the culturally defined position of chiefs on the belief that to do so is socially unacceptable and contrary to tradition. Hence, most people would rather retreat to a distance than gather courage to face their leaders. This was captured in these sentiments from respondents in Mulanje district,

We fear that since the project choice has been made by a respectable person, it would be difficult to scrutinize the process that was taken to arrive at the decision. It appears as if we are disrespecting him/her (Sochera FGD).

This confirms Engberg-Pedersen and Webster (2002), who argue that fear constitutes a real barrier concerning whether the poor engage in socio-political practices that frame their popular agency. They argue that entering into processes and relations in which power is an intrinsic feature involves risk for the less powerful. Hence the fear arising from this danger is a formidable barrier in the realization of political agency.

It was also argued that respect was being used as a weapon in the hands of local elites for commanding obedience. The reasoning was that, obedience, compliance and consensus are all but by-products of respect, and the rationale being that a person submits to another if the latter is respected. Fischer (2006) argues that respect is at the heart of determining whose knowledge counts in participatory spaces. As one key informant put it;

> People in the village believe in cultural values where men and leaders are respected. And if one is respected he/she will also be obeyed. (District Civic Education Officer.)

However, these discourses of 'fear of' and 'respect for' leaders or elders can be a double-edged sword. For instance, where the local leaders encourage people to participate in local decision-making, communities are likely to be more pro-active and assertive in their quest for development, as the case of Chabweza seems to suggest. On the other hand, if communities have been persistently choked by their leaders in local decision-making, their sense of agency and appreciation of participation will be poor. A key challenge, however, is that such a strong dependency relationship hinders local people's agency to claim legitimate and formally recognized rights because they are unlikely to violate common practices of allegiance and submission. Furthermore, it is important to take cognizance of the fact that, in any deliberative process where relations exist between people of influence and those who are predominantly viewed as subjects, the line between respect and fear is very blurred. As such it may be difficult to distinguish whether local communities act based on their respect of authority or out of fear.

Patronage Practices

It was further noted that patronage networks are deeply entrenched in the communities and these hinder the expression of political agency for contesting decision-making.The argument is that local elites are using space for their selfish gains, where local people are merely co-opted and follow the wishes of the patron. The observation is that incentives are given to individuals who pay allegiance to a particular leadership. So if the chiefs are entrusted with the responsibility of distributing resources, they will distribute them to those subjects whom they consider loyal. Confirming this observation were sentiments shared by the focus group discussions in Mulanje where, after asking whether the community could contest projects imposed by chiefs, some respondents feared that they would not benefit from government's subsidized fertilizers. The politics here is that the chief is very instrumental in determining beneficiaries of such government programs as he/she is the defacto point of contact. This makes the chief a formidable patron and decision maker on many fronts.

The implication of the foregoing is that local communities cannot emerge as agents of power where their wellbeing is attached to a system of rewards and punishments centred on loyalty to a leader. It is within this context that Lefebvre (1991) warns against the tendency to create new spaces at local government level within existing relations of patronage and power. He argues that these may only succeed in entrenching token participation since local people continue to subsist in the fringes of decision-making as clients of power.

Low Levels of Community Mobilization

The degree of mobilization determines the extent of citizenship embraced by a particular community. This means that, with a vibrant civil society, communities will be vigorous in contesting decision-making, hence providing a platform for the manifestation of people's agency. However the experience in the study revealed that the capacity of local people to organize or get organized in order to influence decision-making is seriously lacking. In most cases, they depend on the activities of NGOs, who unfortunately, provide piecemeal interventions touching on community mobilization. In the study, it was learnt that in both districts, NICE was working with communities on issues of governance and development with special emphasis on citizen rights and responsibilities. However, due to limited resources, the organization was unable to cover all areas within its jurisdiction. Substantiating this point, NICE District Civic Education Officer for Mwanza district argued that limitations in resources had left them with no choice but to implement one-off activities in selected parts of the district. Furthermore, all four FGDs reiterated that at the time the interviews were being conducted, they had not been visited by officers from NICE for six months. Such intermittence of programming communities has proved to be a serious setback in civil society efforts aimed at inculcating a culture of citizenship in local people. Consequently, efforts by communities have mostly been marked by divided loyalties which, local elites such chiefs and MPs have utilized in a divide and rule fashion in order to achieve their ends.

Conclusion

The foregoing has demonstrated that decentralized planning is essentially a political process that sustains complex interactions of actors with different interests and who employ a diversity of incentives to manipulate resource allocation in their favour. Realizing their deficiencies in the incentive structure, local people may resort to collective agency demonstrated by networking and bargaining. While traits of individual agency exist, orchestration of collective agency, which is a critical asset for contesting project selection, remains a challenge. Power regimes created and sustained around local leaders have skewed the political space for project selection; hence the possibilities for local people to exercise their political agency to contest project selection seem to be limited. Consequently, local people mostly find themselves at the margins of decision-making where prospects of moving from being clients to agents of power in contesting project selection are limited.

It can also be argued that while mobilization activities may succeed in bringing the marginalized into participatory spaces, they may not succeed with the same magnitude in equipping local people with skills to communicate effectively with others in the deliberative sphere. This requires a long tradition of state-

society synergy which, if well nurtured, can result into meaningful engagement between local people and their leaders. Therefore it can be argued that the possibility of local people becoming agents of power depends on their ability to take advantage of their opportunities to enter participatory spaces by using their knowledge and experiences to engage with those that seem to hold the levers of power in the political space. As far as decentralization reforms in rural Malawi and most African countries are concerned, this remains a fundamental challenge

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CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT, DECENTRALIZATION AND SERVICE DELIVERY IN AFRICA

This book is an outcome of the 33rd African Association of Public Administration and Management (AAPAM) Annual Roundtable Conference held in Lilongwe, Malawi in 2011 under the theme 'Strengthening Citizen Engagement through Decentralization to Enhance Public Service Delivery in Africa'. The authors are drawn from various African countries to capture an enriching diverse experience across the continent. Some of the contributions take a general view of Africa while others give an in depth analysis of countries.

The theme of this book centers on how to improve service delivery whilst tackling related and key issues of citizen engagement and decentralization. It offers a multi-faceted approach to citizen engagements in a bid to enhance public service delivery. This book explores the journey of public service delivery in the continent, from the colonial times to the contemporary era filled with heightened calls for decentralization. The views reflected here in are thus a combination of optimism and realism.

This book is an asset for individuals, governments and organizations focused on development as far as citizen engagement and service delivery are concerned.

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