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*Government Decentralization in Comparative Perspective : Theory and Practice in Developing Countries **

UDC

by

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The need to decentralize development planning and management has become a recurring theme in the plans and policies of international assistance agencies and developing nations in recent years. With the shifting emphasis in development strategies toward promoting more socially equitable economic growth and meeting the basic needs of the poorest groups in developing societies, widespread participation in decision-making is considered essential to the development process, and decentralization has been advocated as a way of eliciting that participation.

Two major arguments are made for encouraging government decentralization in Third World Countries. One is that decentralization is necessary to accelerate the pace and spread the benefits of growth, integrate diverse regions in heterogeneous countries and use scarce resources more efficiently to promote development in poverty stricken or economically lagging areas. Analysts in the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) have noted that "as developing states and donor agencies move to larger numbers of small-scale projects and area-wide, multi-sector, 'integrated' projects in order to reach the rural poor, over-centralized management is becoming more of a problem" (1). World Bank president Robert McNamara, in his report to the Board of Governors in Nairobi, charged that "in most countries, the centralized administration of scarce resources — both money and skills — has usually resulted in

most of them being allocated to a small group of the rich and powerful". He pointed out that if developing nations were truly interested in alleviating poverty and balancing development, "experience shows that there is a greater chance of success if institutions provide for popular participation, local leadership and decentralization of authority" (2).

The related argument is that if the poorest groups in developing societies are to obtain a larger share of government services, means must be found to decentralize public service delivery and involve beneficiaries in planning and decision-making at the local level. USAID analysts contend that "decentralization is necessary to increase the scope of decisions, and thus incentives, available to local participants, as well as to build institutions and to encourage, structure, focus and stabilize such participation" (3). The United Nations Development Program (UNDP), in an evaluation of 200 rural development projects funded during the 1970s, found that the poorest groups in developing societies cannot rely on the central government to meet their needs. "The efficient delivery of services to rural communities must depend on effective organization at the community level in order to have meaningful interaction with the delivery agencies in the establishment of priorities", UNDP evaluators insist. "Moreover, communities must be able to mobilize political resources to be able to provide incentives for efficient bureaucratic performance" (4).

Decentralization has also become an important part of the development strategies of

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(1) U.S. Agency for International Development, Office of Rural Development, *Managing Decentralization*, Project Paper (Washington : U.S. International Development Cooperation Agency, 1979), mimeo., p. 24

(2) World Bank, *The Assault on World Poverty* (Baltimore : Johns Hopkins, 1975), pp. 90-98.

(3) USAID, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

(4) United Nations Development Program, *Rural Development : Issues and Approaches for Technical Cooperation*, Evaluation Study No. 2 (New York : UNDP, 1979), p. 104.

many Third World governments, especially those in East Africa (5). Among the most notable attempts to decentralize development planning and administration has been Tanzania's program of administrative reform initiated in 1972. It abolished traditional local governments, absorbed local officers into the national civil service and decentralized the national ministries. The reforms gave regional authorities greater responsibility for rural development planning. Powers of district and village development committees were expanded. Central ministry technical officers were assigned to local development committees and local development directors were recruited and trained by the national government. Administrative decentralization in Tanzania was designed to strengthen the ongoing *ujamaa* program in which the widely dispersed rural population was concentrated in communal production and settlement units and given responsibility for planning and carrying out programs for self-reliant development.

Decentralization of development planning also became a cornerstone of Kenya's rural development policy in the early 1970s. Provincial and district development advisory committees were established in Kenya pursuant to policies announced in the government's national plan for 1970-1974. The goal was to "coordinate and stimulate development at the local level by involving in the planning process not only Government officials but also the people through their representatives" (6). Kenya established a system of district development committees in 1974 through which technical assistance was provided to local planning organizations.

But perhaps the most extensive program of decentralization in Africa was initiated by the revolutionary government of the Sudan in 1971. The Local Government Act, promulgated in that year, expanded the duties of Province Commissioners and created Province Executive Councils to coordinate the work of local officials and central ministry representatives in the provinces. The province Executive Councils were given authority to create district, town, rural and village councils to which they could delegate planning and administrative

responsibilities. In the mid-1970s many central ministries were abolished and nearly all planning and administrative responsibilities were devolved to the provinces. Plans are now underway to regionalize the entire country and to grant administrative autonomy to regional governments (7).

In practice, however, developing nations have faced complex problems implementing decentralization policies. Observing more than a decade of experimentation in Tanzania, Picard notes that while "decentralization has brought about a modicum of deconcentration of power to the regions and districts, the administrative structure has not been able to establish the mechanisms that will ensure increased participation at the district and subdistrict level" (8). He insists that "a major goal of President Nyerere, that decentralization provide mechanisms for popular participation in the districts, remains largely unachieved" (9). Similarly, in Kenya, control over development planning and administration remains highly centralized despite the decentralized structures and procedures adopted in the 1970s, and the Sudan has seen a decade of political struggle to establish decentralized processes of planning and decision-making, which are still far from operational or effective (10).

Recent evaluations raise profound questions about the commitment of national bureaucracies to decentralization, about the political motivations for decentralization in some countries and their implications for achieving socially equitable economic growth. Decentralization has been thwarted in some cases by conflicts arising between the desire of government leaders to control fragile and poverty-stricken economies and their programs for encouraging widespread participation in development. Moreover, decentralization requires certain preconditions and supporting policies that many governments cannot or will not provide, and changes in attitudes and behavior on the part of central government officials that have been difficult to achieve. Nor have the roles of central and local administrative

(5) For a detailed discussion see Dennis A. Rondinelli, *Administrative Decentralization and Area Development Planning in East Africa: Implications for United States Aid Policy*, Occasional Paper No. 1 (Madison, Wisconsin: Regional Planning and Area Development Project, University of Wisconsin, 1980), especially pages 21-54.

(6) Republic of Kenya, *Development Plan 1970-1974* (Nairobi: The Government Printer, 1969), p. 4.

(7) A review of early experience can be found in John Howell (ed), *Local Government and Politics in the Sudan* (Khartoum University Press, 1974).

(8) Louis Picard, "Socialism and the Field Administrator: Decentralization in Tanzania", *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 12, No. 4 (July 1980), pp. 439-457; quote at p. 450.

(9) *Ibid.*, p. 455.

(10) See Musa Mahgoub Hamad El-Nil, "The New System of Local Government", *The People's Local Government Journal*, Vol. 4, No. 3 (December 1975), pp. 1-26.

units — or those of citizens — always been clearly delineated in decentralization laws. Ironically, many of the weaknesses of highly centralized government that decentralization policies were designed to overcome, are often the strongest obstacles to making decentralization work.

For these reasons, it is necessary to re-examine the concept of decentralization and to review the practical problems of implementing decentralization policies in the light of recent experience. This paper outlines the benefits that are claimed for decentralization of development planning and administration and the various forms that decentralization can take. The problems of implementing policies in East Africa are summarized, and the essential financial and administrative resources and the political, organizational and behavioral conditions for making decentralization work are described and analyzed. Finally, the paper discusses implications for providing technical assistance to developing nations.

THE BENEFITS OF DECENTRALIZATION

A number of advantages have been claimed for transferring greater responsibilities for development planning and management from central governments to lower levels of administration or other organizations in developing countries. Among the potential benefits of decentralization are the following:

1. Decentralization is a means of overcoming the severe limitations of centrally controlled national planning that have become evident in most developing nations over the past two decades, by delegating greater authority for development planning and management to officials who are working in the field, closer to the problems. Decentralization to regional or local levels allows officials to disaggregate and tailor development plans and programs to the needs of heterogeneous regions and groups within a country (11).

2. Decentralization is a means of cutting through the enormous amounts of "red tape" and the highly structured procedures characteristic of central planning and management

(11) The deficiencies in national planning are outlined in Dennis A. Rondinelli, "National Investment Planning and Equity Policy in Developing Countries: The Challenge of Decentralized Administration", *Policy Sciences*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (August 1978), pp. 45-74; and Dennis A. Rondinelli, "Administration of Integrated Rural Development: The Politics of Agrarian Reform in Developing Countries", *World Politics*, Vol. XXI, No. 3 (April 1979), pp. 389-416.

in developing nations that result in part from the overconcentration of power, authority and resources at the center of government in the national capital (12).

3. By decentralizing functions and reassigning central government officials to local levels, their knowledge of and sensitivity to local problems and needs will be increased. Closer contact between government officials and the local population would allow both to obtain better information with which to formulate more realistic and effective plans for government projects and programs.

4. Decentralization would also allow greater political and administrative "penetration" of national government policies into areas remote from the national capital, where central government plans are often unknown or ignored by the rural people or are undermined by local elites, and where support for national development plans is often weak (13).

5. Decentralization would allow greater representation for various political, religious, ethnic and tribal groups in development decision-making that could lead to greater equity in the allocation of government resources and investments (14).

6. Decentralization would lead to the development of greater administrative capability among local governments and private institutions in the regions and provinces, and thus expand their capacities to take over functions that are not usually performed well by central ministries, such as the maintenance of roads and infrastructure investments in areas remote from the national capital. It would also give local officials the opportunity to develop their managerial and technical skills.

7. The efficiency of the central government could be increased through decentralization by relieving top management officials of routine tasks that could be more effectively performed

(12) Some of these problems in East Africa are discussed in Christopher Trapman, *Changes in Administrative Structure: A Case Study of Kenyan Agricultural Development*, London: Overseas Development Institute, 1974.

(13) The concept of political penetration is described in most detail in L. Cliffe, J.S. Coleman and M.R. Doornbos (eds.), *Government and Rural Development in East Africa* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1977).

(14) This argument has been especially strong in the Sudan, where decentralization was used to satisfy dissident political and religious groups' demands for administrative autonomy. See Omar el-Haq Musa, "Reconciliation, Rehabilitation and Development Efforts in Southern Sudan", *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 27 (Winter 1973), pp. 1-6.

by field staff or local officials. The time released from routine administration would free political and administrative leaders to plan more carefully and supervise more effectively the implementation of development policies (15).

8. Decentralization can also provide a structure through which activities of various central government ministries and agencies involved in development could be coordinated more effectively with each other and with those of local leaders and nongovernmental organizations within various regions. Regions, provinces or districts provide a convenient geographical base for coordinating the myriad specialized projects that many governments in developing countries are undertaking in rural areas (16).

9. A decentralized governmental structure is needed to institutionalize participation of citizens in development planning and management. A decentralized government structure can facilitate the exchange of information about local needs and channel political demands from the local community to national ministries (17).

10. By creating alternative means of decision-making, decentralization can offset the influence or control over development activities by entrenched local elites who are often unsympathetic to national development policies and insensitive to the needs of the poorer groups in rural communities.

11. Decentralization can lead to more flexible, innovative and creative administration. Regional, provincial or district administrative units may have potentially greater opportunities to test innovations and to experiment with new policies and programs in selected areas without having to justify them for the whole country. If the experiments fail, their impacts are limited to small jurisdictions; if they succeed, preconditions for their success can be

tested or created for replication in other areas of the country (18).

12. The creation of a regional, provincial or local structure of government through decentralization of development planning and management functions allows local leaders to locate services and facilitate more effectively within communities, to integrate isolated or lagging areas into regional economies and to monitor and evaluate the implementation of development projects more effectively than can be done by central planning agencies.

13. Decentralization can increase political stability and national unity by giving groups in different sections of the country the ability to participate more directly in development decision-making, thereby increasing their "stake" in maintaining the political system.

14. As societies, economies and governments become more complex, central control and decision-making becomes more difficult, costly and inefficient. By reducing diseconomies of scale inherent in the overconcentration of decision-making in the national capital, decentralization can increase the number of public goods and services — and the efficiency with which they are delivered — at lower cost (19).

The assertions and hypotheses underlying these alleged advantages have not all been empirically verified; and indeed, many of the benefits of decentralization are cited by advocates as potential rather than actual results of decentralization programs. In reality, as noted earlier, the results of decentralization policies in many developing nations have been disappointing.

THE CONCEPT OF DECENTRALIZATION

Some of the problems that have arisen in developing nations with implementing decentralization have been conceptual. Decentralization is often discussed and proposed by government officials and staffs of international aid agencies without a concise conception of its meaning and without a real understanding of the alternative forms that decentralization can take.

(18) See Uma Lele, *The Design of Rural Development: Lessons from Africa*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1975), chapters VIII and IX for a discussion of alternative forms of organization for rural development and their implications for innovation and flexibility.

(19) USAID, *op. cit.*, *passim*.

(15) See USAID, *op. cit.*, *passim*.

(16) The advantages of a regional base for planning and administration are outlined in Albert Waterston, "An Operational Approach to Development Planning", *International Journal of Health Services*, Vol. 1, No. 3 (1971), pp. 233-252, and John Friedmann, *Urbanization, Planning and National Development* (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1973), chapters 12-16.

(17) The roles of participation in development are reviewed by John M. Cohen and Norman T. Uphoff, "Participation's Place in Rural Development: Seeking Clarity through Specificity", *World Development*, Vol. 8, (1980), pp. 213-235.

The Meaning of Decentralization

Decentralization is defined here as the transfer or delegation of legal and political authority to plan, make decisions and manage public functions from the central government and its agencies to field organizations of those agencies, subordinate units of government, semi-autonomous public corporations, areawide or regional development authorities; functional authorities, autonomous local governments, or nongovernmental organizations. The degree of political and legal power that is transferred or delegated with the authority plan, decide or manage — that is, the amount of power that the central government “gives up” to subordinate or semi-autonomous institutions — depends on the form of decentralization used and the amount of support that the central government provides to other organizational units in carrying out decentralized functions.

Forms of Decentralization

Decentralization can take a number of forms. First, distinctions can be made between *functional* and *areal* decentralization. The former focuses on the transfer of authority to perform specific tasks or activities to specialized organizations that operate nationally, or at least across local jurisdictions. Creation of field offices within national ministries dealing with health care or highway construction, for instance, or of public enterprises to build and maintain utilities are forms of functional decentralization. Areal decentralization, on the other hand, is always primarily aimed at transferring responsibility for public functions to organizations within well-defined sub-national spatial or political boundaries — a province, district, municipality, river basin or geographical region. Usually the transfer or delegation of authority is to an institution that may legally perform those functions only within a specified geographical or political boundary.

A second distinction can be made among three degrees of decentralization: deconcentration, delegation and devolution.

1. *Deconcentration.* The least extensive form of decentralization is deconcentration. At one extreme this merely involves the *shifting of workload* from central government ministry headquarters to staff located in offices outside of the national capital, and the staff may not be given the authority to decide how those functions are to be performed. Fesler argues that the shifting of workload may not really be decentralization at all: “to move workload out of the capital may be efficient

and convenient for the public and may even promote a feeling that government is close to the people”, he notes. “But it may not involve any decentralization of power, that is, it may not provide the opportunity to exercise substantial local discretion in decision-making”. (20). Although the observation is valid and probably true for most Western nations, in highly centralized governments in developing countries even the shifting of workload from central offices to staff outside the capital can have an important impact on development, and may be a crucial first step that highly centralized governments must take toward more extensive deconcentration later.

A greater degree of deconcentration can be achieved through *field administration*. As opposed to merely shifting workloads from central government offices in the capital city to those in other locations, creation of a system of field administration implies the transfer of decision-making discretion to field staff, allowing them some latitude to plan, make routine decisions and adjust the implementation of central directives to local conditions, within guidelines set by the central ministries. Under a system of field administration, even though government officers are working within local jurisdictions that may have semi-autonomous or delegated powers, field staff are employees of a central ministry and remain under its direction and control.

A useful distinction can also be made between field administration and *local administration*. Local administration is a form of deconcentration in which all subordinate levels of government within a country are agents of the central authority, usually the executive branch. Regions, provinces, districts, municipalities and other units of government are headed by leaders who are either appointed by or are responsible directly to a central government agency, usually a Ministry of the Interior or Local Government. Local functions are performed under the technical supervision and control of central ministries, and the heads of the local administrations serve at the pleasure of the nation's chief executive. Local administrations may either be *integrated*, wherein ministry officials and local officers work under the supervision of the local executive, or *unintegrated*, wherein field staff of central ministries and administrative staff of

(20) James W. Fesler, “Centralization and Decentralization”, in David L. Sills (ed.), *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, (New York: Macmillan, 1968), p. 373.

local jurisdictions work independently of each other and are supervised by different sets of executives (21).

2. *Delegation.* Another form of decentralization is the delegation of decision-making and management authority for specific functions to organizations that are only under the indirect control of central government ministries. Often the organizations to which public functions are delegated have semi-independent authority to perform their responsibilities, and may not even be located within the regular government structure. Delegation of functions from central ministries to such organizations as public corporations, regional planning and area development authorities, multi-purpose and single-purpose functional authorities, and project implementation units represents a more extensive form of decentralization than administrative deconcentration. Delegation implies the transfer or creation of broad authority to plan and implement decisions concerning specific activities — or a variety of activities within specific spatial boundaries — to an organization that is technically and administratively capable of carrying them out.

The response of many governments and most international lending institutions to the severe limitations on public administration in much of the Third World has been to delegate more functions to public corporations and special authorities, which have been used extensively in East Africa to execute development schemes. During the 1950s and 1960s the creation of corporations and parastatal organizations was an integral part of Western public administration theory's prescription for administrative reform and modernization, and was seen by many development-motivated political leaders as a way to "short-circuit the normal government machinery and endow it with developmental drive, coherence and authority to plan and pursue economic development by such means as seen fit to it" (22).

3. *Devolution.* Finally, the most extreme form of decentralization is the strengthening or creation of independent levels and units of government through devolution. Some administrative theorists argue that devolution is a

concept and arrangement quite separate from decentralization, in that it implies the divestment of functions by the central government and the creation of new units of governance outside the control of central authority. Sherwood, for example, has noted that devolution means "the transfer of power to geographic units of local government that lie outside the formal command structure of the central government. It is not decentralization. Thus, devolution represents the concept of separateness, of diversity of structures within the political system as a whole". He and others argue that decentralization and devolution are two different phenomena and would use "decentralization to describe an *intra*-organizational pattern of power relationships and devolution to describe an *inter*-organizational pattern of power relationships" (23).

In this framework, devolution has certain characteristics. First, it requires that local government be given autonomy and independence and be clearly perceived of a separate level over which central authorities exercise little or no *direct* control. Second, the local units must have clear and legally recognized geographical boundaries over which they exercise authority and within which they perform public functions. Third, local governments must be given corporate status and the power to raise sufficient resources to perform specific functions. Fourth, devolution implies the need to "develop local governments as institutions" in the sense that they are perceived of by local citizens as organizations providing services that satisfy their needs and as governmental units over which they have some influence. Finally, devolution is an arrangement in which there are reciprocal, mutually benefitting and coordinate relationships between central and local governments; that is, the local government has the ability to interact reciprocally with other units in the system of government of which it is a part (24).

(23) Frank P. Sherwood, "Devolution as a Problem of Organization Strategy", in R.T. Daland (ed.), *Comparative Urban Research* (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1969), pp. 60-87.

(24) Uphoff and Esman argue that "local institutions which are separated and isolated from other levels are likely to be impotent developmentally. Local autonomy by itself provides little leverage for development. What makes the most difference are systems or networks of organization that make local development more than an enclave phenomenon. Thus, we found *linkage* to be a more significant variable than autonomy when it comes to promoting rural development". See Norman Uphoff and Milton J. Esman, *Local Organization for Rural Development in Asia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Center for International Studies, 1974), p. xii.

(21) Examples are discussed in Paul Collins, "Decentralization and Local Administration for Development in Tanzania", *Africa Today*, Vol. 21, (Summer 1974), pp. 15-25.

(22) Martin J. Boodhoo, "The Organization and Management of Development Agencies: A Comparative Perspective", *International Review of Administrative Sciences*, Vol. 42 (1976), pp. 221-236; quote at p. 222.

Although the specifications for devolution may be valid from a Western theoretical or legal perspective, in most developing nations actual requirements are less stringent. Devolution is usually seen as a form of decentralization in which local government units are given responsibility for some functions but in which the central government often retains some supervisory powers and may play a large financial role. Even where most of the Western theoretical conditions for devolution are met, central governments in developing nations often attempt to make local governments act consistently with national development policies and plans in the performance of their functions, and certain formal or informal controls are often maintained to accomplish that goal. Few developing nations have a system of formal devolution meeting all of the conditions noted earlier, but some national constitutions devolve specific powers and responsibilities to local governments or give them residual powers that are not claimed by the central government. And for development purposes, the strength of local government units — in terms of the salience of functions they perform, the skill and professionalism of local officials, their base of financial resources and the effectiveness with which they carry out their responsibilities — may be much more significant than their legal status as independent units (25).

Thus, various forms of decentralization must be analyzed on a continuum. Each form of decentralization has different implications for institutional arrangements, the degree of transfer of authority and power, local citizen participation, preconditions for successful implementation, and advantages or benefits for the political system. In reality, although there are differences among the various forms of decentralization, they are not mutually exclusive. All government structures consist of some combination of these forms of decentralized administration, with emphasis on the amount of authority transferred to decentralized units differing from country to country. The distinctions, however, are often not clearly reflected in the decentralization proposals of developing nations, and the ambiguity can lead to serious political and administrative problems during implementation.

DECENTRALIZATION IN PRACTICE — PROBLEMS IN EAST AFRICA

Nearly a decade of experience with decentralization in East Africa suggests that countries in that region have had, at best, mixed

results in implementing their policies. In Tanzania, Kenya and the Sudan, decentralization was pursued in somewhat different ways and with different purposes, but many of the problems and difficulties encountered by the three governments have been quite similar, as have been the overall results. A review of the problems not only reveals the constraints under which programs must be carried out, but suggests conditions that must be established to make decentralization effective.

First, political commitment to decentralization has been relatively shallow in all three countries, despite the strong advocacy of government reform by the dominant political leader in two of them. In Tanzania, President Julius K. Nyerere had the general support of important political leaders but initially received little cooperation from local leaders and the national bureaucracy. Central ministry technicians in Tanzania only supported decentralization after they came under the control of TANU, the country's single political party. In the Sudan, President Gaafar Mohamed Nimeiry acted with the backing of the Sudan Socialist Union, that country's only political party, and some regional leaders, but the central bureaucracy often opposed or undermined decentralization policies. Political support for decentralization and local participation in development planning and management in Kenya and Tanzania has usually been limited to arrangements for obtaining greater compliance by rural people to central government policies. In all three countries, strong political leadership was required for more than a decade to make the concept of decentralization — even in the limited forms of deconcentration now recognized in East Africa — politically palatable. The difficulties of building political commitment to decentralization have delayed and often obstructed progress in all three countries (26).

A strong obstacle to implementing decentralized planning and administration proposals in East African countries has been the continuing resistance of central government bureaucrats — in both the national ministries and local administrative units — to "decision-making from below". In Kenya and Tan-

(25) *Idem.*

(26) See Richard N. Blue and James H. Weaver, "A Critical Assessment of the Tanzanian Model of Development", *Agricultural Development Council Reprints*, No. 30 (July 1977), pp 19; Joel D. Barkan and John J. Okumu (eds.), *Politics and Public Policy in Kenya and Tanzania*, (New York: Praeger, 1979); and Abdel Moneim al Rayah and Alfred Logune Taban, "Decentralization: Power to the Provinces", *Sudanow* (March 1979), pp. 9-14.

zania the central bureaucracies still maintain control over regional, provincial and district development planning. In the Sudan, President Nimiery had to reorganize or abolish many central ministries to overcome bureaucratic opposition to decentralization decrees. The resistance is attributable not only to the unwillingness of central ministries to transfer those functions that provided their base of financial resources and political influence, but also to the deep distrust that technicians and professionals within central ministries have of local administrators and tribal, religious and community leaders.

Opposition also came from traditional elites and some local leaders. A primary objective of decentralization in East Africa has been to break up traditional bases of political influence by establishing new administrative structures, by creating planning and management procedures that would weaken the power of local elites by bringing younger leaders into community decision-making, or by strengthening the role of centrally appointed officials within rural communities. But in Tanzania, local elites often joined with small landowners and some central ministry technicians in obstructing or neutralizing programs aimed at expanding participation in development planning or at reallocating government resources. In Kenya, local leaders and large landowners often form alliances with ministry officials and members of parliament to protect current patterns of decision-making or to resist changes proposed by district development committees that are adverse to their interests (27).

Decentralization policies are also weakened by the "centrist attitudes" of many government officials — both in the national capital and within local communities — that lead them to scorn participation of rural people in development activities. In the Sudan, province officials have often worked around members of district and village councils. "Distrust of the ability and probity of local councillors is ingrained and instructions on grass roots democracy are cynically administered", Howell observed (28). In Tanzania, government officials in the regions and provinces take primary responsibility for development planning and TANU's leaders maintain a veto power over proposals submitted by

(27) See Joel D. Barkan, "Comparing Politics and Public Policy in Kenya and Tanzania", in Barkan and Okumu, *op. cit.*, pp. 3-40.

(28) John Howell, "Administration of Rural Development Planning: A Sudanese Case", *Agricultural Administration*, Vol. 4 (1977), pp. 99-120; quote at p. 109.

regional and district development committees (29). Evaluations of "bottom-up" planning for rural development in Kenya conclude that mutual distrust is reinforced by poor communications and lack of knowledge about rural people's objectives and motivations within central planning and operating agencies in Nairobi. Thus, despite the formal structure of decentralized planning, "poor communications between national planners and local communities is still a problem", Mbithi and Barnes contend. "In fact, their points of view are quite different in many respects, such as perceptions of goals and constraints, short- and long-term priorities, proper control of development resources and planning techniques" (30).

The gaps between political rhetoric and the behavior of government officials toward decentralized planning and management are reflected in ambiguities in decentralization policies. In all three countries the early decentralization laws were quite vague about the extent and forms of decentralization to be established, the procedures for participation and the roles of and relationships among officials at various levels of administration. Public pronouncements in Tanzania and the Sudan implied that local governments would be created; the language of the decentralization laws — and even their titles — used the term "local government", whereas in reality, leaders in both countries initially intended only to establish local units of administration that would act as agents of the central government. Moreover, in all three countries, the multiple levels of review and approval through which local plans must pass, create bureaucratic delays that discourage enthusiastic participation in development planning by rural people and reinforce the power of the bureaucracy to modify or veto proposals.

But even if central ministries in Tanzania and the Sudan were entirely committed to more extensive decentralization, they have little capacity to support and facilitate local planning and administration. Successful decentralization, at least in the early stages, depends on the strength and competence of the central

(29) See P.R. Lawrence, P.L. Raikes, R.G. Saylor and D. Warner, "Regional Planning in Tanzania: Some Institutional Problems", *Eastern Africa Journal of Rural Development*, Vol. V, Nos. 1-2 (1974), pp. 10-45; and Diana Conyers, "Organization for Development: The Tanzanian Experience", *Journal of Administration Overseas*, Vol. 13, No. 3 (July 1974), pp. 438-448.

(30) Philip Mbithi and Carolyn Barnes, *A Conceptual Analysis of Approaches to Rural Development*, Discussion Paper No. 204 (Institute of Development Studies, University of Nairobi, 1975), mimeo., p. 21.

administration to support field agencies and to help create greater administrative capacity at lower levels of government. Yet, in all three East African countries administrative capacity within central ministries and agencies remains weak. Most central ministries are overstaffed, but technical and managerial skills below the top level of administration are poor (31). Bureaucracies in all three countries are generally inefficient or unable to provide the technical, financial, personnel or other resources needed by lower levels to carry out development activities (32). The low level of administrative capacity at the center weakens the entire administrative structure, and the inability of central ministries to carry out development activities effectively rebounds throughout a decentralized system.

Local administrative units also suffer from serious shortages of trained manpower and financial resources to carry out decentralized responsibilities. Shortages of trained personnel are severe below the central government level in all three countries; skilled technical and managerial personnel are quickly claimed by national ministries, public corporations or international firms in the Sudan leaving local administrative units chronically short of skilled managers. Posts in local administrative units in both Kenya and Tanzania are often seen as "hardship duty" by educated officials or as temporary jobs to be held until a promotion — to the national capital — is received (33). The unwillingness of many trained officials to accept local government posts weakens the capacity of local units to participate effectively in development planning and administration.

Moreover, decentralization policies in East African countries have been undermined by the insistence of central authorities on transferring planning and administrative functions to lower levels without providing sufficient financial resources or adequate legal powers to collect and allocate revenues within local jurisdictions. The value of participation in

(31) A detailed discussion of problems of administrative capacity can be found in Jon R. Moris, "The Transferability of Western Management Concepts and Programs: An East African Perspective", in L.D. Stifel, J.S. Coleman, and J.E. Black (eds.), *Education and Training for Public Sector Management in Developing Countries* (New York: Rockefeller Foundation, 1976), pp. 73-83.

(32) See J.R. Nellis, "Three Aspects of the Kenyan Administrative System", *Cultures et Développement*, Vol. 5 (1973), pp. 541-570; and O. Aguda, "The Sudan Civil Service 1964-1971", *Quarterly Journal of Administration*, Vol. 6 (April 1972), pp. 333-347.

(33) Trapman, *op. cit.*; and Moris, *op. cit.*

development planning becomes questionable when local communities have little or no control over financial resources with which to carry out their plans. A committee of the People's Assembly — the national legislature — in the Sudan, in its 1976 evaluation of the results of the Local Government Act of 1971, concluded that "the insufficiency of funds was the basic cause... of weakness... in the institutions of the People's local government and of turning them into empty skeletons" (34). In much of the Sudan — and in rural Tanzania and Kenya as well — the revenue base is simply too small to provide adequate taxes to carry out decentralized functions. Costs of tax collection are high and administration is inefficient, resulting in low yields for localities (35).

All of these problems are aggravated by the lack of physical infrastructure, transport and communications facilities, and the poorly articulated and unintegrated spatial systems in East African nations. Inadequate and poorly constructed roads and the paucity of transportation services and communications in rural regions, make coordination among decentralized administrative units nearly impossible and effective interaction among them and with central government ministries extremely difficult. Moreover, it creates enormous difficulties for local administrators in mobilizing resources, supervising subordinate personnel, delivering services and disseminating information. Vast rural areas in Tanzania, Kenya and the Sudan are inaccessible even by feeder roads, and participation in development planning and administration by rural villagers and nomadic groups under these conditions is extremely difficult.

The lack of adequate physical and communications infrastructure in rural areas is symptomatic of a much larger and more serious problem that inhibits decentralized planning and management in many developing nations. They have spatial systems that are not conducive to equitable development, decentralized administration or widespread participation in development planning. The settlement system is not well articulated or integrated; services and facilities are concentrated in one or a few large metropolitan centers and the vast

(34) Democratic Republic of The Sudan, The People's Assembly, *Final Report of the Select Committee for Study and Revision of the People's Local Government*, translation (Khartoum: People's Assembly, 1976), mimeo., p. 38.

(35) See the World Bank's analysis of local revenue raising capacity, *Sudan: Agricultural Sector Survey*, Vol. III (Washington: World Bank, 1979), Annex 8

majority of the population is widely dispersed in rural villages that are too small to support productive or service functions or are scattered on physically isolated individual farmsteads. Market towns and middle-size cities that might effectively link larger towns with rural areas are few in number and unevenly distributed geographically. Settlements of all sizes are weakly linked to each other. Physical, social, economic and administrative interaction among them is, therefore, highly constrained (36).

Finally, the disappointing results of decentralization in East Africa can be explained by the absence of or weaknesses in supporting institutions. Rural areas lack both public and private organizations needed to complement and bolster the managerial capacity of local governments. Administrative linkages between central and local administrations, therefore, remain weak. Where linkages do exist they tend to be predominantly "top-down" control procedures rather than channels of mutually beneficial, cooperative and reciprocal interaction.

CONDITIONS FOR EFFECTIVE DECENTRALIZATION

The difficulties that East African governments have had in implementing decentralization policies should not be surprising given their colonial histories, strong traditions of central control, high levels of poverty, and the severity of their current economic and social problems. Some development theorists argue that a minimum level of economic development must already have been achieved before local governments can assume broad development responsibilities (37). Others contend that decentralization at least partially creates the conditions of its own success (38). The ex-

perience in East Africa suggests that decentralization involves far more than simply declaring a policy of "bottom-up" decision-making, reorganizing the administrative structure and establishing local or district planning procedures. The ability of governments to implement decentralization programs depends on the existence of, or the ability to create, a variety of political, administrative, organizational and behavioral conditions, and to provide sufficient resources at the local level to carry out decentralized functions:

1. Favorable *political and administrative* conditions include:

a. Strong political commitment and support from national leaders to the transfer of planning, decision-making and managerial authority to field agencies and lower levels of administration;

b. Acceptance by political leaders of participation in planning and management by organizations that are outside of the direct control of the central government or the dominant political party;

c. Support of and commitment to decentralization within line agencies of the central bureaucracy and the willingness of central government officials to transfer functions previously performed by them to local units of administration;

d. Strong administrative and technical capacity within central government agencies and ministries to carry out national development functions and to support — with adequate planning, programming, logistical, personnel and budget resources — their field agencies and lower levels of government in performing decentralized functions;

e. Effective channels of political participation and representation for rural residents that reinforce and support decentralized planning and administration and that allow rural people, especially the poorest, to express their needs and demands and to press claims for national and local development resources.

2. *Organizational* factors conducive to decentralization include:

a. Appropriate allocation of planning and administrative functions among levels of government with each set of functions suited to the decision-making capabilities, existing or potential resources and performance capabilities of each level of organization;

b. Concise and definitive decentralization laws, regulations and directives that clearly outline the relationships among different levels

(36) The problems of spatial structure in Third World countries are discussed in Dennis A. Rondinelli and Kenneth Ruddle, *Urbanization and Rural Development: A Spatial Policy for Equitable Growth* (New York: Praeger, 1978).

(37) Sherwood, *op. cit.*, p. 75.

(38) Montgomery argues from his study of decentralization of land reform administration, for instance, that where it was successful "devolution seems to work because of a combination of certain factors that come with public participation in program implementation: (a) easier access to knowledge; (b) more powerful motivation; (c) better communication; and (d) increased community solidarity". The question that remains is whether these factors must already be present to some degree before devolvement will work or if devolvement itself strengthens and builds these characteristics. See John D. Montgomery, "Allocation of Authority in Land Reform Programs: A Comparative Study of Administrative Processes and Outputs", *Administrative Science Quarterly*, Vol. 17, (1972), pp. 62-75.

of government and administration, the allocation of functions among organizational units, the roles and duties of officials at each level and their limitations and constraints;

c. Flexible arrangements, based on performance criteria, for reallocating functions as the resources and capabilities of local governments change over time;

d. Clearly defined and relatively uncomplicated planning and management procedures for eliciting participation of local leaders and citizens and for obtaining the cooperation or consent of beneficiaries in the formulation, appraisal, organization, implementation and evaluation of development projects and programs;

e. Communications linkages among local units of administration or government and between them and higher levels that facilitate reciprocal interaction, exchange of information, cooperative activity and conflict resolution;

f. Diverse supporting institutions that complement local government and planning organizations in carrying out decentralized development functions.

3. Behavioral and psychological conditions supporting decentralization include:

a. Changes in the attitudes and behavior of central and lower level government officials away from those that are centrist, control-oriented and paternalistic, toward those that support and facilitate decentralized planning and administration, and a willingness on their part to share authority with rural people and accept their participation in planning and implementing development activities;

b. Effective means of overcoming the resistance, or getting the cooperation, of local elites and traditional leaders in decentralized processes of development planning and administration;

c. Creation of a minimum level of trust and respect between citizens and government officials, and a mutual recognition that each is capable of performing certain functions and participating effectively in various aspects of development planning and management;

d. Maintenance of strong leadership within local units of government or administration that will allow reciprocal exchange between local and central governments.

4. Resource conditions required for decentralization include:

a. Transfer of sufficient authority for local units of administration or government to raise

or obtain adequate financial resources to acquire the equipment, supplies, personnel and facilities needed to carry out decentralized responsibilities;

b. Adequate physical infrastructure, and transportation and communications linkages, among local administrative units to facilitate the mobilization of resources and delivery of public services; and

c. Sufficiently articulated and integrated settlement systems within regions to promote economic, social, political and administrative interaction among rural settlements and between them and larger towns and cities.

Although it is possible to identify those conditions that seem to be essential for successful decentralization in light of experience in East Africa and other developing regions, the levels of adequacy or measures of effectiveness expressed or implied in these conditions cannot be universally prescribed, nor can the precise combination of conditions needed to make decentralization feasible. These must be assessed in each country at the time that decentralization policies are formulated. A strong argument can be made, however, that the fewer the conditions that exist, or the greater the obstacles to creating them, the greater the difficulty planners and policy-makers can expect in implementing decentralization programs.

IMPLICATIONS FOR INTERNATIONAL ASSISTANCE

If the programs and projects that international assistance agencies are now sponsoring in developing nations — multi-purpose, complex, integrated ventures aimed at reaching vast numbers of the poor — require decentralized planning and implementation and widespread participation in decision-making, what can international organizations do to promote decentralization in Third World countries?

Realistically, there is probably little that aid-giving agencies can do directly to influence governments that do not want to decentralize. Ultimately, the structure of government within a country is an internal political matter. International agencies can only make known the potential benefits of decentralized planning and administration for achieving more equitable development, and the potential advantages that might accrue to developing countries by extending participation in development decision-making and implementation to lower levels of government.

Nor should international agencies be seen — and sell — decentralization as a panacea for all of the weaknesses in planning and management in developing countries or as an inevitable stimulant of rural development. The ability of governments to decentralize is closely tied to progress in economic and social development. Various forms of decentralization are more or less appropriate in different countries. Each form has its own preconditions, advantages and drawbacks.

At the same time, there is a great deal that aid agencies can do to assist those governments that are pursuing a policy of decentralization. These include: 1) helping to strengthen national political commitment and central government administrative support for decentralization; 2) providing technical and financial assistance in the design and organization of effective decentralization programs and procedures; 3) assisting developing nations to build managerial and financial capacity within local units of government or administration, and 4) providing technical and financial aid in creating the physical, spatial and organizational infrastructure needed for "bottom-up" development planning.

Strengthening national political commitment and administrative support for decentralization

Projects aimed at strengthening support for decentralization policies should be designed to expand, simultaneously, the administrative and technical capacity of both central ministries and local governments. This may assuage the fears of central ministry officials and their political allies that resources and powers are being reallocated to local organizations at their expense. Some of the opposition by central ministry staff might be reduced if projects were designed in a way to make it clear that decentralization does not necessarily threaten their existence, but that in reallocating functions among levels of administration new supportive roles are created for central ministries. Building the financial and managerial base of local organizations while also providing resources to central ministries for performing supportive functions, might also create better linkages among levels of administration. As Leonard correctly points out in his study of agricultural administration in Kenya, "in a decentralized administrative structure the center needs to be every bit as strong as in a centralized one, but the reorientation required is one of technical service rather than of hierarchical control". He notes that "Tanzania and (to a lesser extent) Kenya have underestimated

the importance of the local support function of a national headquarters" (39).

Aid organizations must work with central government agencies in identifying and using administrative mechanisms that rely less on central control and more on incentives and exchange to achieve development objectives. A wide range of managerial techniques exist to guide and facilitate local decision-making that do not depend primarily on hierarchical control, and that give local groups more latitude in formulating and implementing development projects. Often, central agencies can initiate desired development activities simply by creating sets of preconditions — through prices, subsidies and rewards — that benefit local officials and rural people rather than punishing them for failure to conform to national development plans and central directives. Information dissemination, educational, and persuasion techniques are often more effective than threats, pressures and punishments in eliciting cooperation and generating innovative approaches to problem-solving. But central government and local officials in East Africa have a long tradition, stemming from colonial experience, with the latter methods of governance and little experience or knowledge of the former (40).

Providing financial and technical assistance in the design and organization of decentralization programs and procedures

Evaluations of experience with decentralization indicate that policies and procedures must be clearly defined if they are to be implemented successfully. Technical assistance can be provided for designing decentralization policies and procedures that allocate functions appropriately among levels of administration, that allow functions to be reallocated as capabilities and resources of units below the central government level change over time, and that clearly delineate the relationships among different units of organization. Moreover, much more attention needs to be given to the problem of designing planning and management procedures that are suited to the capabilities of rural people and to the existing administrative skills of local officials. In none of the East African countries examined in this study was intensive analysis done of the types of planning

(39) David Leonard, *Reaching the Peasant Farmer: Organization Theory and Practice in Kenya* (University of Chicago Press, 1977), p. 213.

(40) Alternative forms of interaction are discussed in Charles E. Lindblom, *The Intelligence of Democracy* (New York: The Free Press, 1965) and *Politics and Markets*, (New York: Basic Books, 1977).

and administrative functions, that the central government should delegate to different levels of administration or of the capabilities of local administrative units to assume those functions that were decentralized. Nor was much flexibility provided in decentralization laws for reallocating functions as capabilities of local organizations changed over time. In the Sudan, for example, functions were devolved from central ministries to provincial councils and commissioners *en masse*. Their capacity to absorb and perform those functions were never assessed. It was simply assumed that capacity for development planning and management existed, or that it would expand as functions were decentralized.

Building administrative and financial capacity among local units of administration and government to assume decentralized planning and management activities

International aid agencies can provide assistance for decentralized development most effectively by helping to build the capacity of local administrative units and to strengthen supporting institutions. The most urgent needs of East African governments, for instance, are for personnel training in managerial and technical skills and for generating local financial resources. The need for personnel training is especially urgent at the province level in the Sudan and among local development communities in all three countries. Technical and administrative officers and council members need to be trained in the rudiments of area analysis so they can better identify and define investment needs, and development committee members in Tanzania and Kenya need training in the broader aspects of project planning and management. Moreover, immediate attention must be given to building at least a minimal statistical base for planning and project identification within rural provinces and districts in all three countries (41).

The ways in which aid is provided can also have an important impact on the success of decentralization. Serious consideration should be given within international organizations to providing grants instead of making loans for projects that are aimed primarily at building local administrative capacity or at providing basic needs for rural populations — such as health, education and social services — in countries attempting to decentralize. This would both relieve national governments of added debt servicing burdens and make funds available for non-revenue producing

(41) See Moris, *op. cit.*, for a more detailed discussion.

projects within local communities. General budget support is also needed by countries such as the Sudan and Tanzania for programs that expand local organization's administrative capacity. General budget support would give ministries greater flexibility to assist local administrative units than is possible through specific project funding. Moreover, in the early phases of decentralization, when local units of administration may be in the weakest financial positions, it may be necessary for international agencies to finance some of the local or recurrent costs of projects that build up the service delivery, planning, and administrative capabilities of local organizations.

Providing technical and financial assistance for creating physical infrastructure and for developing spatial systems more conducive to local interaction

Decentralized planning and administration requires the expansion of capacity for local administrative units to interact and communicate with each other. The lack of adequate physical infrastructure, transportation and communications linkages within rural regions of the three East African countries, for instance, severely inhibits interaction among local administrative units and between them and higher levels of administration. It also obstructs the mobilization of local resources and the delivery of services. These problems are exacerbated by poorly articulated and unintegrated spatial systems within rural regions. Weak linkages among rural settlements and between them and larger urban centers contribute to the low level of interaction within rural areas. Aid agencies must give more attention to providing the essential physical infrastructure in rural areas that will make interaction possible, and to locating services and facilities in such a way that they contribute to integrating spatial systems in rural regions (42).

Finally, much remains to be learned about the role of decentralization in stimulating economic growth with social equity and about the conditions required to make decentralization effective. International organizations must monitor the progress of nations adopting decentralized planning and administrative procedures and evaluate their effectiveness in expanding the participation of the poorest groups in the development process.

(42) One method of spatial analysis and planning has been developed for USAID and UN Agencies for application in countries with these spatial characteristics. See Dennis A. Rondinelli, *Spatial Analysis for Regional Development: A Case Study in the Bicol River Basin of the Philippines*, Resource Systems Theory and Methodology, Series No. 2 (Tokyo: United Nations University Press, 1980).