

**Decentralization, Political Empowerment, and Democratization in Africa:
The Role of Foreign Aid**

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Executive Summary

Since the 1960's, the US Agency for International Development has assisted the process of decentralization of political power in developing countries around the world. Until recently, these efforts have focused primarily on improving municipal government capacity through such activities as strengthening local infrastructure, improving management techniques, and so forth. When USAID began to focus on democratization as an additional component of its sustainable development goals in the 1990's, decentralization programs took on a very different character. Decentralization became a means to improved national as well as local governance, through the distribution of political power and increased accountability of the center to the localities. However, no empirical evidence exists to support the basic assumption of many of these programs: namely, that decentralization is complementary to the democratization process in these countries. As with the process of economic development, it is not clear if decentralization and democratization can occur simultaneously without some interaction effects. In addition, in most African countries, centralized political structures have been the norm for much of their independent existence. The transition to decentralized and democratic political systems is in its infancy in many states, with unknown consequences. This analysis conducts a two-pronged examination of the relationship between decentralization and democratization in Africa. The first section tests the existence of a statistical relationship between democratization and decentralization. The second section examines the potential impact of decentralization programming in Africa, given the continent's unique historical context. Evidence is found of a positive statistical association between democratization and decentralization though insufficient data exists to establish whether the relationship is causal or the direction of causation. Given these findings, it is argued in the second section that despite the association between decentralization and democratization, the historical African experience suggests that democratic outcomes may not always be associated with decentralization programs. The analysis is structured as follows: Section I provides an overview of definitional and measurement issues of decentralization, and an examination of the relationship between democratization and decentralization. Section II presents an analysis of USAID decentralization activities in Africa, and the impact of such programs in increasing democracy in these states, with special attention to historical context of Africa. Section III summarizes the findings of both sections and presents recommendations for structuring of future decentralization activities in Africa.

Section I: Decentralization and Democracy

An Overview of Decentralization: Definitional and Measurement Issues

In a recent article about the future of mankind entitled **The Coming Anarchy**, Robert Kaplan paints a picture of the world dissolving:

Most people believe that the political earth since 1989 has undergone immense change. But it is minor compared with what is yet to come. The breaking apart and remaking of the atlas is only now beginning...Everywhere in the developing world at the turn of the twenty-first century these new men and women, rushing into the cities, are remaking civilizations and redefining their identities in terms of religion and tribal ethnicity which do not coincide with the borders of existing states (Kaplan 1994:63,66).

Kaplan sees this coming breakdown largely in terms of a struggle over increasingly scarce resources, but whatever the causal variables, there is substantial evidence to suggest that large states, particularly those in the developing world, will continue to be vulnerable to political breakdown. The ongoing conflicts in the former Yugoslavia, the Chechen Republic in Russia, the state of Chiapas in Mexico, and even the separatist movement in Quebec all point towards a dissatisfaction with the ability of a larger national entity to adequately represent the interests of the smaller group or sub-nation. Dissatisfaction in and of itself may not be enough to compel a group which feels unacknowledged to action. But when it is combined with the new reality of a post-cold war world in which the larger external threat of the Soviet Union has vanished, the potential for separatist movements increases. The impact of the dissolution of the Soviet Union is not only on the political realm, but the economic as well. Harberger (1993) goes so far as to argue that the prospects for cross-national economic unification are adversely affected by the lack of an external threat:

Economic integration's success in Western Europe and its failure elsewhere suggests that such integration may require the stimulus of a perceived common enemy, security concerns, and outside sponsorship. Thus, economic integration may be a response to security and political factors, rather than to economic considerations such as economies of scale...If economic integration is a response to noneconomic factors, then a change in these concerns could lead to a change in the economic integration process (Harberger et al 1993:9).

Harberger's concern, that states will have less incentive to cooperate economically if they perceive a less threatening political environment, has implications for the political integration of states. It is clear that the international context of the future reveals the potential for increased separatism and political breakdown globally. Given the international implications of larger numbers of independent states, it becomes imperative to understand the potential of political decentralization as a means to empower the sub-groups within states and ensure stable and

responsive states.

What is decentralization? Johnson (1995) argues that at the most basic level, "Decentralization is a change in the institutional framework in which political, social and economic decisions are made and carried out" (Johnson 1995:1). Conyers (1986) defines it as:

The transfer of authority to plan, make decisions and manage public functions from a higher level of government to any individual, organization or agency at a lower level (Conyers 1986:88).

Conyers argues that there are several ways to classify and distinguish between *devolution* versus *decentralization*, and between various types of decentralization, namely: the functional activities over which authority is transferred; the type of authority that is transferred for each functional activity; the level(s) or area(s) to which authority is transferred; the organization to which the authority is transferred at each level and; the legal/administrative means by which such authority is transferred (Conyers 1986:88). Finally, Rondinelli (1986a) defines decentralization as the:

Transfer of responsibility for planning, management, resource-raising and -allocation, and other functions from the central government and its agencies to field units of central government ministries or agencies, subordinate units or levels of government, semi-autonomous public authorities or corporations, or nongovernmental or voluntary organizations (Rondinelli 1986:1).

Rondinelli (1986b) further disaggregates decentralization into three types; political, giving citizens electoral power over local officials; spatial, deconcentrating activities geographically; and administrative, transferring resource control from central government to local government units.

As with the concept of democratization, there are myriad ways to conceptualize decentralization. What is important for the purposes of this analysis is the most basic conceptualization of decentralization common to all the definitions listed above, namely, decentralization as a transfer of political and economic authority from the center to the local level. In this analysis, the primary focus is on what Rondinelli calls the *administrative/political* component of decentralization as a means for greater empowerment of local populations in Africa to participate in decisions that affect their daily lives. It should be noted, however, that it is impossible to consider any one component of decentralization separate from others, since they are inextricably linked. In the past, efforts to encourage decentralization have, for a variety of reasons including political context, focused on one or the other components, such as fiscal decentralization without giving equal attention to the political aspects. Such efforts are inevitably limited in their scope of results. Fiscal decentralization means little if the citizens have no control over who spends the money and why. By the same token, control over who makes decisions at the local level has little meaning if those individuals are constrained in their ability to serve their constituents by central government control of resources. Yet until recently, it was not feasible to advocate political decentralization in the African context, where many central

governments were not politically accountable to their citizens. The spread of more accountable, democratic political systems in the 1990's paved the way for a greater focus on the political aspects of decentralization in these states.

Forms of Decentralization. Decentralization is a complex process and as such there are many aspects to be considered. Is the process top-down or bottom-up? Are the goals of decentralization managerial or political? What are the explicit and implicit objectives of such programs? These questions are addressed below.

In terms of functional activity, according to Conyers, the spectrum of choices ranges from federal systems where all activities except things like national defense are handled at the regional level; to systems where a single activity (like a program) is decentralized (Conyers 1986:93).

What powers are decentralized over each activity is another key question. Power to make policy is one type, power to raise revenue is another, a third is the power over personnel (Conyers 1986:94). It is common in many so called "decentralized states" to have the sub-units entrusted with some but not all of these powers.

The level to which to decentralize power is another issue. It is very different to decentralize power to the state level in the US for example, than to the city or town level. A recent study seems to suggest that there is evidence that the smaller the administrative unit involved, the more likely that there will be a democratic outcome.¹ If this is true, then in order to mimic the benefits of smallness, states should decentralize to the lowest possible administrative level.

Finally, how the powers are decentralized can be important, if only because of the message it sends to the sub-units about the commitment of the national government to the permanency of the system (Conyers 1986:95). In this case, constitutional legislation is preferable to ordinary legislation, which is easily altered.

Rondinelli (1986b) delineates administrative/political decentralization into three sub-types; deconcentration, delegation, and devolution. Essentially these terms describe different levels of autonomy for the regional units. At the lowest level of autonomy, deconcentration, local governmental units are essentially branch offices of the central government without independent authority. The middle level is delegation, in which sub-national units have some autonomy but are also partially controlled by the central government. At the highest level, sub-national units

¹ See Dana Ott, "State Size and Regime Type: Some Empirical Findings," Paper presented at the 1994 Annual Meeting of the Northeastern Political Science Association. Available on the Microstate Network under Microstate Reports, <http://www.microstate.com/pub/micros/>. The analysis finds that the smaller the state, the more likely it is to be democratic. Thus states with 500,000 population are more likely to be democratic than states with 1 million population, states with 250,000 are more likely to be democratic than states with 500,000 population, and so on.

have authority distinct from the central government that is legally guaranteed, either through constitutional or other means.

These distinctions are very important for comparative purposes, and in the context of this analysis, for determining the effects of decentralization on democratization and vice versa. Just as a consistent definition of democracy must be used in order to "rank" countries in terms of their democraticness, so too must a definition of decentralization be used which evaluates the level of decentralization within countries along a specified scale. Determining the scale along which countries will be placed is always to some degree an arbitrary exercise, but given the existing conceptualizations of decentralization and the question of bringing true local control over resources and decision making, it is possible to construct a measurable scale which emphasizes what Rondinelli (1986b) calls *devolution*, namely the more formal, legal transfer of authority and function from the central government to the local level. The definitions of key terms used in the statistical portion of this analysis are described in more detail in the next section.

Decentralization and Democratization. One of the basic assumptions that has been made in the policy arena is the existence of a positive relationship between democratization and decentralization. Does decentralization promote greater democratization? Recent studies would seem to suggest so. They argue that decentralization empowers individuals in the society to take control over their own destiny, and to have their voices heard:

A democratic system existing only at the macro-level is not likely to endure very long; at best it will be a plebiscitary democracy, in which citizens are offered a choice at election time between giving what amounts to blank checks to those in power or throwing them out...If citizens are to have a genuine role in determining government policy and holding it to account for what it does in matters that affect them, then democracy must be present at the micro-level as well (Blair 1992:2).

Blair argues that decentralization promotes democracy at the national as well as the local level by providing accountability of those who represent the people, and encouraging the formation of groups (like interest groups) which can have a profound influence at the national and local levels. However an empirical link has yet to be established between decentralization and democracy, although substantial anecdotal evidence exists. The most obvious case is the United States, which although already among the most decentralized states in the world, is currently debating the question of whether to further devolve authority to the states. Proponents argue that this will give the states authority to be responsive to concerns of their citizens without having to deal with federal mandates that do not reflect the situation on the ground in these states. Opponents argue that federal oversight is necessary to ensure minimum standards are met and that states do not try to keep out those who will cost them money, such as welfare recipients, by engaging in a "race to the bottom" for benefit levels in these programs. Dukesbury (1991) argues that proponents of decentralization as a method of political empowerment fail to recognize that:

Calls for devolution of power are also made by illiberal, vested local interests who

seek nothing more than to maintain their own control...There are also examples of central governments exercising a liberalizing influence as the champions of policies which provide for broader applications of justice and equity against the opposition of local governments dominated by interests less willing to share power or provide for broader participation (Dukesbury 1991:16).

It has been argued that many developed countries which are democratic, such as Great Britain, France and Germany, have decentralized political structures, but the level and areas where decentralization occurs varies greatly from case to case and no definitive link between decentralization and democracy can be derived from this anecdotal evidence. Statistical studies of the relationship between democracy and decentralization appear to establish a tentative link between formal decentralization (devolution) of power and democratic performance. For example, a recent, quantitative study of 98 countries finds a positive statistical association between decentralization and greater democracy.² This is a significant finding, but the results must be viewed with a few caveats. First, the study authors' index of decentralization is primarily an economic one - combining measures such as central government fiscal revenues as a percentage of total government revenues, and taxation authority, etc. The other main problem with this analysis is the data distribution. The study authors collapse several years of data into one measure of decentralization, (probably because of lack of reliable data on an annual basis), which creates some causality issues with both the economic growth and the democracy measures, which are available on a year by year basis.

Since this analysis focuses on the relationship between democracy and formal decentralization as a means to political empowerment for local populations, some statistical analysis was conducted to try and reinforce the findings of the Charles et al study while overcoming some of its methodological limitations. It should be noted that the findings are preliminary, and much more extensive analysis will be required for any definitive conclusions to be reached. For the purposes of conducting this quantitative analysis of the relationship between democratization and decentralization, the following measurements were used:

Political Democracy. As long as there has been discussion about democracy as a type of political system, attempts have been made to quantify it in some fashion to simplify comparison. As a result there are as many measurement scales of political democracy as there are individuals willing to construct them. The literature on the empirical measurement of democracy is quite voluminous: notable examples include Almond and Verba (1963), Cutright (1963), Dahl (1971), Bollen (1980, 1985), Coppedge and Reinicke (1990), Inkeles (1990), and Freedom House (1991),

² Sandra Charles, Francois Valliancourt and Nicolas Marceau, (1995). **The Impact of Decentralization on Growth and Democracy: A Note**, Programme d'analyses et de recherches économiques appliquees au developpement international (PARADI), Canadian International Development Agency, March. Their analysis finds no association between economic growth and decentralization, but a positive relationship between democracy and decentralization.

to name just a few. Many measures of democracy are not easily operationalized, limiting their utility for this analysis. Perhaps a more difficult problem is the inevitable use of subjective evaluation criteria in the classification of countries. If more than one individual is involved in such classification, problems of inter-coder reliability must be addressed. Of those measures which use data from 1985 or later, the measure by Michael Coppedge and Wolfgang Reinicke (1990) was considered because it attempts to quantify Dahl's (1971) classic requirements for polyarchy. However, their index is calculated only for the year 1985, while the available decentralization data was only available for the years 1991 and 1994, thus eliminating its use in this analysis. The Freedom House index was chosen because of its reliability, as Freedom House has been compiling such data since 1973 on an annual basis. The variable FREEDOM measures the overall Freedom House ranking of political freedom, while the variables POLRIGHT and CIVIL represent the measures of political rights and civil liberties respectively. Freedom House uses low scores as their indicator of democracy (i.e. very democratic) with a progression from there; the higher the score the less democratic (or free) is the state.

Decentralization. As mentioned previously, the aim of this paper is to analyze whether decentralization efforts have resulted in political empowerment of local populations in Africa. As a consequence, it can be argued that for real political empowerment to occur, there must be formal devolution of authority from the center to the localities. One way to measure the level of such formal devolution of authority is to compare the distribution of several key functions across states. Elazar (1994) provides a country by country chart on whether four key government functions; taxation, land-use control, police, and education are administered at the central government or local government units. This, of course, eliminates countries which do not have some formal delineation for local government units. However, it is probable that countries without formally delineated local governments are also less likely to have meaningful local level participation and control over resources. Using Elazar's raw data, states in this analysis were assigned 1 point for each of the four functions that were decentralized or where authority over that function was shared between the central government and local government. The scoring range for the data was thus 0-4, with zero being the least decentralized and four being the most decentralized. The Elazar data is available for only two years, 1991 and 1994, and therefore all conclusions regarding the reliability of this analysis should be viewed with that caveat in mind.

Table 1 (see below) displays the results of the data analysis. The initial findings indicate a strong positive correlation between democracy and formal decentralization. Formal decentralization is strongly associated with the overall measure of democracy, FREEDOM, as well as the component measures of the Freedom House index, POLRIGHT and CIVIL. It should be noted that the association is negative because in the indices, the more decentralized countries get a higher score and the more democratic countries get a lower score. Thus if democracy and decentralization are mutually reinforcing, we would expect that as democracy scores decrease, then the decentralization scores will increase.

Table 1. Crosstabulations of Democracy and Decentralization

| Spearman Correlation | 1991 | 1994 |
|-----------------------------|----------|----------|
| | | |
| FREEDOM | -.3110* | -.3218* |
| POLRIGHT | -.4034** | -.3488* |
| CIVIL | -.2327 | -.4042** |

*Significant at the .05 level, one-tailed test.

**Significant at the .01 level, one tailed test.

a Data from Elazar (1994).

These findings support the argument that formal decentralization is related to higher levels of democratization. However, without the availability of time-series data it becomes difficult to establish a consistent relationship between these variables over time. It should also be noted that these results do not provide any evidence about the causality of the relationship between these two variables, they merely indicate that the two appear to be present simultaneously in many countries. It should again be noted that the presence of such a relationship is verifiable only with those countries which have formal decentralization structures in place. Unfortunately, most USAID programming has involved the less formal types of decentralization such as deconcentration or delegation, which cannot as yet be empirically linked to democratization and local political empowerment. The next section reviews USAID activities in decentralization in Africa, and evaluates whether those activities have contributed to meaningful political participation at the local level in African countries.

Section II - Decentralization and Democratization in Africa

A Historical Perspective

In Africa, and the developing world generally, it could be argued that decentralization policies are being advocated by donors on the basis of some assumptions that are being made about Africa states which may not be entirely accurate. Perhaps the most important assumption has to do with the capacity of centralized states to penetrate the society sufficiently to achieve their goals. While many African states are centralized, there has been a tendency to view this centralization as a proxy for the strength of the state, which can lead to dangerous assumptions. As Migdal (1988) has argued, states in the developing world, and particularly Africa, are centralized but weak states, which already have little ability to control the implementation of

national policy at the local level. He argues that, "the danger in taking the state for granted is that we begin to assume states in all times and places have a similar potential or ability to achieve their leaders' intentions" (Migdal 1988:17). In these weak, centralized states there are competing sets of rules of the game which stymie efforts to impose policies from the center:

In many societies, state officials have simply not gained the right and ability to make many rules they would like...[this is] ...an indication of a more fundamental conflict over which organizations in society, the state or others, should make these rules (Migdal 1988:31).

Migdal also argues that, "the capacity of states (or incapacity as the case may be), especially the ability to implement social policies and to mobilize the public, relates to the structure of society..."(Migdal 1988:33). In Europe, the period of state building and consolidation which united diverse groups into the modern European state system initially resulted in the rise of the extremely authoritarian absolutist states, where the state finally achieved control over society and penetrated it sufficiently to be able to instill its own rule structure as the sole rule structure for the state. By contrast, this process has not yet occurred in much of the developing world, particularly Africa where state borders do not coincide with group borders as a result of the colonial experience. Migdal characterizes the resulting societies as impenetrable and weblike:

The strength of shared memories and beliefs within various subunits-the clans, tribes, linguistic groups, ethnic groups, and so on-suggests an image for many societies of the Third World quite different from the centralized, pyramidal structure found, say, in many European countries. Numerous Third World societies have been as resilient as an intricate spider's web; one could snip a corner of the web away and the rest of the web would swing majestically between the branches, just as one could snip center strands and have the web continue to exist. Although there certainly have been connections between the parts and some parts have been obviously more important than others, often no single part has been totally integral to the existence of the whole. The difficulties state leaders have had in many Third World countries in achieving social control relate to the state's place in these web-like societies (Migdal 1988:37).

In Africa, in contrast to Europe, the state was not able to penetrate and control the society, which has profound implications for the impact of decentralization, which takes additional power away from these states which are already quite weak. For this reason, it seems probable that attempts at decentralization in these states, while giving greater local political control, may also result in increased fragmentation and political instability at the national level. A brief examination of USAID activities to promote decentralization in Africa is conducted below.

USAID's Efforts in Africa

USAID's involvement in decentralization projects in Africa dates back almost to the Agency's

inception. However, the definition and goals of USAID decentralization programs has evolved from the idea of decentralization as a means to mobilize resources for development (Silverman et al, 1983:xiii) to decentralization as a means to improved governance and public accountability (DFM 1992a:1). Dukesbury (1991) argues that:

Issues which we now associate with the problems and challenges of decentralization are more likely to have been labeled as rural development (integrated rural development or IRD), regional development, and even some types of urban (or small town) development as well as a number of seemingly conventional sectoral pursuits which are judged to benefit from a decentralized approach to planning and management (Dukesbury 1991:17).

In addition, linking decentralization to democratization and political empowerment accelerated greatly with the beginning of the Democracy Initiative at USAID in 1990. In other words, consideration of the explicit political benefits of decentralization and its relationship to democratization did not really occur until after 1990. Prior to this the focus of decentralization programs was on improved efficiency in the provision of services, particularly to rural populations, rather than on the devolution of political power to the local governmental units. More detail about these early activities, and the changes that have occurred can be found in Blair (1996). An overview of decentralization projects in Africa reveals the diversity of circumstances in which types of decentralization were applied, and in addition, the relative newness of projects which contain decentralization components with a political objective. Even recent efforts to encourage decentralization have tended to focus on the "governance" (i.e. efficiency) component of decentralization rather than the democracy (political empowerment) component. For example, a report on the utility of decentralization as a mechanism for improved governance in Africa in 1991 argued that in several African countries where decentralization efforts were occurring, along with structural adjustment programs, that these two could combine to produce, "better service delivery and greater economic efficiency" (Garnier et al., 1991:3). The initial review of such efforts, presented in the report, suggests that efforts to decentralize service provision in those countries were for the most part controlled by the central governments, ultimately limiting their ability to be forces for change in terms of increased accountability and efficiency. The report argues that while citizens have greater political choice since they are able to vote local officials out of office, that this is essentially a false choice as the local officials themselves are constrained in their ability to answer to constituent demands because of the restrictions on decentralization processes imposed by the central governments. This is a consequence of a lack of true devolution of power in a formalized fashion in these states. Without a legal basis and justification for decentralization efforts, particularly in these weak states, it becomes entirely likely that the process will fail either through central government reticence or through local co-optation of the process.

This concern is echoed in the final report of the Decentralization: Finance and Management Project on Decentralized Public Service Provision in Sub-Saharan Africa, which argued that efforts to decentralize public service provision in Africa under the project had failed

because central governments co-opted the issue as a way to accomplish their own objectives (ARD 1994:3). Interestingly, the report, while arguing that the central government has prevented the successful implementation of decentralization programs in these countries, rather paradoxically argues that:

In many countries the state has never been strong enough to compel universal cooperation, especially among segments of the rural population. With their inability to provide basic services, the central administration has become an insignificant factor and segments of the population, especially rural, have simply disengaged (ARD 1994:10-11).

What the report does not acknowledge, explicitly or implicitly, is that if the state does not hold the power, someone must. In these states, that someone is often those groups in society which have evolved to represent various interests, be they ethnic or otherwise. Therefore the solution is not simply one of changing the administrative structure to allow power to flow down to that lower level, but also dealing with the question of how to formally define the balance of political and economic power in these states to avoid such power struggles. An important issue to be considered in these weak states is whether formalization of power distribution should simultaneously attempt to break up the local traditional centers of power or whether there should be greater emphasis on aligning political/administrative decentralization structures to more clearly reflect and legitimize those existing bases of power. The most obvious disadvantage of aligning formal local government structures with traditional power bases is that there will in all likelihood be an uneven distribution of power within the society based on the historical evolution of influence rather than any formulaic distribution. An advantage of such alignment is that there will probably be greater actual capacity to act at the local level if those political and administrative boundary lines coincide with the societal power centers. Unfortunately, efforts to formalize local governmental political and economic power are still in their infancy, where they exist in Africa. The balance of this section discusses activities in those countries, and the effectiveness of such efforts in promoting greater local political empowerment.

African decentralization. In many African countries, efforts to give formal, legal recognition and authority to local government units date back on a few years, with many issues still unresolved. For example, in Mozambique, although the government has passed legislation establishing municipal governments, as of August 1995. “greater specificity regarding the fiscal relationship between the municipality, province and central government, and administrative and political links between these government structures was left to future legislation and definition” (Turner & Comedy 1995:3). Not only this but, as with many newly democratizing states, efforts to promote decentralization become hostage to the larger political struggle between the government and the opposition, each seeking to control the process so that they do not forfeit any power to the other. In Madagascar, a similar process occurred to that in Mozambique. While the new Constitution passed in 1992 has provisions for local government units, the details of how the authority will be decided is left for the legislature to sort out at a later date, setting up all kinds of potential disputes about how and to what degree power will be decentralized (Hobgood 1993:1). By contrast, in Senegal, efforts have deliberately focused primarily on deconcentration, that is,

transfer of functions and some authority to local government units. This is in the context of creating greater opportunities for economic growth rather than as a way of giving local people more input into the decision making process.

One of the most ambitious decentralization efforts in Africa has been in Ghana. An early review of the process argues that:

In 1988, the Government of Ghana (GOG) initiated one of the most ambitious decentralization programs in West Africa. Under this program, significant powers and responsibilities were transferred from central to local governmental units, thereby reversing a three decade long trend of gradually escalating centralization. By undertaking this program, the GOG committed itself to shifting the locus of decision-making on local-level development from the center to the periphery, thereby placing in the hands of Ghanaians the capacity to decide on the issues which impinge most directly on their daily lives (Dei 1991:1).

The decentralization program was a formal one, detailed in PNDC (Provisional National Defense Council) Law 207. Political and economic control was devolved to local government units with accountable, elected officials (Dei 1991:3). There are 110 autonomous districts, each governed by a District Assembly which is 2/3 elected every three years, and 1/3 appointed by the central government. There are 87 functions which have been devolved to the district level, including budget formulation. However the central government retains significant capacity to restrict or dictate the activities of the district governments, including power of review of by-laws passed by District Assemblies, and control of some resources (Dei 1991:6). Other problematic limitations on the autonomy of the districts, according to Dei, include:

- o Staffing issues, including manpower shortages and central personnel control over agents working in districts, particularly as regarding employment issues.
- o Financial constraints, including a substantial portion of revenues (39%) derived from central government transfers which are not clearly defined or predictable.
- o Political will, which is lacking in some of the government ministries obligated to cede power to the local level under the decentralization program.

Dei concludes that the GOG does recognize these obstacles and is working to correct those problems through such proposals as additional detail to the decentralization law to spell out specifics of financial and other concerns. The report of the DFM project case study in Ghana offers a less optimistic outlook, however:

Across the board, in all the districts that were the subject of research, the overwhelming majority of funds raised through local taxes was spent on the district government's bureaucratic structure. Virtually none went toward services.

The district government's are well aware that, as a result of their inability to be anything but parasitic at this point, they are losing credibility. Some taxpayers, perceiving the lack of return for their investment, are already refusing to pay their taxes (Fiadjoe et al 1992:I-3).

The case of Ghana reveals in many ways what can happen when formal, legal decentralization occurs without prior explication of detailed rules governing the distribution of power between the center and the local governments.

Cote d'Ivoire also has a comprehensive decentralization program, which began in 1978. As in Ghana, there is specific legislation dealing with the structure of local governments, and the functions that have been devolved to them, as well as their relationship to the central government structure. Interestingly, as with Ghana, the central government kept several key areas of control within itself, including control over land.

Based on the experiences of USAID in Africa, and the empirical evidence, we would expect states which meet or approach "formal, legal" decentralization (devolution) to be more successful in encouraging local political empowerment. The evidence thus far would seem to indicate that no African state has yet devolved enough authority to allow sustained local participation in decision making. This has a number of implications for USAID activities in the area of decentralization in Africa, which are discussed in the next section.

Section III - Lessons Learned, Conclusions and Recommendations

Decentralization for political empowerment is a laudable goal. It encourages people to take control of their lives by allowing them to participate in decisions that affect their daily lives. This analysis has argued that there is at least some statistical basis for promoting decentralization as a means of increasing democratic participation. However, these results must be viewed as extremely tentative, and more work needs to be done in this area. Assuming that further analysis does provide more support for the proposition that democracy and decentralization are compatible, this analysis then examined specific attempts to utilize that association: specifically USAID decentralization programs in Africa. USAID has attempted to promote greater political empowerment at the local level through its increased emphasis on the political aspects of decentralization since 1991. A review of those efforts and consideration of whether such activities are appropriate for Africa was conducted. The initial findings, based on a review of project documents from the major decentralization initiatives in Africa, is that while large scale efforts to decentralize power in Africa have been made in a few states, most notably Ghana and Cote d'Ivoire, substantial obstacles remain to increased political responsiveness of these local units to the populations they are designed to serve. Empirical evidence from other studies, and evidence collected as part of this paper suggest that the more formalized, legal attempts at decentralization should yield greater results in terms of local empowerment. However, of those cases in Africa where legal devolution of power has occurred, none appear to be substantial

enough to manifest such results.

As mentioned previously, the distinct character of developing countries, particularly in Africa, suggests that in order to overcome the legacy of weak states and multiple centers of power at the societal level, there is a need to very specifically define the role, function and authority of the localities, and of the central government as well. However, few, if any African states have democratic institutions with enough legitimacy and strength to devolve such authority successfully. Thus the outcome is either devolution to a non-democratic local authority entirely controlled by the state; or fragmentation and creation of competing centers of power within a state. This suggests that future decentralization activities should be undertaken only with serious consideration of the capacity of these new democracies to implement such reforms without incurring serious political costs.

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