# DECENTRALIZATION IN AFRICA:
## PROGRAMMING GUIDE

**DECEMBER 2012**

This publication was produced for review by the United States Agency for International Development.

Authored by:          J. Tyler Dickovick
                    Associate Professor of Politics
                    Washington and Lee University;


Contact Information:

J. Tyler Dickovick
Department of Politics
Washington and Lee University
204 West Washington Street
Lexington, Virginia 24450
Telephone: 540-458-8174
Fax: 802-458-8639
Email: DickovickT@wlu.edu

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

# DECENTRALIZATION IN AFRICA:
## PROGRAMMING GUIDE


# DECEMBER 2012




**DISCLAIMER**
The author's views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of the United States Agency for International Development or the United States Government.

# CONTENTS

# ACRONYMS

ANC          African National Congress (South Africa)

CADA          *Comparative Analysis of Decentralization in Africa* (USAID, 2010)

DDPH          *Democratic Decentralization Programming Handbook* (USAID, 2009)

EPRDF          Ethiopian Peoples' Democratic Revolutionary Front (Ethiopia)

NDC          National Democratic Congress (Ghana)

NPP          New Patriotic Party (Ghana)

NRM          Natural Resource Management *also* National Resistance Movement (Uganda)

SNG          Sub-national Government

USAID          United States Agency for International Development

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This paper is designed for DRG Officers. It complements other documents (including the accompanying Policy Recommendations Guide, as described in an appendix) that missions can use to guide decentralization initiatives. This Programming Guide is focused on program approaches more than policy recommendations (though the latter obviously inform the programming decisions). It is an instrument for making decisions within a mission about programming approaches, entry points, and specific interventions.

The premise of this Guide is that distinct challenges and programming recommendations arise depending on countries' contexts, including demographics, historical legacies, current political institutions, and the political economy. This guide offers a general framework (developed briefly in sections 1 and 2) for programming approaches in a range of commonly observed contexts, going from countries with historical tendencies towards fragmentation (section 3) to countries with tendencies towards more centralized governance (section 4) to countries with strong subnational institutions (section 5). The emphasis in assessment is on identifying which are the most salient characteristics for deciding on programming approaches, since these three categories are not mutually exclusive, and some countries may be in more than one category.

Approaches to programming are highlighted in the respective sections of the paper, to correspond to different contexts. Yet two key themes emerge that can help to guide programmatic interventions in a concrete fashion. The first is the importance of facilitating communication between actors. This includes enhancing dialogue and improving information flows. The second is the importance of balancing power appropriately between institutions, to include central government, subnational governments, and civil society organizations. Programming approaches that deepen the intergovernmental linkages between actors, and that support countervailing institutions that "check and balance" one another, will be those likeliest to contribute to improved governance. The paper concludes with observations in this vein, along with brief comments on the utility of decentralization programming for other USAID objectives, including cross-sectoral work and evidence-based approaches to programming.

This paper is part of a set of three papers that treat the contexts, causes, and programming possibilities for decentralization in Africa. The papers are as follow:

- *Decentralization in Africa: Why, When, and Where;*

- *Decentralization in Africa: Programming for Policy Reform*;

- *Decentralization in Africa: Programming Guide*.

These papers draw upon the findings of USAID's *Comparative Analysis of Decentralization in Africa* (2010), and the conceptual framework of the *Democratic Decentralization Programming Handbook* (2009).

# 1.0 DECENTRALIZATION PROGRAMMING GUIDE: OVERVIEW, FRAMEWORK, AND PURPOSE

This paper is designed for DRG Officers contemplating programming in decentralization, though it is also intended for officers in other sectors that may interface with decentralization. This Programming Guide is an instrument for missions making decisions about programming approaches, entry points, and specific interventions. The premise of the Guide is that distinct challenges and programming recommendations arise depending on countries' contexts, including demographics, historical legacies, current political institutions, and the political economy. The guide offers a general framework for programming approaches in a range of commonly observed contexts, from countries with historical tendencies towards fragmentation (section 3) to countries with tendencies towards more centralized governance (section 4) to countries with strong subnational institutions (section 5). The emphasis is on identifying the most salient characteristics for deciding on programming approaches; the guide notes these three categories are not mutually exclusive, and some countries may be in more than one category. The paper complements other documents, including a Programming for Policy Reform guide, that missions can use to guide decentralization initiatives; these are outlined in an appendix. Before moving into the analysis, the guide begins with a brief introduction to key concepts.

## 1.1 BRINGING TOGETHER CONCEPTS: FORMS AND DIMENSIONS AS STRATEGIES FOR OBJECTIVES AND GOALS

From USAID's perspective, decentralization can promote three major goals in partner countries: stability, development (to include economic growth and service provision), and democracy and governance. USAID has also developed an understanding of how decentralization contributes to these goals by examining its various forms and dimensions. These are elaborated upon in other reports, as noted in appendices. The main concepts used in USAID's decentralization materials are shown in the following schematic (Figure 1).

**FIGURE 1. DECENTRALIZATION AT USAID**
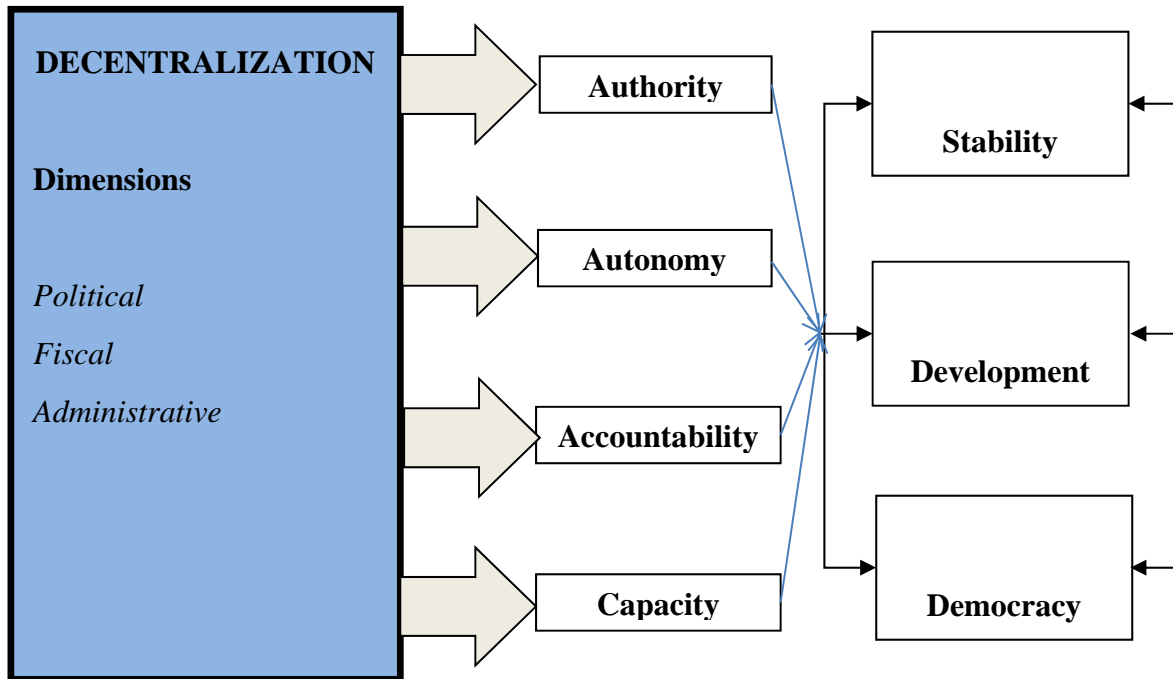


The three goals for USAID from decentralization programming are **stability** and security, **development** (to include both economic growth and service delivery), and improved governance or **democracy**. These three goals can reinforce one another – stability contributes to development and vice versa, for instance – as seen in the arrows at the right-hand end of the figure.

How does decentralization support these goals? Looking at the figure from left to right, we can see first what decentralization is. Decentralization is often understood in terms of three dimensions: **political**, **fiscal**, and **administrative**. Political decentralization is the process by which elections are instituted at subnational levels (whether at the level of regions, states, provinces, districts, municipalities, villages, or other local levels). Fiscal decentralization refers to the transfer of revenues and resources, as well as expenditure responsibilities, to subnational units. Administrative decentralization consists of transferring planning, budgeting, and other administrative responsibilities to subnational units.

Another way of understanding what decentralization is comes from looking at its three forms: **devolution**, **deconcentration**, and **delegation**. Devolution is the form of decentralization that takes place when central governments transfer powers, resources, or responsibilities to elected subnational governments; devolution is thus closely related (or depends upon) a degree of "political decentralization" as defined above. Deconcentration is the form of decentralization that occurs with transfers from central governments to subnational administrative units responsible to the center (such as prefects or district administrators, or field offices of sectoral ministries), rather than to elected subnational governments. Delegation occurs when the central government assigns subnational units to undertake specific actions on the center's behalf, and this can take place with subnational elected governments or special-purpose units ranging from watershed

management bodies to customary authorities in some cases. Each of these three forms can support the goals noted above.

USAID has identified four characteristics that link "what decentralization is" to the goals it supports. They are in Figure 1 at center: **authority**, **autonomy**, **accountability**, and **capacity**. These concepts can be understood as the mechanisms by which decentralization contributes to its goals. USAID programming can help to reshape or clarify patterns of formal and legal *authority* between levels of government. Missions can also enhance the *autonomy* of subnational actors to an appropriate degree, especially in contexts where subnational autonomy is weak. Strengthening *accountability* can come from developing systems that encourage public officials at local levels to be responsive "downward" to the demands and needs of local residents, as well as "upward" to central government. Finally, the building of *capacity* is a well-established "core competency" for USAID programming in strengthening governance and promoting development. It can occur by strengthening capabilities on the demand side with civic and social organizations and/or on the supply side with government institutions. These four characteristics can reinforce and complement one another, much like the aforementioned three goals. For instance, strengthening the *capacity* of civil society organizations will often increase their ability to hold government *accountable*. At the same, USAID should also be aware that inadequacies in just one of these areas can undermine governance. An example is Nigeria, where subnational governments have ample authority and autonomy, and a high degree of technical capacity, yet the entire governance system is undermined by the malfunctioning of accountability.[1] These four characteristics recur in USAID discussions about decentralization, and have shaped the instruments and tools USAID officers have at their disposal (including the DDPH and the CADA, as outlined in the appendix).

All four of these characteristics appear through this programming guide, but *accountability* and *capacity* receive the greatest emphasis because they relate most directly to programming and reflect USAID's core competency in helping to build state institutions and civil society. The characteristic *authority* is most often addressed in programming at the policy level, with decisions about the formal rules that shape the extent of decentralization. Similarly, the concept of *autonomy* links to the policy issue of "how decentralized is decentralization", rather than how well governance works in practice, though there are also ways USAID can support subnational autonomy through programming that is not purely policy-driven. Examples may include building the tax capacity of local governments or programming to turn accountability mechanisms for local officials from top-down (responsive to central actors) to bottom-up (responsive to the local populace). These examples show that the line between characteristics is blurry. For example, building local revenue collections alters the *capacity* to collect taxes, but also the governing *autonomy* that tax collection engenders. Meanwhile, promoting downward *accountability* also has implications for the *autonomy* of subnational governments. Regardless, it is generally possible to condense the discussion of programming options by emphasizing capacity and accountability.

It is important to note that the goals and objectives outlined above are not necessarily shared by host country governments. Indeed, the motivations of governments for favoring decentralization will often be quite different from the "noble" goals such as development and democracy listed above. Central governments will often hesitate or resist when it comes to promoting a decentralization of authority, or increases in subnational autonomy, or a redirection of accountability that flows downward to citizens instead of upward to the top. The need thus

arises for a ***political economy analysis*** of the programming environment.  This is undertaken and outlined in the DDPH and the CADA, so this guide does not outline how to do such a political economy analysis. That said, the programming environments outlined in sections 3, 4, and 5 do emerge from different political situations. This programming guide should thus be used *after* a political economy analysis is undertaken (as reflected in an accompanying document on "Decentralization in Africa: Why, When, and Where"). For example, a fractured, fragmented, or failing state points to section 3 of this programming guide, suggesting the need to consolidate governing authority in functioning central institutions. The presence of dominant central institutions, such as  a top-down political party, would lead to section 4, as it suggests a different set of programming initiatives to disperse power.  Section 5 would be consulted in the presence of strong subnational institutions. Analyzing the political economy is a necessary step that precedes the approaches here.

## 1.2    OVERVIEW OF THE GUIDE

The remainder of this guide is divided into sections that offer concrete guidance on decentralization programming. Section II outlines three main types of polities for which programming recommendations can be made, based on whether institutions at the center and at the local level are weak or strong.  Countries with weak institutions at all levels are quite different than countries that have either strong patterns of centralized governance or a set of powerful local institutions.

Sections 3, 4, and 5 link country contexts (as outlined in the CADA reports and highlighted in the accompanying documents) to the main goals of decentralization and offer corresponding programming approaches. Section 3 focuses on societies divided on ethnic or regional lines, including conflict/post-conflict settings, failed/failing states, and societies divided by the geographic distribution of the economic base, especially with extractive industry. Stability is a key goal in these societies. Section 4 focuses on promoting democracy and development in polities with enduring traditions of top-down government. Section 5 examines where subnational institutions are strong, whether with strong social forces (such as civic groups or traditional authorities) or strong SNG institutions (especially in federal states). In these cases, promoting DRG goals will often mean establishing an appropriate balance of power between state and social institutions. The concluding section 5 briefly highlights main themes and shows how the Programming Guide provides a coherent approach that links the assessment of country contexts to different policy and programming approaches.

# 2.0 ASSESSING CONTEXTS AND PROGRAMMING ENVIRONMENTS

This section underscores three main types of polities for which programming recommendations can be made. A key understanding is which existing institutions are weak and which are strong. Where local institutions are weak and the center is weak also, this often means a divided society and failed/failing states; if the center is "strong", however, this typically means centralized governance. If local institutions are strong, by contrast, the challenge will be institutionalizing state-society interactions.

## 2.1 A TYPOLOGY OF AFRICAN CONTEXTS: THE STRENGTH OF CENTRAL AND LOCAL INSTITUTIONS

The matrix below offers a schematic overview of country contexts. A first possibility is a country where both central and subnational institutions (and linkages between them) are strong. Such countries would have clear lines of *authority*, a solid degree of subnational *autonomy*, robust *accountability* mechanisms, and ample governing *capacity*. Such countries will typically not be priority target countries for USAID interventions. Rather, USAID would establish programs where some governing institutions require strengthening. Accordingly, this guide does not focus on the top-left corner of the matrix.

### FIGURE 2. ASSESSING CONTEXTS

|  |  | Central Institutions | |
|---|---|---|---|
|  |  | **Strong** | **Weak** |
| **Local Institutions** | **Strong** | N/A   (Non-target countries) | Decentralized Systems |
|  | **Weak** | Centralized Systems | Divided & Fragmented Societies<br><br>Failed & Failing States |

The next three subsections raise the other three possibilities: countries with a "strong" center (a phrase explained below) and weak local institutions; those with strong local institutions and a weak center; and those with weak institutions at both the center and the local level. These present different contexts for potential programming that are then elaborated upon throughout the remainder of the guide.

## 2.2 WEAK CENTER AND WEAK LOCAL INSTITUTIONS: DIVIDED AND FRAGMENTED SOCIETIES

The first context for programming is countries that have failed, are failing, or are collapsed states. This often happens when societies are divided or fragmented by internal divisions, or when states lack the basic power necessary to govern in a territory.[2] In Africa, the internal divisions that divide societies will typically be identity-based, most notably ethnic (though sometimes racial) divisions that often overlap with regional or territorial distinctions. These divisions can happen in largely agrarian or trading societies, but ethno-regional divisions are often exacerbated where there is a big distinction in the economic prospects of different groups, especially when it comes to extractive wealth from mining and mineral deposits or petroleum reserves. The possibility of a divided society with a weak center is seen at the lower right of the matrix. In such countries, the central government is weak, and local institutions are also weak, needing to be built in order to provide public services and public goods.

Development and democracy will rarely occur where states have failed and societies are riddled with conflict; stability is a virtual prerequisite for democracy and development. In these contexts, a premium should thus be placed upon securing and stabilizing the basic ability of the state to govern. This requires supporting state capacity, but does not mean setting up a state that dominates its society. The state requires legitimacy, which can be developed through improved functioning, but also by ensuring that different social groups and individuals feel they have the requisite autonomy from the state and a system of accountability that makes government responsive to needs and demands. Programming in such contexts should strengthen the capacity of institutions at both the center and subnational levels. Specifically, the suggestion is to establish institutions that *balance the distribution of power* between the center and subnational units. In failed or failing states and in divided societies, state authority is often best constructed from the bottom up. Post-conflict Uganda in the 1980s is an example of a country where central state authority had collapsed and was ultimately rebuilt from the bottom, by a rebel movement that constructed local councils in the areas it controlled before taking over the central state. In divided societies, trust will often (but not always) be higher at the local level than at the national level, and local efforts can facilitate institution building. At the same time, the goals of stability, development, and democracy are rarely served by forms of decentralization that tend towards a chronically weak center, as this can lead to state disintegration. Regions such as Somaliland (insofar as Somalia is the national context) may have plausible claims to independence on the grounds that local governance is superior to the non-existent national government, but development investments will be leveraged where national contexts are improved.

## 2.3 STRONG CENTER AND WEAK LOCAL INSTITUTIONS: CENTRALIZED STATES AND DOMINANT PARTIES

The second possible programming context appears less dramatic than state collapse and civil strife, but it has also been elemental to Africa's weak record of economic, social, and political development. It is the legacy of the centralized state, often run by a dominant political party. Many of the countries in Africa are governed by dominant parties today (even in relatively democratic countries in southern Africa such as Botswana, Namibia, and South Africa). When there are few local institutions to countervail the power of the central state or the leadership of the dominant party, governance becomes highly centralized. Despite the major changes in Africa since the 1990s, this legacy dates back to systems of colonial rule and the decades of single-party

states (and military rule) after independence. It is a reality that has shaped governance in many of USAID's partner countries in Africa.

A point of clarification should be added here regarding the "strength" of the center. The term strength is used in the sense that the central state exercises political dominance over local/subnational actors and seeks to dominate civil society. It is not used in the political science sense of the term, in which a "strong state" is one that can successfully promote development by exercising its independent power; few African countries fit this definition that is usually epitomized by East Asian countries such as South Korea, or formerly Japan, or more recently China.  In fact, nearly all African states (with the possible exception of Botswana) have been "weak" by contrast with developmental states in other regions.  The emphasis here is on which level of government has authority, wields power, and controls public resources. By this use of the term, many African states have long histories of highly centralized governance that continue up to the present.

## 2.4    STRONG SUBNATIONAL INSTITUTIONS AND WEAK CENTER

A final possible programming environment examined in this guide consists of already decentralized systems of governance. In such systems, the center is weak, but subnational institutions are robust.  Two forms can be considered.  The first is systems with strong *social* institutions at local levels, such as a strong civil society, indigenous forms of governance, or traditional and customary institutions that are distinct from the state. The second form of "weak center-strong locality" is where subnational *government* institutions are quite strong while the center is weak.  The clearest examples are state or provincial governments in federal countries, though other examples may exist in the better-governed regions of countries such as Somalia or D.R. Congo.

Strong social institutions at the local level are more common in Africa than powerful subnational governments, especially if one includes traditional authorities among social institutions, which wield considerable power over issues such as land tenure and family law in many countries. Africa is also characterized by large numbers of other civil society organizations, from trade unions to women's groups to environmental NGOs to hometown or neighborhood development associations to informal institutions that monitor a village's pasturage or forest or fish stock. In many ways, the inability of central governments to dominate these institutions may be welcomed as a check on excessively centralized governance and as local initiatives responding to local challenges. At the same time, the inability of those same central governments to control some such institutions and to mediate between social organizations can also result in infringements on the rights of local minorities or underrepresented populations. Given the complexity and diversity of local realities, the programming recommendations are to support the development of countervailing powers that balance the prerogatives of civil society, local authorities, and state institutions. Of course, the programming approach depends upon the overall evaluation of which actors are "weak" and which are "strong". Defining this is challenging and central states may simultaneously be "strong" relative to local governments (dominating the latter, as indeed happens in nearly every country, with the exception of intermediate-level governments such as states and provinces in federal countries) and too "weak" to control social institutions on the ground. Since this will sometimes occur, it becomes important to explain how this guide can be used in such instances.

## 2.5 OVERLAPPING CONTEXTS: WHAT IF A COUNTRY IS ALL OF THE ABOVE?

The typology of three different categories above begs a question: what are the programming possibilities if a country fits more than one of these?  For example, what if a country is both divided and has strong local institutions?  Or what if a country is highly centralized and has a dominant party, yet also seems to be fragmented?  Indeed, what about all three at once?  It is not difficult in Africa to imagine an ethnically divided and politically centralized country with rich and strong social institutions at the local level.  To be sure, the three categories above are not mutually exclusive, and it is quite possible (even probable) that a country context will exhibit more than one of these characteristics.

This characterization is for convenience, and two observations can be offered.  First, the remainder of this guide is designed to address these various possibilities in three distinct "sections", and there is no reason that only a single section will be salient for a given country.  For instance, if a country exhibits both ethnic fragmentation and centralized government (and examples abound from Mali to Mozambique to Zambia), then both sections 3 and 4 can be consulted for programming considerations.  In these circumstances, the advice that emerges for programming will not be contradictory between the sections, because all are informed by a general proposition that effective decentralization programming requires complementary strengths from SNGs, central government, and civil society.  The programmatic issues addressed in these different contexts are not contrary, but instead differ in their emphasis.

The second point is that it will often fall to USAID officers to determine the *most salient* characteristics of a country context.  In some circumstances (say, Côte d'Ivoire) preventing conflict and promoting stability between ethnic or regional groups may trump other programming that might build upon the strengths of certain local institutions for small-scale service provision, while in another case (say, contemporary Sierra Leone) the latter may be most pressing even if there are occasional skirmishes or flashpoints of unrest.  For Kenya in the 1990s, the most salient characteristic of the programming environment may have been the highly centralized political system, with its dominant state and dominant party, yet after post-election violence in 2007-2008, the most salient characteristics in the programming environment may have been the ethno-regional divisions and fragmentation in the country.[3]  This guide encourages assessment of the context that identifies the most salient characteristics in a forward-looking fashion.

# 3.0  DIVIDED SOCIETIES: THE GOAL OF STABILITY

This is the first of three sections that links country contexts to the main goals of decentralization, and proposes corresponding programming approaches. This section focuses on societies divided on ethnic or regional lines, including conflict/post-conflict settings and failed/failing states. The two main sub-types of divided societies are post-conflict societies and societies divided by the geographic distribution of the economic base, especially with extractive industry. Stability is a key goal in these societies, and approaches point most to this goal, but democracy and development are also considered.

## 3.1  STABILITY AS PRIMARY GOAL IN DIVIDED SOCIETIES

Stability should be the main goal of decentralization programming where societies are divided and states have failed. This is for two reasons.  First, stability is one of USAID's primary goals, as reflected in extensive efforts at reconstruction and state-building in post-conflict countries. Preventing, mitigating, or managing conflict – the corollaries of promoting stability – are themselves significant goals.  Second, stability is a prerequisite (or nearly so) for USAID's other main goals of development and democracy.  Countries that have ongoing conflicts are not propitious environments for other types of programming or for the achievement of other governance goals.  In cases of instability and conflict, development is usually halted or reversed, as there is little incentive for private actors to invest in production, little opportunity for public actors to invest in public services, and often actual destruction of physical, human, and financial capital.  The goal of democracy is also predicated on normally-functioning governing institutions.  While it is possible for countries in conflict to remain or even become democratic, the establishment of enduring democratic governance requires that civil strife not predominate. As a popular formulation puts it, a democracy requires at least a degree of national unity.[4]  This is often lacking in cases of overt conflict.  In countries where the populace is divided and the state is weak, stability thus becomes the primary goal both on its own merits and for its contribution to development and democracy.  It is the goal that is "first among equals", though programmatically it can come as "stability via development" where decentralization programming seeks to promote stability by giving political voice, or as "stability via democracy" or improved governance.

## 3.2  STATE BUILDING AND INSTITUTION BUILDING IN DIVIDED SOCIETIES

Divided and fragmented societies are typically characterized by a relative absence of strong, constructive linkages between the state and its citizens.  The absence of these institutions can be seen at the individual level, where the interaction between individuals and the state is characterized by patterns of patronage, rent-seeking, and corruption.  The absence of constructive linkages can also take place at the level of civil society organizations, which in divided societies will often be centered on appeals for particular identity groups rather than on broad-based appeals for improved governance and provision of public goods.

The lack of strong links between the state and society can have serious detrimental effects on social stability. (Of course, weak linkages between state and society are also problematic for economic development and democratic governance, as will be discussed below.) With an eye towards stability, it is crucial to build institutions that large numbers of citizens deem legitimate. This includes a functioning state, a vibrant set of civil society organizations that demand policy programs (and not simply exclusive favoritism), and electoral institutions that function and are accepted as representative. The process of building these institutions is essential to quality governance and to stability in fragmented countries.

## 3.3 DECENTRALIZATION AND CONFLICT: COMING TOGETHER AND HOLDING TOGETHER

Decentralization can mitigate conflict when it provides opportunities for a reconciliation of various interests, such as between majority and minority groups or between the many minority groups in an ethnically fragmented country. In African countries, this is especially salient with respect to ethno-regional conflict, which endures as a central challenge today in countries from Senegal to Nigeria to Kenya to Mozambique. The prospects for decentralization reducing conflict are clearest in collapsed and fragile states. To use a leading historical example, the Ugandan state was rebuilt in the 1980s under Yoweri Museveni using a strategy that emphasized decentralized power after the collapse of the state under previous leaders Idi Amin and Milton Obote. Similar emphases on decentralization after major conflict are found in Nigeria after the Biafra War and Ethiopia after the overthrow of the Derg regime of Haile Mengistu in the 1990s. In all these cases, the efforts to rebuild the state combined accommodation of ethnic and regional interests, or a strategy that focused on re-crafting authority from the local level up, given the failure of the state (as in Uganda).

At a minimum, decentralization should be contemplated as an important instrument or governing strategy wherever questions of conflict and stability are present. Mozambique is another case where decentralization became a governance strategy at the end of a major civil war, even if this process was not as comprehensive as in some other African countries, and this phenomenon can be observed to an extent in the context of smaller regional crises of governance in Tanzania and Mali. The list of potential cases for programming interventions includes relatively low-grade conflicts in the absence of open war over an entire national territory, such as the Casamance in Senegal, or the long-running (yet low-intensity) dispute over Barotseland in Zambia. As argued below, governance will contribute to stability if it can address the challenge of balancing power between levels of government. This means a separation or division of powers, rather than an abdication of authority by the center. Divisions and separations of power are the premise of federal systems, but the same logic can and should apply to unitary states that are historically centralized. In terms of country contexts, there are ample opportunities for finding ways to balance central and subnational authority in the more than 40 African countries with unitary systems.

### 3.3.1 CHALLENGE: GIVING LOCALS A STAKE IN THE SYSTEM WHILE AVOIDING "EXCESSIVE DECENTRALIZATION"

The countries where decentralization can matter for stability in Africa are numerous, with contexts ranging from open war and collapsed states to countries with less existential threats to stability. While the implication is that decentralization could impact stability favorably in a large number of African countries, caveats must be offered immediately: decentralization should not

be prescribed or adopted hastily and it should not be presumed to affect stability only in a positive way. Decentralization can be the wrong policy and programming prescription in some circumstances, and in some circumstances less decentralization is preferable. The challenge for divided societies is one of balancing central and subnational power. Strengthening central power alone may increase the ability of the center to monitor or control subnational interests, but this could result in exclusion of minorities or underrepresented regions. Strengthening only subnational could give greater autonomy, but could compromise the rule of law, or legitimate national standards, or even the rights of those groups that are minorities within certain regions or districts. An example of this latter concern can be found in Kenya, a country that was not one of the CADA cases, but is considering a major devolution to county governments in 2013: one of the principal concerns is for those groups that will suddenly find themselves as minorities in certain counties in a context of potential unrest. Ensuring a degree of effective minority representation at the subnational level becomes an imperative for ensuring stability.

For programming decisions, the ideal approach would follow a "do no harm" principle: it would capture the possible benefits of decentralization without creating further instability or worsening conflict. In states that are highly centralized, this involves pushing the pendulum towards decentralized governance that gives local populations throughout the territory a stake in governance, but not so far that the central government's authority is unduly compromised. In a general sense, the solution involves conferring to regional or local actors a degree of autonomy, while avoiding "excessive decentralization" that could empower rebellions or insurgencies, or lead to secessionist conflict. The programming approaches below aim to capture this "Goldilocks" level of decentralization that is not too much, not too little, but just right. USAID can make recommendations at the policy level regarding the overall extent of decentralization, but at the programming level, two basic approaches emerge: supporting accountability through intergovernmental institutions that link levels of government in a balanced relationship; and promoting the capacity of local residents *below* the level at which political identities operate (such as ethnic regions).

### 3.3.2 APPROACH: SUPPORT INTERGOVERNMENTAL INSTITUTIONS THAT BALANCE POWER

One of the prevailing themes of this guide is that "decentralization" can often best be supported not only through the creation of powerful subnational units, but also through the strengthening of institutional linkages between actors, and especially *intergovernmental* linkages. Examples of intergovernmental institutions that may be supported include: forums for mayors or governors that include participation by central government actors; sector-based meetings in which central ministers dialogue with district- or regional-level department heads; and forums or opportunities for dialogue between elected officials at the subnational level and those in the national legislature (members of parliament, National Assembly deputies, etc.). This list is not exhaustive, but merely illustrative, and other axes of communication could include those between deconcentrated central officials and elected mayors, or between representatives of city councils and higher-level council members. Importantly, these examples all culminate in some form of sustained coordination, collaboration, or communication between multiple actors, not just capacity work with one level of government.

Working on intergovernmental relations has multiple benefits. The first of these is that it simultaneously promotes decentralized governance while also engaging in state-building. This is

important because decentralized units in Africa typically face significant capacity constraints (in terms of fiscal, human, physical, and social resources) that make them unlikely to succeed without some degree of backing and cooperation from the center.  Another advantage is that central governments may be amenable to approaches that emphasize intergovernmental collaboration instead of simple decentralization of power. If USAID can leverage intergovernmental forums and linkages to create opportunities for subnational officials to set agendas, this could empower those officials vis-à-vis central governments over the long-run.

How will these approaches actually balance power? If decentralization has been rather limited, balancing implies strengthening the voices of subnational actors in a centralist environment, while if decentralization has been "too much", balancing implies strengthening the ability of the central state to coordinate among disparate subnational actors. In either circumstance, promoting sustained communication is central to the balancing of power, and of particular importance is the ability to *set the agenda* in this communication. USAID efforts to program for improved governance should target these intergovernmental institutions, with an eye towards giving agenda-setting power to the relatively weaker actors. For instance, in countries where decentralization is limited, a USAID-sponsored forum that brings together central and subnational actors might be chaired by regional/provincial elected officials on a rotating basis, rather than by the central ministry. Conversely, USAID could sponsor similar forums chaired and led by central ministries that enable coordination among subnational actors. This minor change (and others like it) can help reestablish intergovernmental relations on a basis that facilitates greater voice for the weaker level of government; this is noted also in section 4 below.

### 3.3.3 APPROACH: SUPPORT "MOST LOCAL LEVEL" RESOURCE MOBILIZATION BELOW REGIONAL/PROVINCE LEVELS

A second programming solution to the challenge of strong divisive forces is to take resource mobilization below the regional level and down to the most local level possible.  This approach will often avoid or prevent identity group affiliations that could lead to national disintegration, especially ethnicities that predominate in a region.  Whereas cultivating regional or provincial-level resource can empower subnational groups that can challenge national unity, local groups rarely achieve such scale.

The concepts of autonomy and capacity apply to civil society institutions as well as to governments, and civil society organizations may have these characteristics needed to mobilize resources.  Civil society is naturally seen as the subject acting to ensure *accountability*, but groups also wield autonomy and capacity.  Some civil society institutions indeed have more *capacity* than some local governments in the mobilization of resources, precisely because of their *autonomy* from government institutions.[5]  While governments (both national and local) are historically associated with webs of patronage and clientelism in Africa, some civil society institutions exhibit the ability to mobilize resources (through voluntary "contributions" or *cotisations* in francophone Africa) because they are largely trusted, legitimate, and seen as accountable to their members.  In other words, civil society organizations represent an opportunity and a key resource that can be drawn upon to gather the resources necessary to make for an effective provision of public goods and public services.  Programming should seek to draw upon the powers and legitimacy that many of these groups possess, whether in the case of village, hometown, or neighborhood associations; NGOs, voluntary organizations, or cooperatives; women's or youth groups; and secular or religious institutions. A caveat is

ensuring that decentralization programming linking civil society institutions to service provision does not allow government to shirk responsibilities, leaving these to other institutions; the key is that accountability to civil society remains part of the approach.

Moreover, programming on a local basis has roots in many African societies. By programming at the very local level (such as the village or sub-village) rather than the provincial or district level, USAID can leverage local-level resources in the form of human and financial capital. This can improve public services and provide public goods, without enabling larger ethno-regional groupings to develop the strong fiscal autonomy that challenge national unity. Successes in resource mobilization at the local level have been observed even in low income countries such as Mali, where civil society organizations have collaborated with local and central government institutions to create local public goods. It is also relevant in countries where decentralization is being attempted anew, such as Kenya, where the *harambee* tradition initially held that communities would collectively operate at very local levels; though the system was distorted during one-party rule for decades, there are some indications that *harambee* will make a comeback under the new strategy of devolution there.

## 3.4 ECONOMIC BASE: GEOGRAPHY, EXTRACTIVE INDUSTRY, AND STATE FAVORITISM

Besides histories of conflict, imbalances in the economic base are another prevalent situation in Africa that exacerbates social divisions and can increase the potential for instability. Given Africa's low degree of economic development and substantial natural resource wealth, the division of economic spoils is a major question in countries from Guinea to Cameroon to Zambia. Within a given country, extractive industry is rarely distributed evenly across the national territory. There are many countries (such as Ghana or Zambia) where some areas are markedly wealthier than others due to resource wealth and related industrial investment, and there are other countries where resource-rich regions have not benefited and lag behind in many development indicators (such as the Niger Delta in Nigeria, relative to other parts of southern Nigeria).

Most African countries have high levels of economic inequality between regions or between major cities and rural areas. The geographic base of the economy creates the potential for conflict, as do perceptions (often justified) of government favoritism in allocating resources. The geographic distribution of economic resources represents a distinct category of situations where conflict might arise. The most obvious cause would be in countries where some regions have abundant natural resource wealth and others lack these resources. The most well-known ongoing example is the Niger Delta conflict in Nigeria, though extractive industry has been at the source of violent conflict in many countries from Liberia and Sierra Leone to the long war between Sudan and present-day South Sudan.

Not all regional variations in wealth are based upon natural resources. Many countries have high levels of economic inequality, with industrial bases often concentrated in a single major city or sub-region. For much of Africa, the dominant economic center is the capital city (though Nigeria, Cameroon, South Africa and others will have a leading city that is not the capital). In this circumstance as well, conflict or social divisions can emerge between groups that see themselves as competing over access to the national wealth. A prominent version of this comes when one major city (or a small number of major cities) generates a large portion of national fiscal revenues. In these cases, government expenditures in smaller towns and villages may be

seen as forced redistribution, to which urban residents may object.[6] Related to this urban-rural distinction, it also has happened that major cities are the only localities with the resources and capacity to take on tasks that have been devolved to them, while other areas are stuck in a limbo with responsibilities devolved, but inadequate revenues to meet these responsibilities; what may be meaningful decentralization for Dakar or Ouagadougou may be tantamount to an unfunded mandate for rural Senegal or Burkina Faso.

Finally, instability can come from the sense among a population that it is not receiving its share of the national economic pie or of the spoils of political power. This can have many variants, but in Africa can often result in conflict along lines of identity rather than social class: the instability is based on ethnic, regional, racial, or sectarian divisions. Conflicts in Kenya and Zimbabwe in recent years exhibit these characteristics, while the civil war in Côte d'Ivoire represented a variant of this situation. Preventing a sense of grievance is difficult, but the pressing issue is avoiding or containing civil strife over the question of resource distribution.

### 3.4.1 CHALLENGE: AVOIDING CONFLICT OVER RESOURCE DISTRIBUTION

In the contexts noted above, the challenge of promoting stability is clear. It is a question of promoting systems that maximize the likelihood that population groups will not take up arms against one another. Politics is often defined informally as "who gets what, when, and how", and groups are often especially attuned to the distribution of resources. They are worried when they perceive that the distribution disadvantages them. Instability may have many causes, but relative economic deprivation has long been established as one principal factor.[7] 5ariations in resource access within a country (whether by region or by identity group) pose threats to stability, or at least the potential for resentment that can feed instability. A populace with a significant grievance will be likelier to initiate conflict, especially where state structures are weak and unable to halt these groups.[8] Conversely, populations are more likely to avoid conflict if they have fewer grievances, and if the state exhibits enough strength to attend to demands (or put down rebellion). The two suggestions below are ways to use the process of decentralization to mitigate the conflicts that may emerge.

### 3.4.2 APPROACH: FACILITATE DIALOGUE BETWEEN ACTORS (HORIZONTAL AND VERTICAL) ON RESOURCE DISTRIBUTION

There is no magic bullet to prevent tensions between identity groups, but one overarching argument derived from the historical evidence is that grievances are often mitigated through inclusive deliberations and negotiated settlements. The greatest recent example of this in Africa may be South Africa, where the transition from apartheid was a negotiated settlement that defied expectations.[9] A programming approach that facilitates such dialogue over the distribution of resources) can help decentralization contribute to stability. The best solution for donors seeking to support stability in this context is not simply to provide technical assistance to craft an "ideal" distribution of resources, but rather to promote the inclusion of major groups in political bargaining processes. In short, the decentralization of decision making can itself facilitate stability.

Donors such as USAID should be careful to avoid a contradiction between rhetoric and practice: if USAID advocates for participatory practices at the local level on the grounds that it contributes to democratic governance and proper resource allocation, then it should not simply assume technocratic assistance in the determination of revenue distributions will contribute to

development or democracy.  While there are clearly circumstances that require decision making by technocratic elites, the existential questions about the sharing of national revenues should be subject to some degree of open deliberation.

This presents the opportunity for USAID to build or contribute to a participatory process by which revenue demands are formulated.  This does not necessarily mean involving itself directly as a party in overtly political debates.  It can include, rather, assistance in formulating plans, budgets, and capital investment proposals for subnational levels of government; these will form the basis of a subnational perspective on resource allocation.  It can also sponsor regional forums that bring together actors from different levels, with USAID being instrumental in ensuring that subnational interests are as well-articulated as those of central governments.  It can include use of donor-sponsored funds on a competitive basis that emphasizes transparency in awards. In short, USAID can build capacity for subnational units to articulate their claims to central government resources.  By preparing subnational actors to be ready and able contributors to debates on resource allocation, USAID can simultaneously build capacity, increase transparency and accountability, and perhaps buttress subnational autonomy.

### 3.4.3  APPROACH: ASSIST IN DESIGNING SYSTEMS THAT BALANCE CENTRAL AND SUBNATIONAL INTERESTS

The second approach for supporting stability in economically divided societies is designing systems that balance the interests of central and subnational actors.  This links to the issues noted directly above, and also links to the previous section on balancing power. Here, the emphasis is on the equitable distribution of fiscal resources, or at least a distribution that is acceptable to various parties.

For countries where there are imbalances between one or more wealthy urban areas and poorer rural areas, decentralization can be structured to minimize latent conflicts.  Rather than allowing a clear urban bias (or only redistribution from urban to rural areas), decentralization can be designed with multiple components.  For instance, central governments in many countries have developed formulas for co-financing development projects with local governments that include both population and the local poverty rate or average income as indicators in the calculation; the former indicator favors large urban areas and the latter favors poorer areas.  Similarly, the center might combine cost-of-living adjustments for teachers or other national civil servants in capital cities with extra incentives for these public sector workers to take positions in the lowest-income rural areas, according to the perceived desirability of those posts.  This is compatible with the dialogue-based approach listed in section 3.4.2 above, if USAID programming supports open dialogue that sets an agenda to address these urban-rural divides, rather than proposing technical formulas directly.

Cases of natural resource rich countries pose a variant of this challenge. Many countries in Africa consider subsoil resources (such as oil and minerals) to be national, not local or individual.  Nonetheless, countries such as Nigeria have guaranteed that a portion of revenues extracted from natural resource collection are returned to the local area.  Again here, the national division of revenue is fundamentally a policy decision that is beyond the scope of most USAID programming, yet the principle of supporting intergovernmental dialogue to prevent instability remains in effect. The principle is assisting actors in partner countries with their home-grown process of decision making.  This and the other ideas outlined in this section are noted in Table 1 below.

**TABLE 1. PROGRAMMING GUIDANCE:**

**STABILITY IN DIVIDED SOCIETIES AND FRAGILE STATES**

| Context | Divided Societies and Fragile States |
|---|---|
| **Main Goal** | **Stability** |
| **Challenge** | Give stakes in the system and avoid disintegration |
| **Approaches** | Support local-level resource mobilization |
| | Balance power across intergovernmental institutions |
| **Challenge** | Avoid conflict over resource distribution |
| **Approaches** | Facilitate dialogue on resource distribution |
| | Assist in designing systems that balance national and subnational interests |

# 4.0 CENTRALIZED POLITIES: THE GOALS OF DEMOCRACY AND DEVELOPMENT

This section examines polities that have an enduring tradition of top-down government. The two main contexts identified here are countries with top-down states and those with dominant political parties. Of course, these two phenomena coexist in many cases. The approaches emphasize trainings for appointed officials and permanent local staff rather than elected officials, bottom-up dialogue within political parties and between government actors that enhance the voice of underrepresented groups, and sequencing that decentralizes governance over time.

## 4.1 DEMOCRACY AND DEVELOPMENT AS GOALS IN CENTRALIZED POLITIES

In countries with highly centralized governance, the greatest challenge for USAID programming is likely to be promoting democracy and the principle of inclusive governance. Centralism in Africa has meant a lack of political participation for much of the populace. Indeed, it is the legacy of the centralized state – and its failures in the areas of development, democracy, and stability alike – that gave rise to much of the current enthusiasm about decentralization. By taking decision making down to local levels, new opportunities emerge for new voices to enter the political sphere, including groups that are minorities at the national level and those groups that have been historically underrepresented in national government yet are essential to governance in their communities, especially women.

While improving democracy and governance will be the main challenge in centralized systems, development is also a likely challenge here, since highly centralized states in the developing world have long track records of underperformance at establishing environments where development can thrive, but this can be understood for present purposes as a governance challenge that is best addressed through interventions to democratize and decentralize decision making. Stability may be a challenge, but this goal is likeliest to emerge in the cases of divided societies and failed states mentioned above; to the extent that a society is riven by social divisions, it is best addressed by looking at section 3 of this guide, regardless of whether the state is centralized in structure or not.

## 4.2 STATE-BUILDING AND INSTITUTION BUILDING UNDER CENTRALIZED INSTITUTIONS

Since democracy and governance programming focuses on building institutions of the state and civil society, the question becomes how this plays out in centralized states. The question is, What does it mean to build state institutions when the state is already highly centralized, and could

"state building" or "institution building" exacerbate the problem? It is certainly possible that support provided to central governments in these circumstances could result in more top-down control. Accordingly, building institutions here means supporting and developing institutions of local government and civil society. Building local government units can be seen as a form of state building, since it extends public authorities down to the local level, but it is not a matter of strengthening central state institutions further or helping them to dominate civil society. On the contrary, the form of capacity building envisioned here looks more like supporting institutions that counteract the power of the central state, whether these are viable subnational governance units or social institutions that act to hold the central government in check.

## 4.3    CENTRALIZED INSTITUTIONS: TOP-DOWN STATES

Africa has a history of centralized governance in many countries, with a long legacy of top-down administration, and centralized authorities are typically reticent to abandon the prerogatives they have long held. A primary challenge will be establishing meaningful policies to decentralize governance, as programming to support local/subnational governance depends upon the existence of at least a degree of decentralization; on the programming side, a leading challenge is ensuring that decentralization is actually implemented, supported, and enforced, and not undercut by the politically dominant central institutions. As noted below, approaches involve supporting gradual increases in the responsibilities and powers of subnational actors

African local politics has long been characterized by a paradox in which central states are too weak to promote development at the local level, yet are too strong relative to other levels of government. Gaining control of the central state became the focal point of much of African politics for decades, precisely because governments and regimes that controlled the state apparatus could appropriate resources for private gain. Instead of effective public services and effective local governance, the populations of towns and villages received patronage if they were connected (by kinship, for example) to the government, and neglected if they were not. Central states tried to overcome their weakness through domination (as with military rule) and manipulation (as with civilian regimes that relied on corruption and patronage to maintain control), rather than by building effective linkages between government and society, such as tax capacity, democratic governance, and accountable administration. The tendency towards dysfunctional administration created a vicious circle in which weak states tried to centralize decision making to keep control, which resulted in further deterioration of state capacity.[10]

This pattern of top-down administration with weak governance is most apparent in former French and Portuguese colonies, though it also exists in former British colonies. Indeed, a few years after the wave of decolonization crested in 1960, most francophone countries fell under the rule of a one-party state (see section 4.4 below for more on parties), often for the better part of three decades. In lusophone countries, one-party states also emerged after independence in 1974, though Angola and Mozambique were long divided by civil war during the Cold War era. Several former British colonies also developed one-party states, including Tanzania and Kenya, though many others experienced a sequence of coups and disorderly alternations between military and civilian rule.[11]

In this context, which lasted up to Africa's modest "wave" of decentralization in the 1990s and 2000s, there was little room for the creation and building of effective local government or bottom-up governance. Rather, central states viewed local administrations as appendages that

served the interests of the center. They were transmission belts for central directives and for any necessary distribution of patronage, and not instances where local residents could articulate their demands. This pattern – which lasted for more than a generation and attained a degree of encrustation in the political culture – continues to inform African governance today. In general, central states are reticent to devolve authority, are skeptical that subnational governments and subnational units have the capacity to do the work of government, and are often suspicious that decentralization will contribute more to social fragmentation than to better governance.

### 4.3.1 CHALLENGE: ENSURING DECENTRALIZATION IS IMPLEMENTED AND LOCAL OFFICIALS ARE NOT "SET UP TO FAIL"

Where the center has been the repository of political power for decades, getting decentralization implemented is difficult. Elected officials passing legislation to decentralize power is only a first step: the actual fulfillment of a decentralization process depends upon the ministries, bureaucracies, and public servants that put decentralization into effect. The Comparative Analysis of Decentralization in Africa found that a common experience in Africa was the passage of decentralization laws that were then not fully implemented in practice; this is the difference between decentralization *de jure* and decentralization *de facto*. One of the lead challenges in African decentralization is closing this gap between changes in law and real changes in governance practice.

 A second and related challenge is that subnational actors (whether elected or appointed) may be "set up to fail". Central governments often "drag their feet" on transferring powers, resources, and authorities, but they can also undercut subnational governance by recentralizing power, and poor performance by subnational actors can serve as a justification for this. The clearest case from the recent *CADA* studies is Uganda, where recentralization has been explicit, but dissatisfaction with local governance and intergovernmental relations may also have contributed to the 2012 coup in Mali. Less egregious (but more common) examples come when central governments argue that subnational actors have demonstrated inadequate capacity to assume new functions. If decentralization laws include "big" provisions to devolve or deconcentrate major responsibilities, they may be less likely to be enforced in practice, on the grounds that the decentralized units are ill-prepared for important duties.

States have been known to use the "lack of local capacity" as a justification to stop implementing decentralization, even after legal authorities for subnational governments have been established. The technical capacity of local actors may indeed be lower than central governments in most countries, and may remain so for some time. Yet this centralist logic is untenable for two reasons. First, capacity develops through the exercise of authority and the cultivation of autonomy, yet central states will often prevent this development that can be a virtuous circle (albeit in a slow process). Instead, a lack of decentralization creates a vicious circle in which no autonomy is given because local capacity is low, and capacity thus fails to develop, which in turn necessitates continued centralism. Breaking this logic requires some degree of meaningful decentralization. Second, central states in Africa have themselves demonstrated low capacity over long periods of time. They may have technical skills, but they also failed to promote development for over 30 years, proved susceptible to conflict, and were guilty of massive misappropriation of funds. These failures too must be understood as a lack of capacity, which is not just technical preparation, but is more broadly the ability of state institutions to respond to public demands. In this sense, a recurring theme in the *CADA* reports is that decentralized levels

of government should be granted the opportunity to demonstrate and build capacity where central states have failed.

### 4.3.2 APPROACH FOR THE GOAL OF DEVELOPMENT: FAVOR "STEPWISE" DECENTRALIZATION THAT ADDS LOCAL CAPACITY OVER TIME

From a perspective focused on development as the main outcome, it is often advisable to build subnational capacity and responsibilities gradually, rather than decentralizing power and resources in a "big bang" process. "Stepwise" processes that add capacity over time will allow new or reformed subnational units to accumulate experience managing and administering increasingly difficult tasks. These units will not be set up to fail with responsibilities beyond their capacity. A demonstrated ability to execute decentralized tasks in turn should temper the center's incentive to recentralize.[12] In a pragmatic sense, central governments will also likely be more comfortable implementing gradual decentralization, as contrasted with likely efforts to avoid transfers of resources and responsibilities that may come with dramatic changes. Decentralization should not be designed simply to accommodate the center's jealousy, but a stepwise process can have superior development outcomes if it enables the systematic building of subnational capacity and accountability mechanisms.

To be sure, decentralization is rarely "excessive" in Africa, and in most cases it has been quite modest.[13] Does this mean African decentralization has adopted the "right approach"? Not necessarily, though in some cases this may be true. Many African central governments have passed decentralization framework laws and have begun the slow transfer of responsibilities to local levels, accompanied by revenue transfers that are quite often based on transparent formulas. An approach for USAID in these contexts is to maintain pressure on central governments such that decentralization does not stall or backslide. In terms of programming, this implies work on both the civil society side and in building the capacity of subnational actors both to perform tasks and to coordinate and demand the responsibilities and resources that have been transferred to them by law.

In some cases, USAID may wish to support *deconcentration* as part of an appropriate programming strategy to support the goal of development in some of these environments. Effective programming that has a meaningful decentralization component here depends upon USAID pushing for accountability mechanisms that point "downward" to local residents and civil society, and for changes that increase the autonomy and capacity of deconcentrated officials. Without changes in these underlying characteristics, deconcentration will remain a top-down affair. The possibility of *delegation* should also not be overlooked. Delegation is more rarely considered in the decentralization literature than devolution or deconcentration, but it is generally consistent with the forms of decentralization seen in Africa. In much of Africa, decentralization has nominally taken the form of devolution, but this devolution has been undercut by deconcentrated officials that continue to exercise much authority. The result is a decentralization in which elected subnational governments largely undertake specific tasks at the behest of central government officials; that is, in essence delegation. USAID programming can support improved decentralization by helping to organize subnational actors and facilitate the articulation of their needs and demands to central government.

In short, decentralization can be supported from a programming perspective by devolving, delegating, or deconcentrating *simpler tasks first and decentralizing gradually*. In this sense, the limited decentralization that has occurred in Africa in recent years may be seen as a first step in a

longer process in which states decentralize basic responsibilities for public services such as health and education, with the intention of building up over time. A typical "stepwise" process (in health or education, e.g.) might look like the following, though in some cases the first several steps may be taken simultaneously:

1. Catalog and transfer assets (such as buildings, desks, etc.) to local control with subnational units responsible for maintenance; transfer resources to match
2. Establish protocols for small-scale procurements (such as supplies) by subnational units and transfer these responsibilities; transfer resources to match
3. Establish protocols for large-scale procurements (such as new construction) by subnational units and transfer these responsibilities; transfer resources to match
4. Develop subnational human resource management (teachers, health workers, etc.), and progressively transfer public servants to subnational payrolls; transfer resources to match

Each of these steps is conducive to programming that supports capacity building. The stepwise process also minimizes the likelihood of major errors or subnational failures that could injure the decentralization process or lead to attempts at recentralization.

The conclusion is that advocates of decentralization should support progressively building subnational capacity in a gradual process so as not to overwhelm new decentralized units, while continuing to exert policy pressure on central states to respond to growing capacity with further doses of authority, autonomy, and downward accountability. Specific examples of programming approaches in such a context are numerous. One example might include working with district-level officials to improve monitoring mechanisms and public accountability measures for overseeing the likes of school facilities and health clinics. Another might be working with newly-established subnational civil service bodies (which are often still weak, in countries where these are even established) to prepare for the eventual hiring and firing of subnational civil servants. More generally, USAID can see its projects as necessarily complementary to central government obligations to support decentralized units; this serves as a reminder that many programming interventions may operate best not in the direct project-based provision of capacity-building, but at the level of policy reform and advocacy targeting central governments, since the latter should leverage more sustainable and permanent efforts to localize governance.

### 4.3.3  APPROACH (DEMOCRACY): FACILITATE AGENDA-SETTING BY LOCAL ACTORS

The approach above highlighted the goal of development, but it is also possible to program to support democratic deepening in highly centralized states. With a view towards making governance more bottom-up and hopefully more democratic, USAID can endeavor to broaden the base of political decision making. This essentially requires cultivating the voice of civil society actors vis-à-vis local government, and that of subnational actors vis-à-vis central government. Some of this occurs at the policy level – for instance, with electoral rules that make subnational officials accountable to local populations – but some of this can also be taken on at the project level.

Programming approaches that will prove useful in democratizing decision making will be those that open up public debate to local voices. This involves forums and avenues through which actors besides those in central government are empowered to make public statements and to help determine the nature and flow of which topics are up for debate. Examples can take place in multiple forms, each of which is amenable to USAID programming:

1. Agenda-setting in public forums.  This can take the form of civil society organizations being granted "the floor" in local meetings such as town halls, in ways that elected officials cannot exclusively control.  It can also take the form of subnational officials having the say over the rules of intergovernmental meetings (perhaps by chairing some such meetings, e.g.)
2. Agenda-setting in media. This is related to public forums, but can be extended to donor-supported community radio initiatives, or publications, press releases, and public relations support for associations of local or regional governments, or of subnational elected officials (mayors' associations or governors' associations, e.g.)
3. Agenda-setting in policy debates.  The programmatic ideas here are similar to those for public forums above, but can also take place in "closed door" meetings among ministerial officials, intergovernmental coordinating bodies, and the like.  It matter that subnational officials have input into the agenda and tone of such meetings, and programming initiatives can support the coordination among subnational officials that enables them to contribute.

In all of these cases, USAID programming can ensure that voices traditionally underrepresented in debates about governance are given ample opportunity to affect policy and governance.  This set of approaches is elaborated upon in section 5 of this guide.

## 4.4    CENTRALIZED INSTITUTIONS: DOMINANT PARTIES

State bureaucracies are not the only institutions in Africa that exert a centripetal force in governance.  Decentralization on the continent is also challenged by the prevalence of dominant political parties.  These parties often are internally structured such that their leaders – especially top national executives beginning with presidents – have considerable control.  This contributes to centralized governance overall, and demands a programmatic response if USAID wishes to support decentralization.

Africa has a large number of countries with a single dominant party, as evidenced by the sample used in the CADA. Of the 10 countries examined, at least seven are clear dominant-party systems, with another two (Mali and Nigeria) having party systems that are somewhat more fragmented and unstable, but with a single party that has been the only party to control the presidency since democratization and has retained a majority in the legislature throughout that time. The exception to the dominant-party tendency is Ghana, with a clear two-party system that has twice witnessed party alternation at the presidential level since 2000 and has been almost evenly divided between the two main parties (the NDC and NPP).

### 4.4.1   CHALLENGE: PROMOTING RESPONSIVE DEMOCRATIC LOCAL GOVERNANCE UNDER LIMITED COMPETITION

In the context of dominant parties, there are several challenges for the promotion of democratic local governance, the clearest of which is ensuring autonomy for subnational governments and a degree of downward accountability. This challenge emerges due to the likelihood of top-down governance and strong party discipline – that is, the exercise of control over party members by party leaders – in dominant party systems.  Dominant parties can lead to a perversion of the characteristics of decentralized governance if accountability flows almost exclusively upward, with subnational officials primarily interested in accommodating the needs of central officials rather than local constituents.  Under these circumstances, autonomy is undermined as directives

flow down from party leadership.  Indeed, even capacity can be compromised to the extent subnational officials focus more on pleasing central government supervisors than on satisfying constituent demands.[14]

Dominant parties are not necessarily anti-democratic, as the cases of Botswana and South Africa show.  These are two of the most democratic systems on the continent, and are fully multi-party in the formal sense, yet have been dominated by a single party since becoming democracies.  Party discipline is also consistent with democratic governance, as is the case in many legislatures in industrialized countries.  Yet dominant parties with party discipline suggest that politics will not operate from the "bottom up".  That is, these characteristics of dominant party systems run counter to the principles that make USAID wish to support decentralization.

### 4.4.2  APPROACH: CAPACITY BUILDING FOR PERMANENT LOCAL STAFF

One programming initiative in this environment is prioritizing capacity building for permanent local staff, rather than elected officials.  This means working with those civil servants at the local level that are neither elected, nor top-ranking political appointees.  Examples include clerks, local secretaries-general, office staff, and the like.  USAID might even work with host country governments to increase the number and proportion of local staff that are employed on a permanent basis.  The reasoning here is that permanent staff will often be local public servants on an indefinite basis.  This contrasts with elected officials whose electoral fortunes may wax and wane, and who may not be in their current posts for long, whether due to losses in reelection bids or to advancement to higher levels of office.  Investments in capacity building and training in local governance for permanent local staff can be more cost-effective because it will not be directed at personnel who may not be present in the future.  Furthermore, permanent staff at the local level are often less vulnerable (though not impervious) to the vicissitudes of party politics.  Bureaucrats and public servants are not apolitical, but they do have incentives to work with incumbents regardless of party.  In dominant-party systems, they may often have an extended working relationship with members of the dominant party, but they may also need to work effectively with the opposition at the local level.  Such capacity building is relatively familiar to USAID program officers, and will not be elaborated upon here.

### 4.4.3  APPROACH: PARTY DIALOGUE WITHIN AND BETWEEN PARTIES

The second possible approach to decentralizing power in dominant-party systems points at the advantages for democratic governance from enhancing pluralism.  That is, USAID programming can help increase the number of voices that have say in local politics, even in the context of a single dominant party.  Principally, this will come from work within the party.  Dominant parties may be keen to welcome USAID interventions so long as these serve the party's prerogatives, but it is possible that programming can be both acceptable to the leading party and work to alter its patterns of behavior.  Specifically, USAID can work with party members (not excluding opposition members, but acknowledging the reality of party dominance) on several related initiatives.  The main principle is helping the party to find ways to incorporate bottom-up contributions from the rank-and-file or from citizens at large.  Parties operate to transmit information both from the bottom-up and from the top-down, and USAID can prioritize the latter.  This can take place through a mechanism proposed at several points in this guide: organizing meetings and forums in which underrepresented voices are brought together and given opportunities to set the agenda for dialogue.  If party meetings are typically affairs run by high-ranking officials, USAID can encourage the convening of complementary forums where the

perspectives of local party members are aggregated, coordinated, and expressed. Over time, this pluralistic approach to internal party operations will contribute to "socializing" party members into a role where they convey information (such as demands and needs) from local communities up the chain of command to higher levels.

This process above may take time to show results, but it is likely better than the alternatives. In particular, programmers should not expect significant results from dialogue between parties, given the history of a lack of power-sharing on the continent, at least in the absence of civil conflict. There is little to suggest that dominant parties will attend to the concerns of weak opposition parties, or willingly share power with them. Put another way, there are precious few instances where governing parties exhibit "political will" to engage in consensus-building with the opposition. Exceptions occur mainly when the center has strong incentive to bargain or negotiate, which usually happens under duress, especially in cases of conflict or strife when the opposition has some claim to control part of a territory.

Table 2 below briefly summarizes the approaches recommended for programming in countries characterized by centralized states and/or political party systems with a dominant party.

### TABLE 2. PROGRAMMING GUIDANCE:
### DEMOCRACY IN CENTRALIZED SYSTEMS

| Context | Centralized Polities |
|---|---|
| Main Goal | **Democracy** |
| Challenge | Promote decentralization and avoid further (re)centralization |
| Approaches | Build decentralization slowly in stepwise fashion, adding capacity over time |
| | Facilitate agenda-setting by local actors |
| Challenge | Promoting responsiveness in dominant party systems |
| Approaches | Build capacity for permanent local staff |
| | Facilitate dialogue within parties |

# 5.0 STRONG SUBNATIONAL INSTITUTIONS: THE GOALS OF DEVELOPMENT AND DEMOCRACY

Subnational institutions are not weak everywhere in Africa, even if the continent has been characterized by centralized states. Africa has many strong social forces at the local level, such as civic groups or traditional authorities, and some countries (especially federal states) also have strong subnational governments. Where subnational bodies are powerful, promoting DRG goals is often a matter of establishing an appropriate balance of power between state institutions at different levels, or between state actors and social actors. The major theme for programming in these contexts is *coordination between actors.* Where subnational government is strongly empowered, promoting improved DLG may even involve strengthening *central* institutions that coordinate across sectors and levels of government.

## 5.1 DEVELOPMENT AND DEMOCRACY AS GOALS WITH STRONG SUBNATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

In many parts of Africa, the most enduring institutions are at the local or subnational level. These fall in several categories. The most obvious examples are traditional or *customary authorities*, which operate locally and often exercise considerable control over issues of local import, including land tenure and natural resource governance and management. The impact of these traditional authorities on governance is extensive in some contexts, and they may act in ways that contribute to USAID goals or in ways that hinder them. In society at large, other powerful institutions at the local level include *non-governmental organizations*, *religious institutions*, and any number of *civil society* groups that have a permanent presence. Additionally, *political parties* are found where civil society and the state intersect, and some political parties may have a strong subnational presence; they often bridge the divide between formal institutions of government and those of civil society, playing a crucial role in aggregating and channeling the demands, preferences, and interests of local populations. Insofar as political parties cultivate local support and respond to actors at the subnational level, they may be important "subnational institutions" as well. Powerful subnational institutions also include formal

state institutions in some countries (especially federal countries) with robust and deeply embedded systems of subnational governments.  In addition, some official state institutions under the purview of the central government may be seen as strong subnational institutions, if these are primarily responsive to local needs and demands.  Examples may include delegated (or even deconcentrated) authorities that are accountable to local representatives or populations.

In contexts where one or another of these local institutions is strong, the most pressing goal for programming is probably development (much as section 3 emphasized stability and section 4 emphasized democracy).  This because the presence of strong local institutions often indicates some pre-existing degree of democratic local governance: where society is criss-crossed with local civil society institutions and/or robust local governments, the most pressing challenge will be coordinating the action of these institutions so that they function for the common good.  Strengthening democracy at the subnational level can often be an intermediate step, of course, to improving local collective action for development.  The emphasis on development and democracy does not negate the importance of stability as a goal in these contexts.  Rather, the question of stability in the presence of strong subnational institutions was generally addressed in section 3 on divided societies (since movements likely to compromise stability are those that exacerbate subnational divisions).  Given that development is perhaps the crucial challenge in the presence of strong subnational institutions, the programming approaches in this section regularly emphasize coordination between existing actors.

## 5.2    STATE-BUILDING AND INSTITUTIONAL COORDINATION WITH STRONG SUBNATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

Development programming routinely centers on the building and supporting of institutions that can provide public services or promote public goods over an extended period of time.  Where strong institutions exist already, the question becomes how to leverage the power of these institutions to provide the public services or promote the public goods in question.  A primary programming challenge is coordinating the actions of the multiple relevant actors – local governments, NGOs and civil society, political parties, traditional and religious authorities and central states – to ensure development.  The building of the state's capacity to coordinate is a key intermediate step.  To be clear, building state capacity does not imply that programming should promote the state's dominance over subnational institutions. On the contrary, the best programming approach is to develop the state's capacity to coordinate without dominating.  This means state institutions retain authority and establish a rule of law, while leveraging the developmental strength and democratic impulses of social institutions.

The state is the key institution in public life, yet it is historically very weak in much of Africa (even in centralized states as seen in section 4), where processes of state formation and state building are incomplete.  The weakness of the state's presence is clearest in the "hinterlands" and more remote rural areas of many USAID partner countries, where state institutions are thinly distributed and exhibit low developmental capacity.  This does not mean such areas are devoid of institutions; as noted above, the premise of this section is that rural areas with weak linkages to the modern state may be characterized by any number of institutions, from active local associations of farmers to vibrant churches or

mosques. The question is how the activities of these institutions can be aligned with national goals to promote broader citizenship, literacy, public health, economic growth and development, and so on. Where the state is strong, it is capable of exercising its power to ensure such coordination, but where the state is weak it may not achieve this. The upshot is the need to build the state's capacity to coordinate and mediate between the powers of strong social forces.

## 5.3 STRONG LOCAL INSTITUTIONS: THE COORDINATION IMPERATIVE

The first version of strong subnational institutions to consider occurs when civic organizations and civil society are well-established and powerful; another is where subnational *governments* are powerful, as considered in section 5.4. The presence of local civic organizations implies that there is the requisite capacity in society for communities to arrange for the provision of public goods or public services, so long as the state performs the requisite task of coordinating this activity for the benefit of the populace at large. In the absence of this sort of coordination, strong local organizations may direct their energies to activities that serve only a subset of the population (often the members of the strong group itself). The programming challenge is ensuring that the strong institutions are responsive to the public at large.

It may seem that having strong local institutions is self-evidently "good". Why would it be problematic? In brief, not all "civil society" organizations are interested in the public good. Rather, many are close to "special interest groups" that have particular interests and may support preferential treatment for their own members, as opposed to generally improved governance for all. They may be more akin to self-interested "lobbies" than advocates of good governance. Examples of "overly strong" groups can be local development associations that assume public functions in ways that benefit of their own members (such as through favoritism in contracts), or traditional authorities that arrogate the responsibility to represent a community while excluding certain groups (such as women, ethnic minorities, or youth), or "development brokers" that gain personally from intervening in donor projects, or even local militias or vigilante groups that may cast themselves as part of "civil society".[xv]

Two general programming approaches can help make strong local organizations responsive to the needs of a community at large. The first is promoting regular communication between the state and society, which helps make the actions of powerful actors transparent. The second is promoting institutions that balance the powers of the state and social actors. Strong social institutions – whether NGOs, religious groups, development associations, or otherwise – will be most beneficial to development when they are also counterbalanced by institutions that are designed to be accountable to the populace at large.

### 5.3.1 CHALLENGE: FORMALIZING ACCOUNTABILITY AND INSTITUTIONALIZING RESPONSIVENESS

Powerful social groups can use their leverage to hold government accountable, or they can use that leverage primarily to garner particularistic benefits for themselves, and good programming will promote the former over the latter.[xvi] The challenge is channeling or *institutionalizing* the contributions of social groups so that they contribute to governance

and benefit the populace at large. "Institutionalizing" has two distinct (yet related) meanings here. First, it implies regularizing the use of accountability mechanisms over time, and particularly in the periods between elections. When politics is institutionalized in this sense, there will be regular and consistent flows of information from citizen groups to government. The importance of this kind of institutionalization can be seen by the problems that arise when it is lacking: a common observation in assessments of African decentralization is that "accountability" occurs mainly around elections and that this is inadequate for quality governance.[xvii] Routinizing the pressure of local institutions on SNGs can enhance the responsiveness of governance.

The second meaning of institutionalizing is making sure that politics follows rule-based procedures, rather than being subjected to decisions made by personal whim. This implies predictable and transparent mechanisms for government action, and procedures that are open to all. It counters any tendency towards personalism, favoritism, nepotism, or other attempts to gain personal advantage. The challenge is again ensuring that pressures from strong local actors do not result in benefits accruing only to selected groups. Institutionalized politics helps this by keeping processes open and transparent. The programming themes that emerge from this challenge are consistent with those throughout this guide: what matters is regular and consistent communication and a balance of power between actors.

### 5.3.2 APPROACH: PROMOTE COMMUNICATION BETWEEN STATE AND SOCIETY

Perhaps the most intuitive way that programming can support the quality of decentralized governance is through enhanced communication between state institutions and civil society. One side of this coin is developing the capacity of civil society institutions to formulate and articulate their demands to state institutions. This approach has a long track record at USAID, with clear impacts on headcounts of participation and ongoing efforts to dig further into the evidence to determine the real governance impact of these "demand side" interventions. Examples include a range of programming options already familiar to USAID officers across sectors: the holding of regular public forums; the creation of participatory processes for areas such as budgeting, prioritizing, and planning; and the use of community radio and local media to disseminate information publicly. These forms of communication can contribute to institutionalizing responsiveness and accountability.

The other side of the coin (the "supply side") is programming that encourages the state's responsiveness to civil society. Even the best laid plans of social organizations will have little impact if public institutions are not receptive and willing to engage in dialogue. Strengthening the supply side means supporting the institutions where public accountability resides.[xviii] Accountability is not simply a matter of social groups using voice; it also depends upon state institutions being appropriately receptive to those voices, and listening while also retaining the autonomy to make decisions without undue influence from specific groups. For communication to work, local governments too must be part of participatory mechanisms and public forums, and they must do their part to communicate their decisions to local citizens and to transmit local demands "up the chain

of command" to higher-level actors as necessary.  Working communication depends upon information being spoken, but also received, processed, and used.

### 5.3.3   APPROACH: PROMOTE COUNTERVAILING AND BALANCING OF STATE POWERS AND SOCIAL POWERS

The second programming approach to institutionalize accountability is directed at cultivating a proper "balance of power" between state institutions and local civil society. While strong civil society is to be encouraged, state institutions must remain as the fundamental check on the excessive or inappropriate exercise of power by civic groups, and USAID programming can support the state's ability to intervene and mediate in society when local tensions arise. This is the most basic function of a state: to maintain law and order in the territory under its purview.  At the same time, programming should respond to the fact that state capacity has been low in Africa largely because of inadequate linkages between the state and social institutions, as noted above (with three main areas being inability to tax, failure to develop accountability mechanisms, and the treatment of public positions as opportunities for private gain).

In a general sense, the aim is to create checks and balances between different institutions. This includes helping civil society with the tasks of whistleblowing and monitoring state action, while helping the state in turn to assure that certain civil society organizations do not garner preferential treatment for their group members, or simply make unrealistic and unattainable demands.  USAID can support participatory processes in which civil society can express community needs and make demands of elected officials.  Simultaneously, USAID can help local officials to make necessary decisions (which will not always please everyone) and process information responsibly.  This implies more than just helping civil society formulate demands in the form of "wish lists".  It requires developing capacities for how alternatives should be weighed, how costs and benefits of public action can be calculated, and how tradeoffs and compromises must sometimes take shape.  Programming can support the technical decision making capacity of leadership on both the demand side and supply side, and can even support the "public relations" associated with the need to disseminate the results of fair and just decision making.  In short, building capacity among local actors means each must develop the ability to say "no" as well as "yes". Further programming options echo those noted throughout this guide: opening lines of communication between actors, establishing and maintaining public forums for dialogue (along with closed forums in which government officials can make necessary decisions), encouraging broadly participatory processes, and facilitating a degree of agenda-setting by traditionally weaker actors.   In addition to this, a final specific possibility for consideration is co-financing by state and social actors; this implies each actor having "skin in the game", which increases incentives for mutual checking and can build trust over time.

## 5.4   STRONG SUBNATIONAL GOVERNMENT UNDER FEDERALISM

Civil society groups are not the only strong subnational actors in Africa.  Occasionally, the strong subnational institutions are the subnational governments themselves.  Africa's federal countries deserve particular consideration with respect to programming here, as they are a special category of countries in which subnational governments are constitutionally empowered and protected, have significant political weight, and have a

much stronger degree of fiscal and administrative autonomy than district or local governments in other African countries. There are only four countries that fit the definition of federal states, and three are particularly weighty in terms of their impact on African development and politics, because they together represent over a third of sub-Saharan Africa's people: Ethiopia, Nigeria, and South Africa.[xix] These countries have important intermediate levels of government below the center and above the local government (states in Nigeria, provinces in South Africa, and regional states in Ethiopia).

Africa's federations developed strong subnational government in ways that are individually distinctive, yet follow a common pattern. In general, all three have constitutional protections for subnational governments: they have laws guaranteeing them autonomy over several major public services, guarantees of a substantial share of national revenues, their own elected officials, and representation at the national level in the form of an elected upper chamber of the national legislature (a Senate in Nigeria, House of Federation in Ethiopia, and National Council of Provinces in South Africa), though all three have a clear leading party that either is dominant (in Ethiopia and South Africa) or nearly so (in Nigeria). Each country also has similar imperatives behind the origins of federalism, namely the question of national stability and avoiding internal conflict. Federalism has been the attempted solution to ethnic and regional divides in Ethiopia and Nigeria, and was similarly the accommodation reached between the African National Congress and the National Party in the transition from apartheid in South Africa. In these contexts, the challenge is balancing central and subnational levels of government, in a "separation of powers" or "checks and balances" sense. This is so that the tensions implicit in federal systems result neither in disintegration (as in section 3) nor excessive centralization (see section 4).

### 5.4.1 CHALLENGE: ENSURING APPROPRIATE MIX OF CENTRAL AND SUBNATIONAL AUTHORITY

USAID officers considering decentralization programming in federal states should support appropriate blends of power and resources for the different levels of government. In some circumstances, patterns of governance necessitate more robust support for subnational units, because these units may not have significant powers in spite of the formal institution of federalism. Yet getting the right mix does not always mean more decentralization is a solution, especially in federal countries where subnational power tends to be greater. On the contrary, greater enforcement of central prerogatives can be helpful in some federal countries in order to improve the performance of subnational governments. For this reason, the specific challenge depends upon an assessment of the specific national context and the relations between levels of government. Where an imbalance of power favors the center, USAID can work to support greater decentralization of power and resources, while in cases where subnational units are running amok or are over-endowed with powers and resources, USAID can support institutions that re-equilibrate the mix in favor of the center. The challenge is thus in part an analytical one: how can USAID officers determine whether central and subnational authority should be increased or decreased?

There are three main federal countries in Africa – Ethiopia, Nigeria, and South Africa – each of which was examined in the context of USAID's Comparative Assessment of

Decentralization in Africa, and given this small number it is worth saying a word about each. Ethiopia and South Africa have several important similarities, despite many important differences between the countries. Both are federal and empower subnational governments, but both also have very significant centripetal forces, namely the dominant party, being the African National Congress (ANC) in South Africa and the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) in Ethiopia. In both cases, the national party leadership exerts significant control over the decision making of politicians at the subnational level, most of which also belong to the dominant party. Also significant in both cases – but perhaps moreso in the more democratic South Africa – is the state. In South Africa, the state plays a major role in setting standards and closely monitoring the expenditures and actions of the provinces, which implies a much more limited form of autonomy than the federal moniker might suggest. Nigeria represents a different case, as states may have "too much" power and resources. In an important sense, the high degree of autonomy and resources of Nigeria's states is a governance problem. To use the terms noted above, the states in Nigeria have substantial authority and autonomy, and even a relatively substantial technical capacity, but all of these characteristics complicate governance in the absence of an appropriate dose of state-level accountability to citizens and to the central government. Thus, South Africa and Ethiopia would likely be better positioned for more conventional decentralization programming designed to buttress the authority and autonomy of subnational units, whereas Nigeria may benefit most from stronger intergovernmental linkages that support the center's ability to interact with the states and exert some pressures on them to ensure accountability. This is explored further in the approaches below, which take a "balanced" view of the coordination challenge in federal systems.

### 5.4.2 APPROACH: SUPPORT INTERGOVERNMENTAL COORDINATING INSTITUTIONS (FISCAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE)

Federal countries in Africa can benefit from improvements in the institutions that link together the central government and the subnational units. No level of government can function in a vacuum, and strong linkages between levels are needed. Examples of such coordinating institutions are numerous, and can include: regular intra-sectoral meetings (as with the "MinMECs" in South Africa and similar proposals in a unitary state in Kenya); fiscal commissions that make transparent and public recommendations to legislatures on the distribution of fiscal resources; and coordinating offices within line ministries that are responsible for administrative decentralization. Yet coordinating institutions are not limited to bodies led by central governments. They can also include associations of municipalities or states. Of particular interest in centralized federations would be other forums that link national legislators (especially those in the upper chambers) more strongly to local constituencies. All of these institutions – whether situated in the central government or not – could facilitate the information flows between actors that underpin coordination for development. Obviously, decentralization proponents will wish to ascertain that the interests of subnational units are well-represented in such institutions (which is not inevitable), but central government too must play a major role.

USAID's general ambition in supporting coordinating bodies and intergovernmental forums should be to facilitate coordination between levels of government (often led by

central government) while protecting a degree of decision making autonomy for subnational actors.  The goal is maximizing the flow of information between actors, which in turn contributes to superior coordination.   At the same time, USAID can work on an agenda-setting angle to promote the voices that are relatively underrepresented in a given political system.  Doing so can help ensure that weaker actors get their representation and that the predominant actors (central states in centralized systems, e.g.) do not simply reassert their power in a new institutional environment.

### 5.4.3   APPROACH: BALANCE FISCAL DECENTRALIZATION WITH ADMINISTRATIVE OVERSIGHT

Another programming approach in the context of strong subnational governments builds on the theme just mentioned, and it makes use of the different forms and dimensions of decentralization outlined in the section I of this guide.  How can one strike the necessary balance between decentralized development and effective coordination by central actors?  Note that decentralization is multifaceted – with political, fiscal, and administrative components.  USAID programming can consider all three dimensions and make use of the multifaceted nature of decentralization to strike a balance between central and subnational power.

In particular, countries with strong subnational governments and a great deal of fiscal decentralization may benefit from strengthening administrative oversight and central government capacity to monitor subnational spending.  Where provinces or regions have political backing and receive substantial proportions of the national budget (such as Nigeria), they can pose a challenge to central efforts to guarantee national standards and can possibly even compromise economic stability if they spend in a profligate fashion.  In South Africa, the potential perils of fiscal federalism have been counteracted by the strong capacity and authority of central actors that engage in administrative oversight, with the National Treasury (the ministry of finance) being the main example.  Programming for "decentralization" need not always increase the autonomy of subnational actors; especially in federal countries it can take the form of strengthening intergovernmental relations through improved oversight.

Advocacy for stronger administrative oversight in Africa should be conditioned upon strong political and fiscal decentralization, lest USAID perpetuate the problems of hyper-centralization shown in section 4.  Central state power has often meant domination by a powerful central party and overbearing state, and even federations have been examples of this.  By contrast, excessively decentralized governance is relatively rare in Africa.  Nonetheless, when an analysis of country context suggests high degrees of political and fiscal decentralization, it is possible that a lesser degree of administrative decentralization (or a more robust continuation of central oversight) is in order.  The approaches to programming in countries with strong subnational institutions are summarized in Table 3.

## TABLE 3. PROGRAMMING GUIDANCE:
## DEVELOPMENT WITH STRONG SUBNATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

| Context | Strong Subnational Institutions |
|---|---|
| **Main Goal** | **Development** |
| **Challenge** | Formalize accountability, ensure responsiveness |
| **Approaches** | Institutionalize communication between state and social institutions |
| | Balance powers of state and social forces (via public fora, cofinancing, e.g.) |
| **Challenge** | Ensure appropriate mix of central and subnational power |
| **Approaches** | Support coordinating institutions between levels of government |
| | Use dimensions of decentralization (fiscal and administrative, e.g.) to balance power |

# 6.0 CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This paper concludes by briefly summarizing the approaches for decentralization programming, and noting how it may contribute to other USAID objectives and interact with other initiatives. By way of review, it is possible to sum up sections 3, 4, and 5 of this guide with the "Goldilocks" analogy noted previously. Some country contexts are too fragmented and divided (section 3) and some are too centralized (section 4), and these require different approaches and support for different actors to make them "just right". In divided societies, USAID can support stability through institutions that hold a country together, by facilitating dialogue and developing intergovernmental institutions that balance interests. In centralized systems, an emphasis on the goal of democracy points towards progressively building the capacities of local actors to manage their own affairs and articulate their demands to the center; advocating for increased in subnational autonomy is more advisable in this case than in fragmented systems. Meanwhile, section 5 is about countries where different subnational actors (whether in civil society or subnational governments themselves) are relatively strong. This is to be encouraged to an extent, but again the importance of balancing power between central and subnational actors (and between state and society) emerges. This glance at the various findings suggests several cross-cutting themes that emerge from this guide.
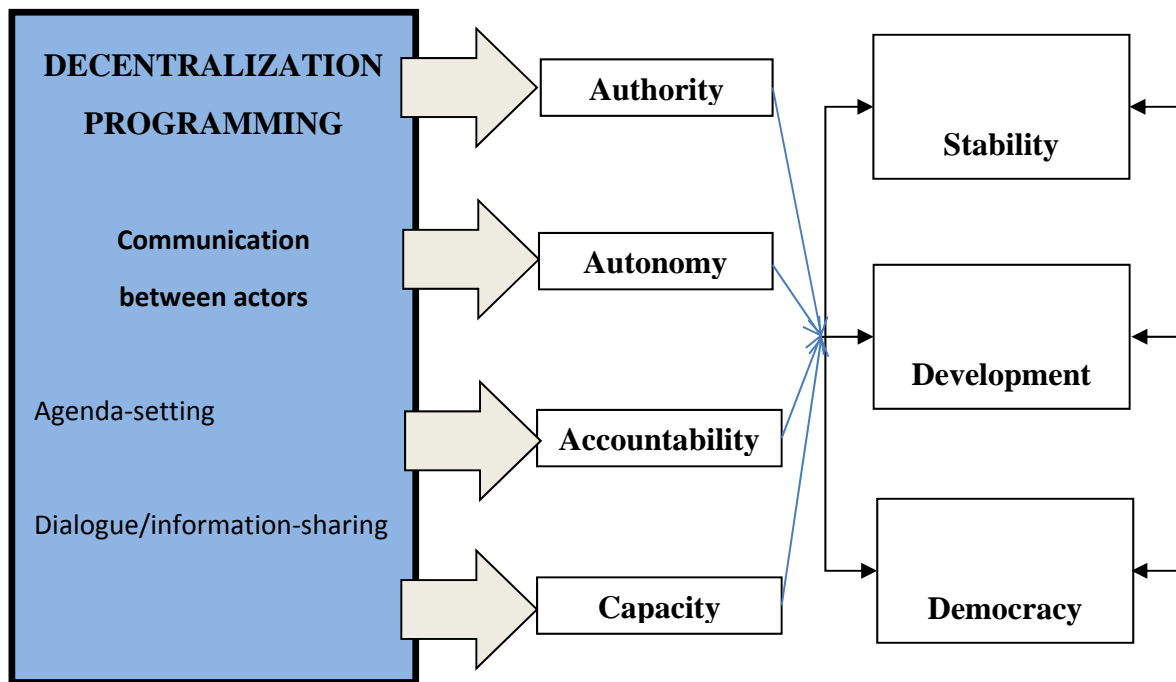
## 6.1 BETTER PROGRAMMING FOR DECENTRALIZATION: CROSS-CUTTING THEMES

Programming principles for decentralization in Africa were outlined schematically on page 1, but that figure can be recast here in more concrete fashion in light of the themes that recur in this guide. The two frequently recurring themes are the need for *communication* and the need to *balance power* in the intergovernmental system.

Under the rubric of communication between actors, there are two sub-themes. The first is thinking about agenda-setting. From USAID's perspective, this is essentially about amplifying the voices of relatively underrepresented or weaker groups. This idea of setting an agenda is familiar to those who have worked in conventional demand-side programming with civil society groups (where a goal is allowing civic groups to help set a development agenda), but the principle is more general: it can also be seen in how interactions happen between levels of government, among other areas. The other sub-theme is dialogue and information sharing, which can reduce tension between groups and facilitate coordination between development actors. The other main theme is balancing power between actors, for which the sub-themes revolve around the idea that "decentralization" programming should actually reflect a separation of powers between actors, with countervailing forces encouraged to ensure that no single actor or level of government comes to dominate a system. Contributing to effective intergovernmental relations will do more to support governance than treating decentralization as an end in

itself.  Concrete programming strategies can be built around these themes, with the intended impacts being enhancements in each of the familiar items seen on page 1: authority, autonomy, accountability, and capacity, with each in turn contributing to USAID's three major goals.

**FIGURE 2. DECENTRALIZATION PROGRAMMING:**

**A REVISED SCHEMATIC**



## 6.2    DECENTRALIZATION FOR BETTER PROGRAMMING: PRESIDENTIAL INITIATIVES AND EVIDENCE-BASED APPROACHES

Two final observations are in order about decentralization at USAID.  The first is that decentralization is a theme that cuts across sectors and is applicable in far more than just the democracy, rights, and governance sector.  Decentralization programming as outlined here can lead to symbioses and synergies with Presidential Initiatives and other sectors.  Those initiatives and sectors will benefit from a decentralized approach to service delivery, or at a minimum from a deepened understanding of how governance operates at various levels in target countries.  In return, work on the initiatives and sectors will help DRG officers ensure that they can support various development indicators using governance as an instrument, while also supporting improved governance for its intrinsic value.

The second point is that decentralization is remarkably well-suited to finding valid evidence linking interventions to outcomes.  Better measurement of the effectiveness and impact of interventions is a further potential advantage of the proposals above. Decentralization typically implies working in several districts or communities within a

country; these target communities may be selected due to community characteristics or by random selection in order to measure impact more scientifically. Decentralization multiplies the number of cases where an intervention takes place (see DDPH chapter 6). It takes place within a target country, but also within different communities with different identifiable characteristics. By paying close attention to the criteria used to selecting target communities, decentralization programming can lead USAID in the direction of the "gold standard" of evidence-based decision making. With regard to other sectors and initiatives, a mainstreaming of decentralized programming approaches will lead very likely to improved outcomes, but also to *improved ability to measure those outcomes*. Targeting different localities and measuring the variations between them is one of the best modes of intervention for understanding a project's impact, which is of increasing importance at USAID and in the donor community.

In conclusion, this guide has offered perspectives on how to initiate or improve decentralization programming, and has argued that decentralization programming in its turn can contribute to USAID's major goals. These goals include the stability, development, and democracy of partner countries, as well as (from a more inward-looking perspective) the goals of improving the efficacy of USAID's major initiatives beyond decentralization and its desire to become the leader among donors in evidence-based programming.

# APPENDIX A: REFERENCES

## USAID REFERENCE DOCUMENTS

USAID. (2009). *Democratic Decentralization Programming Handbook [DDPH]*. Washington, D.C.: United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

USAID. (2010). *Democratic Decentralization Strategic Assessment Guide.* Washington, D.C.: United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

## DESK STUDIES (BY COUNTRY)

**Botswana**. Poteete, Amy R. and Bashi Mothusi. (2010). *Botswana Desk Study*. Washington, D.C.: United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

**Burkina Faso**. Englebert, Pierre and Nestorine Sangare. USAID. (2010). *Burkina Faso Desk Study*. Washington, D.C.: United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

**Ethiopia**. Dickovick, J. Tyler and Tegegne Gebre-Egziabher. (2010). *Ethiopia Desk Study*. Washington, D.C.: United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

**Ghana.** Ayee, Joseph A. and J. Tyler Dickovick. USAID. (2010). *Ghana Desk Study*. Washington, D.C.: United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

**Mali**. Wing, Susanna and Bréhima Kassibo. (2010). *Mali Desk Study*. Washington, D.C.: United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

**Mozambique**. Reaud, Beatrice and Bernard Weimer. (2010). *Mozambique Desk Study*. Washington, D.C.: United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

**Nigeria**. Wunsch, James and Bamidele Olowu. (2010). *Nigeria Desk Study*. Washington, D.C.: United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

**South Africa**. Picard, Louis A. and Thomas Mogale. (2010). *South Africa Desk Study*. Washington, D.C.: United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

**Tanzania**. Tidemand, Per and Nazar Sola. (2010). *Tanzania Desk Study*. Washington, D.C.: United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

**Uganda**. Smoke, Paul, William Muhumuza, and Emmanuel Mugalaasi Ssewankambo. (2010). *Uganda Desk Study*. Washington, D.C.: United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

## FIELD STUDIES (BY COUNTRY)

**Botswana**. Poteete, Amy R., Bashi Mothusi, and Daniel Molaodi. (2010). *Botswana Field Study*. Washington, D.C.: United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

**Mali**. Coulibaly, Chéibane, J. Tyler Dickovick, and James T. Thomson (2010). *Mali Field Study*. Washington, D.C.: United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

**Mozambique**. Ames, Barry, Ed Connerley, Domingos de Rosario, Eduardo Nguenha, and Laudemiro Francisco. (2010). *Mozambique Field Study*. Washington, D.C.: United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

**Nigeria**. Olowu, Bamidele, John Erero, Rosemary Soetan, and Rotimi Suberu. (2010). *Nigeria Field Study*. Washington, D.C.: United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

**Tanzania**. Chaligha, Amon, Nazar Sola, Per Tidemand, and Peter Bofin. (2010). *Tanzania Field Study*. Washington, D.C.: United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

# APPENDIX B: CHARACTERISTICS OF DECENTRALIZATION

This appendix is a supplement to the programming guides. Its purpose is to draw explicit links between the three goals of decentralization at USAID (stability, economic development, and democracy and governance) and the four characteristics of decentralization that can promote these goals: authority, autonomy, accountability, and capacity. The main guides can be read without reference to this appendix, but some readers already familiar with USAID's frameworks for its decentralization publications may find this useful for linking together key concepts.

**What Decentralization Does: Authority, Autonomy, Accountability, and Capacity**

The end goals outlined in this set of guides on Decentralization in Africa are stability, development, and democracy, and the central question is how decentralization can support these three goals. In general, decentralization contributes to these goals by shaping other characteristics of governance noted in section 1. Specifically, decentralizing power and resources changes governance in four main ways: it alters the formal *authority* and *autonomy* of different levels of government, and thus confers upon SNGs greater or lesser latitude for taking actions and making decisions; it also changes patterns of *accountability* between levels of government, citizens, and civil society institutions; and it can affect the *capacity* of government institutions to take effective action. These four characteristics are addressed in somewhat greater detail here.

To attain the goals of stability, development, and democracy, decentralization can aim at altering how these four characteristics operate in the governing system of a partner country. Appropriate levels and forms of these four characteristics – authority, autonomy, accountability, and capacity – are conducive to improvements in local governance, and thereby to the end goals. Recommending decentralization will often mean recommending that these characteristics be enhanced at the local or subnational level. Because it involves transfers of power and resources, decentralization is frequently intended to grant greater authority or autonomy to local governments, for example. Specific examples may be creating local elections to enhance accountability, or providing greater resources to provincial governments to improve their technical capacity. Yet it is not always true that "more is better" in all four of these characteristics, and a balance between levels of government is required on all counts; excessive authority or autonomy for local governments, for example, can be problematic if central governments are incapable of performing the important functions of setting national standards and protecting the national economy. These four characteristics are central to the logic of this guide, and each is thus elaborated upon below.

**Key Concepts: Characteristics of Decentralization**

| Characteristic | Definition |
|---|---|
| Authority | The legal or formal power to undertake a certain action (*de jure*, or by law) |
| Autonomy | The power to take actions or make decisions in practical terms (*de facto*, or in fact) |
| Accountability | The responsibility on has to other actors for performing a task |
| Capacity | The technical ability to perform a task or function for which one has authority |

The key concepts listed above are thus the essential characteristics by which decentralization can be measured.  In theory, decentralization is expected to enhance the authority and autonomy of subnational actors.  It is also expected that major development goals (including the deepening of democracy and enhancements to stability) will be improved via the improved accountability of government to the citizens.  Capacity is a necessary characteristic for decentralization to work, and is often seen as a co-requisite to enhancements in the other three areas.  The findings from the *Comparative Assessment of Decentralization in Africa* can be summarized by saying that formal authority for subnational actors has been increased considerably, but that actual autonomy remains limited by practical considerations such as limited tax bases and strong central states.  Accountability in Africa continues to flow upward to central actors even after decentralization, while some downward accountability mechanisms have been put in place.  There is not clear evidence whether capacity has improved or declined on average, but this can be seen as a testament that decentralized governance is no less effective than centralized governance, despite being run by "novices".

## Promoting Stability: Characteristics of Decentralization

Many parts of Africa have an ongoing need for state-building and nation-building, and decentralization can contribute meaningfully to these processes, as long as the several caveats listed above are taken into account.  It may sound paradoxical that states and nations can be strengthened by subdividing them with stronger subnational units that (after all) represent a form of internal division.  Yet experiences across sub-Saharan Africa (and beyond) have shown that giving greater authority and autonomy to subnational units can – under some circumstances – help the prospects for stability and security.  Giving more power and resources to subnational actors can help build a nation and decentering power and resources from a state can help build that state.

A key premise here is that stability will be enhanced when a nation-state has greater legitimacy for more of its population.  In Africa, legitimacy has often been understood in terms of whether a subgroup within a nation-state sees itself as receiving a fair distribution of resources, or their part of the "national cake".  This is seen in the proverbs and sayings that link political power to the idea of consuming or "eating" portion of national resources, with the "politics of the belly" (as noted by Jean-François Bayart in 1993) and the idea that in attaining governing power, a group will deem it to be "our turn to eat" (as noted by Michaela Wrong in 2009).  However, it may be possible through an orderly form of decentralization to carve out an arrangement in which there is a transparent and formula-based division of the national cake.  By guaranteeing all groups some access to resources, conflict can be mitigated and stability enhanced.  There have been several instances in recent African political history where decentralization has been

or could be beneficial in defusing tensions, such as South Africa, Uganda, and Mali for a time (prior to the coup of 2012). Apart from the use of decentralization in the comparative assessment studies, the issue will be tested going forward in Kenya.

A key contextual question is whether the center is an antagonist and belligerent, or a victim of centrifugal forces. To echo the terms used in section 2, state building is an especially important phenomenon where politics has become centrifugal. Where non-state actors contribute to violence and instability, it often becomes necessary to strengthen the power of the central state. On the other hand, when the center is an active belligerent, it can be the cause of instability, and some subnational groups can justifiably complain about central government illegitimacy. National democracy is a key factor here, but not the only one. It is apparent that recommendations for a highly democratic national government facing a violent rebellion should be different than recommendations for a highly repressive national government facing a liberation movement from a persecuted minority. Darfur and South Sudan were quite different from the likes of Mali's formerly democratic central government attempting to find an accommodation with Tuareg rebels; whatever the merits of the latter's claims, the legitimacy of the central governments were quite distinct. Certain subnational units in failing states could even plausibly have benefitted from secession, such as Somaliland in present-day Somalia, and the Kasai region of the current D.R. Congo at the end of the Mobutu era in what was then Zaïre. The independence of South Sudan, and USAID's investments in this process, is the clearest evidence that autonomy for some subnational regions in African countries is a viable and defensible proposition.

There are still several problems with decentralization as a solution to stability issues. The first problem with the state-building process is the prospect that decentralization will prove inadequate or not go far enough. Subnational and local institutions can continue to be dominated by central states, or conversely it is possible to create local units that are devoid of interaction with the state. Another problem is the prospect that decentralization might go too far and could fragment central authority, reinforce internal geographic divisions, and create resentment of economic imbalance between regions. The other caveats centered on the chance that decentralization will create subnational identities that tend towards a violent form of secessionism. The caveats are not to suggest that autonomy from the central government is to be avoided; on the contrary, these are admonitions that USAID missions and partner governments should subject policy recommendations in the area of decentralization to the "do no harm" test. There are some circumstances that require caution before devolution can be advised.

Bringing these considerations together, the optimum pattern for policy advocacy is to strengthen the ability of state institutions to *coordinate* and *enforce* rather than *dominate*. In all states, central governments have a first claim to sovereignty, being the repository of the "legitimate use of force" in the national territory. To promote stability, USAID can recommend decentralization designed to share power between the center and SNGs. Accommodation and power-sharing on the part of the center can be combined with mechanisms to intend to prevent decentralization from reinforcing preexisting divisions. The principles for policy advocacy can be revisited with respect to the four mechanisms: authority, autonomy, accountability, and capacity. With regard to these characteristics, all four call for a mix of subnational and central control, as seen in the table below.

**Promoting Stability:**

**Characteristics and Policy Recommendations**

| Characteristic | Policy Recommendation |
|---|---|
| Authority | Retain power at the center for national public goods (rule of law, defense, etc.) <br> Develop legal frameworks that empower SNGs to deal with local issues <br> Facilitate flexible arrangements that handle conflicts across SNG jurisdictions |
| Autonomy | Support provision of services at local level, with central checks on local power <br> Create institutions to protect "new minorities" at subnational levels <br> Provide formula-based revenue transfers with central monitoring of spending |
| Accountability | Ensure SNG accountability flows both downward to locals and upward to the state <br> Provide meaningful representation via decentralization to national minorities |
| Capacity | Develop coordinating institutions to share information between center and SNGs <br> Develop SNG capacity in "early warning" systems for local conflicts |

## Promoting Development: Characteristics of Decentralization

Encouraging development through decentralization is largely about facilitating an array of localized responses to public service challenges, as opposed to a single centralized response. By creating a larger number of accountable jurisdictions with a necessary degree of policy autonomy, decentralization allows public institutions within a country to be responsive to local variations and to learn from one another.

At the same time, the very term decentralization implies a transfer of power from a central power that previously held authority, and these central powers continue to be important in setting the parameters for decisions in the subnational units. There are several criteria that must be met for decentralization to work as intended, and these involve responsibilities and both the national and subnational levels. Subnational units must have some real policymaking autonomy in their jurisdictions, of course, but central governments must also maintain a presence in ensuring the nation-state remains a rule of law and a common market (and that subnational units cannot erect undue barriers to one another), along with other national responsibilities such as the currency. In addition, the central government is responsible for ensuring that SNGs face a hard budget constraint. This is essential to prevent decentralization of resources from harming the national economy: if SNGs use their autonomy to borrow funds and then pass on the debt obligations to the central government, the budget constraint on them is soft, and this will generate hazardous incentives to overspend and "pass the buck". Making decentralization work in many circumstances thus requires strengthening the ability of the *central government* to manage the intergovernmental system of finances and responsibilities.

The strategy for promoting development via decentralization thus revolves around encouraging healthy responsiveness from SNGs to information coming into their local environment, while also ensuring an adequate degree of coordination with other actors. Competition with other jurisdictions is a useful component of this set of information flows, as it allows localized responsiveness to observations about governance elsewhere.

This entails securing a degree of *authority* and *autonomy* for SNGs. With respect to authority, the main approach for USAID is to recommend flexible policy environments

that allow subnational units to adopt their own approaches.  Some decentralization laws may approach this administratively by giving SNGs control over their own civil servants.  Other examples could be "intercommunality" in Mali or cross-county collaborations with special districts in Kenya, in which SNGs elect to come together to solve collective problems on an ad hoc or limited basis.  In this, deconcentrated central government agencies could play a supporting role in SNG initiatives without mandating specific action.  Beyond framework laws, promoting development further involves strengthening the *capacity* of SNGs to respond to local information, and a process of *accountability* that ensures SNGs have incentives to do so.  In Table 4.4 below, each of these four characteristics can be seen as necessary to ensure responsive local governance.

**Promoting Development:**

**Characteristics and Policy Recommendations**

| Characteristic | Policy Recommendations |
|---|---|
| **Authority** | Support legal frameworks that clearly delineate resources and responsibilities<br>Support frameworks that give policy flexibility to subnational actors |
| **Autonomy** | Support implementation of national legal frameworks that confer authority to SNGs<br>Propose development of formula-based revenue transfers |
| **Accountability** | Develop systems to ensure central governments have a role in SNG fiscal probity |
| **Capacity** | Propose policies that provide central support to new SNGs<br>Create institutions that bring together SNGs to share information |

These approaches are likely to support the purported advantages of decentralization while reckoning with the caveats and challenges listed in each section. The "do no harm" principle would suggest empowering local governments while combating elite capture at the SNG level. The risk of making SNGs "too autonomous", as noted in the policy guide, is low in most of Africa's historically centralized states, though it pertains in countries such as Nigeria and any countries that decentralize extensively in the future.

For SNGs with low capacity, one may expect to see some deterioration in service provision at the outset, but this does not suggest working only with "advanced" or model communities. Indeed, the CADA comparative report finds that there was no systematic deterioration in capacity when viewed across the cases examined; this is because central government capacity to deliver public services was itself low prior to decentralization (CADA Final Report). Moreover, low local capacity has frequently been used as a central government justification to avoid decentralization, often indefinitely. This seems scarcely credible in most countries on a continent when central government failings have been considerable (cf. Mali In-Country Assessment). Preferable from the perspective of evidence-based programming would be a strategy that either randomly samples across communities or deliberately targets communities with a range of capacities, as this will better enable USAID to detect the development impact of the intervention (see DDPH).

## Promoting Democracy: Characteristics of Decentralization

Of the various characteristics of decentralization that relate to the goal of democracy, the most important is probably accountability.  Political decentralization establishes a degree of autonomy through elections (and other aspects of decentralization transfer authority to new levels of government), but the question of accountability is central: accountability of

government officials – to citizens and to other actors in government – is essential to the deepening of democracy

Enhancements to accountability can come in several forms. The most obvious of these comes at the ballot box. Elections – provided these are regular, free, and fair – provide officials with incentives to perform well in attending to public needs and demands. Depending upon their structure, elections may also be the crux of "upward accountability" to higher-level actors. Where higher-level party members can affect the fates of subnational officials through nominating procedures or control of the party's candidate list, elections become mechanisms for those high-ranking officials to assert control. On the other hand, civil society's role is also considered. Development partners have repeatedly advocated and programmed for elections and the strengthening of civil society, working on both the "supply" and "demand" side of local democratization.

### Promoting Democracy:

### Characteristics and Policy Recommendations

| | Policy Recommendation for USAID Missions |
|---|---|
| **Authority** | Create legal frameworks that devolve power to SNGs<br>Couple deconcentration with legal frameworks to ensure local responsiveness<br>Focus on developing institutions for intergovernmental relations, not just SNGs |
| **Autonomy** | Work with political parties and former SNG officials at national level to promote SNG<br>Promote regularized, formula-based fiscal transfers |
| **Accountability** | Create opportunities for accountability to flow downward to local actors<br>Retain and enforce upward accountability where SNGs have substantial autonomy<br>Promote transparency and openness over mandatory representation |
| **Capacity** | Develop capacity for the holding of regular subnational elections<br>Develop frameworks in which government officials check and balance one another<br>Develop laws that favor ability of civil society and media to offer feedback to officials |

The table above suggests how the four characteristics of decentralization can again be targeted at the policy level for the promotion of democracy. As is the case with other goals (stability and development), the policy recommendations at times shade into programming recommendations, though the latter are addressed directly in a separate guide. To the extent possible, the emphasis here is on recommendations that can be made to partner governments. These include suggestions for the legal and fiscal frameworks that underpin decentralization. Such suggestions match well with the characteristic of authority. For the areas of autonomy and accountability as well, the focus is on institutionalizing patterns of intergovernmental relations that reflect balances in power between levels of government and recommendations for transparency and formulas, rather than ad hoc decisions about decentralization that leave discretion with the center. The characteristic of capacity is often addressed in the domain of programming (rather than policy *per se*), but there are possibilities for developing frameworks and laws that facilitate regular accountability of political actors to citizens and to one another.