

**AFRICAN DECENTRALISATION POLICIES AND PRACTICES FROM 1980S  
AND BEYOND**

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March 2001

Working Paper 334

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ISSN 0921-0210

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## **ABSTRACT**

Globally, African countries are the most centralised in terms of formal governance structures. Approaching decentralisation as a complex, relative, instrumental and multidimensional process, this paper highlights the motivations and dilemmas of recent decentralisation policies and programmes in Africa. It discusses the main features of African decentralisation policies and practices in colonial and post-colonial times with special focus on the 1980s and beyond. This period is associated with structural adjustment and democratisation. A framework for analysing decentralisation policies and programmes is proposed. This is the basis for suggested improvements in the design and implementation of decentralisation policies in African and possibly, other developing states.



## 1. INTRODUCTION

Historical, political, economic factors explain the poorer development of local government institutions in developing countries compared to industrialised countries. In the 1990s, however, Africa's national governments (as other less developed (LDCs) and transitional countries) and international development agencies renewed their interest in local self-government institutions as distinct from deconcentrated structures which have always been favoured. These factors include: globalisation, economic crisis and the response of structural adjustment, democratisation and local, domestic forces such as rapid urbanisation, stronger ethnic identities etc. (See Wunsch & Olowu 1990, McCarney 1996).

The decision to focus on African countries is both pragmatic and deliberate. It is pragmatic in that LDCs constitute a wide diversity of countries; hence a focus on Africa makes the discussion more manageable especially on the subject of decentralisation. It is also deliberate in view of the fact that the relationship between adjustment/democratisation and the institutionalisation of local government in Latin America, the former Eastern European countries and Asia has been the subject of much more systematic research and analysis (Regulska 1993, Campbell 1997, Fukasaku & Hausmann 1998, Rood 2000). Compared to these other developing countries, decentralisation policies have remained poorly analysed and developed in African countries and local governments are least developed there than other regions of the world (UNDP 1993).

Africa, for instance, has the highest proportion of World Bank (WB) decentralisation projects among LDCs, it has the least formal analytical work on decentralisation or intergovernmental relations (Litvack et. al 1997: 35). Decentralisation policies and programmes in Africa are designed more often on the basis of ideological arguments (which exult the supremacy of party, state or market) rather than an analysis of the empirical reality of what exists on the ground. This is further aggravated by the paucity of information on local political economy issues. This may in part, explain why African decentralisation evaluations have with but a few, very limited exceptions, been negative (Compare: Rondinelli 1981, Mawhood 1983, Olowu 1988, Crook & Manor 1998; with Olowu 1989, Olowu & Smoke 1992).

## 2. DECENTRALISATION CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS AND CLASSIFICATION

Decentralisation the deliberate and planned transfer of authority and resources away from the central state institutions to peripheral institutions has acquired considerable popularity especially in developing countries. But this popularity in the scholarly and policy circles has not always been for the best: it has made the term to become slippery (Bird 1995), one that means different things to different people (Conyers 1985).

Decentralisation takes many forms e.g. the delegation of responsibility and authority to field units of the same department or level of government referred to as **deconcentration** or the **devolution** of authority to locally constituted units of government or special purpose authorities. Other forms include **privatisation**, **deregulation** (Rondinelli 1981) but there are also references to **territorial** and **functional** decentralisation (United Nations 1965, Rondinelli 1981, Smith 1985). Variants in the decentralisation family have also been suggested: **hybrid or partial decentralisation** whereby responsibilities and personnel are decentralised but not financing (as in the Decentralisation Act of 1982 in Nepal) (Silverman 1992: 15). Another is **market decentralisation** referring to the decentralisation from governments to market, quasi-market and non-governmental organisations, as distinct from most of the forms mentioned earlier which are referred to as **intergovernmental decentralisation** (Bennett 1994: 11). Market decentralisation incorporating not only privatisation, but contracting, fiscal decentralisation, public private partnerships has recently acquired new prominence as it has become a part of the new public sector management reforms which are driven by international finance institutions (IFIs). These are also referred to as forms of **economic decentralisation** (Mackintosh & Roy 1999).

Decentralisation is a relative, complex, instrumental and multidimensional process. It is relative in that it describes the distribution of state resources (responsibility, finance, personnel or discretionary authority) between various institutional actors within the state and/or society against some normative mode in space or time. It is complex in that it incorporates and is impacted upon by political, economic, institutional and cultural factors. Moreover, programmes of decentralisation are a mixture of centralisation, privatisation, deconcentration and in some cases devolution. These facts make decentralisation an instrumental concept in that it is a means to specific ends (improved service delivery,

empowerment, poverty alleviation etc not an end in itself. Finally, decentralisation is a multidimensional process which defines the distribution of power and resources between state and society, the executive and other branches of the government, at micro level between central and local governments, central government and their field administrations, between central/local governments and non-governmental entities as well as at higher levels between governmental units within a federal or international system.

Three aspects of decentralisation are focussed in this paper **devolution, deconcentration and federations** for two reasons. First, they are closely related to one another conceptually: they belong to the generic form of decentralisation that can be referred to as inter-governmental or intra-governmental decentralisation. While market decentralisation or privatisation may be related in some sense to efforts to decentralise, the latter concepts raise several other issues relating to the management of national economies, which are beyond the scope of this discussion. Secondly, and, more importantly, these three concepts have constituted the focus of government policy pronouncements on decentralisation in LDCs and especially in African countries, although different forms of market decentralisation are taking the centre stage in many African public services as well.

Through **devolution**, the central government confers or recognises self-governing capacities on local communities. Critical attributes of local self-government include *locality, representativeness, governmental character or responsibilities* and *institutional autonomy*. (See Mawhood 1983, Olowu 1988, Anderson 1995). Any programme of devolutionary decentralisation or DD will thus involve the transfer of legislative, political, administrative and financial authority to plan, make decisions and manage public functions and services from the central government to local authorities. It is also possible to include under this rubric, the growing involvement of non-governmental (NGOs) and community based organisations (CBOs) in the management of local services in the 1990s. Local governments are likely to be effective when they integrate formal and informal structures of local governance (Putnam 1993, Dia 1996).

**Deconcentration or field administration** is just as important as devolution. There are, however, three fundamental differences between the two forms of decentralisation. First, one involves the *intra-organisational* transfer of *responsibilities* (deconcentration) whereas the other is *inter-organisational* delegation of *responsibilities and discretionary*

*authority*. Secondly, the primary objective of deconcentration is efficiency and effectiveness of the central administrative system whereas the primary consideration of devolution is political popular participation and empowerment. Field administrations could be organised along functional or prefectorial lines (fully or partially integrated) (Smith 1985, Adamolekun 1999)

**Federations** are different from the first two concepts of decentralisation in two important respects. First, a federation relates to the delimitation of responsibilities between two separate political entities, one of which operates at the national level while the other operates at the meso or regional level. On the other hand, local governments and field administrations are based primarily at the micro or community level. Secondly, and more importantly, federation utilises the principle of **constitutional non-centralisation** rather than decentralisation. The idea is to create a system of governance, which at the same time provides opportunities for collaboration over a number of strategic areas while the federating units keep their relative independence in respect of other domestic matters. The federal principle is at present being utilised also at the supranational (e.g. the European Union, the East African federation and Southern African Development Community) and metropolitan (e.g. Abidjan municipality comprising ten city districts) levels (Elazar 1987).

Up until the 1980s, African decentralisation policies were either explicitly or implicitly confined to deconcentration even though the language of devolution was used. Even federal systems in the few countries which utilised them in the continent (Nigeria and Tanzania) were operated as unitary systems (Wunsch & Olowu 1995). By the end of the 1990s, however, structural adjustment and political liberalisation policies had compelled many states in the region to adopt devolutionary decentralisation and, in a few but growing numbers of cases, even federalism. It is thus possible at the present time to classify African countries in terms of those with progressive policies on decentralisation and those that have stuck with the old forms of deconcentration. Still in a third category are those that have gone further to experiment with federal arrangements. A sample of countries in the different groups is provided below:

- **Deconcentration with nominal devolution:** Ghana, Cameroon, Kenya, Malawi, Zambia etc.

- **Devolution:** Mauritius, Senegal, Uganda, Sierra Leone, Mali, Cote d'Ivoire, Nigeria, Tanzania etc.
- Partial Devolution (Urban Areas Only): Namibia, Mozambique, Botswana etc.
- **Federations:** Republic of South Africa, Ethiopia, Nigeria, and Tanzania.

The conscious articulation of decentralisation as a policy choice is in reality only one type of response to the factors pushing in the direction of DD. Another type of response, not analysed here but well documented also in the literature, is what is best referred to as decentralisation by default: one in which people and communities fill up the void left by the state (see McGaffey 1992 with respect to Zaire). In the next section, we provide a brief overview of decentralisation policies and practices since the end of World War II when many of these mostly poor countries started to become self-governing<sup>1</sup>. This will provide the background to an analysis of decentralisation programmes and policies of the 1980s and 1990s.

### 3. FOUR PHASES OF DECENTRALISATION IN AFRICA.

Like other LDCs, African states can be described as both highly centralised and decentralised. In terms of broad state-society relations, African countries are decentralised. Most economic activities remain uncaptured by the state, a fact which is regarded as an illustration of state weakness (Hyden 1983, Migdal 1988). On the other hand, they are also highly centralized, having been forged out of colonial conquest. Colonised peoples were regarded as neither possessing the intellectual nor cultural capacities for local self-governance. Beginning from India and spreading later to Africa, the predominant form of government was 'indirect rule'. This meant rule by a few colonial officials with the aid of the most compliant traditional rulers. Where no such rulers existed, they were created as in eastern Nigeria and parts of eastern and southern Africa. The objective was to provide the minimal conditions for law and order, taxation and justice for the colonial order. Local administration comprised a native court system, a local tax and a treasury.

While this system succeeded in guaranteeing the conquered territories for its new masters, it could not serve as the vehicle for economic and social development of the colonies. Most importantly, it failed to provide avenues for political participation and empowerment for the growing number of educated elites which the colonial system itself

produced. Opposition to rule by traditional rulers also grew as many of them remained illiterate, extremely conservative and corrupt. Countries such as Tanzania abolished the institution altogether (Mandami 1996).

### **3.1 Phase One (1945 Early 1960s):**

After the Second World War, decolonization came to top the agenda in international relations for a variety of reasons: reward for the colonised peoples' participation in the war, agitation by the growing number of educated elites from the colonies, and the ascendancy of social liberal parties in the colonising countries Britain and France. One evidence of this is the colonial despatch of the British Secretary of State for the Colonies in 1947. He argued in the despatch that the 'development of an efficient and democratic system of local government' was a key to success in African administration (cited in Hicks 1961:4).

Largely as a result of this policy shift, important changes were made in local government throughout British and later Francophone Africa. During the late colonial period, the outlines of the system of local government were thus already fully established in British Africa and to some extent in the French municipalities. It had the following key attributes:

- A tradition of elected councils;
- A well defined local tax system (ranging from per capita flat rates in most places to graduated personal rates in Eastern Africa. and the beginning of a property/land tax in the major urban centres);
- Involvement of local governments in a range of minimal infrastructure services: especially in education, health and sanitation, rural roads and water supply agricultural extension services and natural resource management all of these with carefully articulated grant systems from the central government.
- Involvement of local governments in cities in major capital investment activities and the rural ones in co-operatives and community development activities (Davey 1980, Stren 1989).

This period has been described as the golden age of local government in Africa and the experience was not peculiar to Africa (Hicks 1961, Olowu 1989). Reform efforts since

that time have tried to place local government on the same pedestal they were during this time.

### **3.2 Phase Two (Early 1960s to Late 1970s):**

Instead of building on the gains of this period, Africa's post-independence leaders sought to dismantle this legacy. There were two major rationales for this development. On the economic front, Africa's new crop of indigenous political leadership believed that the only way to demonstrate the worth of the new leadership was in rapid development achievements. They subscribed to a programme of central planning and in most places to a socialist ideology to promote development. Ghana's Nkrumah had argued that political independence was the springboard for economic and social development. They now had to deliver and they saw democratic local governments as irritants at best if not obstacles to their ambition to build powerful economic states.

Secondly, the consolidation of the nation-state via a single party mechanism was also high on the agenda. A new wave of decentralisation reforms ensued which tried to forge local administrations that were essentially instruments of control within the framework of the one-party or military state. Local governments and local administration were designed primarily for the maintenance of law and order and only secondarily for the implementation of centrally determined development plans. They also had political objectives such as participation but these were to be carried out mainly through consultative assemblies, which had no real powers over the government officials in charge of the local governments.

Philip Mawhood (1983: 8) best captured the state of affairs:

In the 1960s, (there followed) for most countries a swing away from local autonomy in favour of central planning and greater control over public resources. A de-concentrated administration was left in charge of the locality, similar to but weaker than the colonial one. It was aided by committees that hardly had a role beyond discussing development plans and giving help in their implementation'

Other reviews confirmed that most of these decentralisation policies. They were described as 'the rhetoric of decentralisation and the reality of centralization' in most developing countries (Subramaniam 1980) and in Africa as 'attempts at window dressing increasing centralisation' (Olowu 1988: 40). Indeed, some of the main actors in the process

lamented afterwards. For instance, late President Nyerere of Tanzania (1984: 828) recanted:

There are certain things I would not do if I were to start again. One of them is the abolition of local governments and the other was the disbanding of co-operatives. We were impatient and ignorant.. We had these two useful instruments of participation and we got rid of them. It is true that local governments were afraid of taking decisions but instead of helping them we abolished them. Those were two major mistakes..

### **3.3 Phase Three (Late 1970s to End of 1980s):**

When the economic crisis of the 1970s emerged, most of them responded, usually at the prompting of international finance institutions, by adopting structural adjustment programmes (SAPs), which approached decentralisation to local governments as a possible mechanism for cutting back central government expenditures. How did the SAPs impact on decentralisation?

Even before SAP, many governments in Africa had sought to hive off their responsibilities to private corporations largely as a response to declining resources. Decentralisation of responsibilities for services was sought in a number of countries not only to state created structures, such as local governments/administrations but also to community groups and to religious and philanthropic organisations such as churches (See Hyden 1983). The Kenya Government, for instance, relaunched its commitment to *harambee* a programme whereby communities provided the basic resources for building specific social infrastructures with the central government complementing these efforts. Similar efforts have been noted in other parts of Africa (see policies on hometown associations and ton-tines in West Africa: Barkan et al 1991, Webster & Fidler 1996 and N'gethe 1998).

With SAP, such initiatives became formalised into policies. World Bank lending portfolios emphasised the need for its borrowers to utilise opportunities provided by parallel or informal economies and institutions and use them as alternative instruments for the delivery of services. The reasoning here is that these institutions can help to promote competition in the public sector in the production of services and goods (See Silverman 1992, Litvack et al 1997).

A second reason for embracing local governments is that they offered opportunities to develop the local public and private sector economies. This idea is premised on the possibility of **separating provision from production** of services. *Provision* deals with such

questions as 'what public goods and services ought to be provided in what quantity and quality, how to finance the production of such goods and services, and how to monitor and regulate the production of such goods and services'. On the other hand, *production* is the technical transformation of resources into the delivery of these goods and services. Since many of the justifications for decentralisation relate to the provision function and most of the criticisms relate to the production function i.e. the lack of capacity to perform the production of these services, the separation of these two functions reduces the need for attempting to create large technical capacities in local government. Unfortunately, many decentralisation programmes give local governments the production responsibilities while the central government keeps the provision responsibilities. Furthermore, since the state was in most cases in a financial crisis, funding for these decentralised services were sought not from the traditional tax sources or government transfers but from user fees for basic services like health and education and also from private sector and non-governmental organisations including community groups (Barkan et al 1991, Corkery et. al. 1995, Leighton 1996).

ERPs (Economic Restructuring Programmes) assisted local governments to make the decisions relating to location specific investments subject to national guidelines. They should have the right to contract for these services with other agents of production, especially the private sector organisations. Besides ensuring a more efficient allocation of responsibilities between the central and local governments, this pattern of responsibility allocation would assist the development of the indigenous, small-scale private sector. Silverman (1992: 11-12), in a World Bank document notes: 'Demand by local governments for private sector production of public goods and services should result, eventually, in the decentralisation of much of the private sector itself'. This has made it possible in many countries for the public sector to train managers of private sector enterprises who have contracts for the delivery of roads and construction activities to the local governments (e.g. Burundi, Central African Republic, Ghana, Zaire, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, and Sierra Leone). Madagascar and Tanzania have opened their training schools to private sector contractors as well.

The expectations are that this arrangement will result in the following: a) substantial reduction in the functions and size of all governments, including local governments; b)

possibility of improved capacity of local governments to perform the more limited range of economic management activities; c) reduction of local government expenditures both on investments and staffing; d) reduction of local government and public sector deficits with possible positive results for increasing finance available to the private sector; e) competitive production of public services would improve the quantity and delivery of services and also enhance competition and the development of the private sector.

Considerable effort and resources actually went into the implementation of these programmes of decentralisation in many African countries. The central idea was to seek for opportunities to reduce central and local government expenditures and size. In many countries it gave new life to decentralisation initiatives. Many countries, notably Ghana, Malawi, Zambia, to mention a few, adopted new decentralisation policies. In most cases, the policies led to the creation of new structures of local government referred to as district development agencies or funds (DDFs) which were patterned after the Kenya 'district focus' (Oyugi 1990, N'gethe 1998).

These structures which were often dominated by appointed officials of the central government but had some locally elected people as well, would make the plans for their respective communities or districts with field agencies of the main line central ministries operating in that district. Moreover, in a country like Zambia, for instance, health and education services were actually taken away from local governments and given to separate, central organs to administer locally. This was also the logic that was followed by many Anglophone countries, which tried to adopt the British model of the health care service. The hallmark of these organs was the attempt to separate them from political issues and tie them closely to the reorganisation of the central ministries for effective delivery of services.

The attraction of these models for many national governments in Africa is that it leaves these agencies primarily under central government control. And this is important for governments that were not very secure politically. This was the case with decentralisation reforms in Cameroon and the earlier phases of Cote d'Ivoire reforms. Similarly, centrally appointed officials chaired Ghana's local assemblies' executive committees. A review of the Malawi DDF noted that district development committees (DDCs) promoted effective inter-sectoral co-ordination among field agencies of the government operating in the field.

On the other hand, they had no legal mandate, financial and human resources of their own. They were 'concerned only with development and not governance or the recurrent costs of development' (Mbeye 1997: 10). But these organs received considerable amount of financial resources mainly from donors who were interested in assisting programmes of decentralisation in these countries. For instance, the Malawi DDFs received 80% of their funding from donors. Unfortunately, the original goals of expecting that these will lead to major breakthroughs in improved delivery of services, economic performance or participation have not been realised. If anything, DDCs have become obstacles to the development of effective local government institutions as articulated in the relevant constitutions or statutes of these countries (Anderson 1995).

In concluding this section, it is important to point out that besides the deliberate policy responses discussed here, another form of decentralisation also emerged. This is best described as **decentralisation by default** a situation in which a variety of non-state organisations filled the void left by the absence of state institutions in the production of goods and services. Operating often outside the reach of the state, these institutions have been described as informal but they deliver crucial services to the people. The best country case has been documented for Zaire although it is widely prevalent all over Africa (McGaffey 1992, Olowu et al 1991).

### **3.4 Phase Four (1990s to the Present):**

The onset of democratisation in the 1990s has brought to the fore a fourth wave of decentralisation reforms in Africa that are linked to the process of political liberalisation and democratisation. This fourth wave represents in many countries a discontinuity with past approaches to decentralisation in that a deliberate attempt is made to create local governments that are genuinely participatory, responsible to the local communities and relate actively with other local economic actors other than state institutions what has been referred to as local embeddedness (Evans 1996, Ostrom 1996, Helmsing 2000). In the next section, we discuss in some detail some of the factors that have motivated these fundamental reforms and the dilemmas which these countries confront in designing decentralisation policies and programmes which actually enhance democratic participation and improved services.

#### **4. MOTIVATIONS AND DILEMMAS OF DEMOCRATIC DECENTRALISATION**

By the beginning of 1980s, whereas personnel of local governments in OECD countries constituted 42% of all government employees, they were 21 % in Asia, Latin America (29%) and Africa (10%) (Heller & Tait 1983). More recent figures for the early 1990s on employee size (Schiavo-Campo 1998) and financial decentralisation also follow the same pattern. Data from UNDP's (1993: 69) *Human Development Report 1993* reveals that in industrial countries, local governments normally account for 20-35% of total government expenditure, (decentralisation expenditure ratios are even higher in countries like Denmark (45%) and Finland (41%). In developing countries, however, the ratio is usually below 15% and the ratio is not substantially higher even when defence and debt servicing are excluded.

The case for centralised governance dominated the policy and academic literature in African decentralisation (See Wunsch & Olowu 1990, Hulme & Turner 1997). Nevertheless, in the 1990s, the following factors led to renewed interest in new programmes and policies on decentralisation in Africa:

1. The failure of centralised public sector management evidenced by economic, fiscal and political crises (Wunsch & Olowu 1990). The resulting decline in state resources has increased pressure for economic, institutional (public sector) and political reforms (World Bank 1981, 1989, 1997, Cornia & Helleinner 1994) as part of the search for new paradigms of governance.
2. The above mentioned failures have stimulated pressures for political reforms by domestic actors outside the state, many of who had become more visible, politically, and more sophisticated in their critique and protest of state policies as the economic crisis bit harder. Most of these actors sought to bridge the wide gulf between the state and the citizen by demanding greater involvement of citizens in the policy processes and the synchronisation of informal local realities with the highly centralised structures and operations of the (formal) state system. The most dominant form of politics in Africa is local politics but the state has always been organised in manner that is oblivious of this reality. This is a phenomenon which, some argue, is responsible for the persistence of two publics long after the colonial period the amoral, formal public and the informal

public which is the real public realm to which most citizens hold moral allegiance. (See Ekeh 1975, Joseph 1987, Hyden 1999).

3. Pressure from external donors: This is an important consideration given the fact many African states are heavily dependent on donor funds for development expenditures. Democratic decentralisation is regarded as one of the key elements of good governance (GG) programmes. The others are: transparency, accountability, rule of law, electoral reforms and conflict mitigation. GG programmes are regarded as key to alleviating poverty to which most bilateral and multilateral donors had committed themselves in the 1990s (UNDP 1997, OECD 1997). The European Union and several European bilateral donors initiated programmes of 'decentralised co-operation' which look beyond the traditional central government organs in the recipient countries to incorporate private, non-governmental and local government organs (see Hertog 1999, Materu et. al 2000).
4. Growing urbanisation and metropolitanisation in most countries. Urbanisation is variable in Africa but it is marked everywhere by high rates of growth. As Table 1 shows, African urbanization level is low by world standards (40% compared to a world average of 51%). However, the rate of growth for the region is high. The southern part is the fastest growing region followed by the west, east and north (UNCHS 1996).

**Table 1: percentage of Urban Population in African Countries, 1950-2030**

Countries by Region	YEARS					
	1950	1960	1990	1995	2000	2020
Eastern Africa (18)	5.2	7.3	21.8	25.4	29	43.2
Middle Africa (9)	14.2	17.9	37.8	41.6	45.6	60.4
Northern Africa (7)	24.5	30.0	44.6	47.9	51.2	63.6
Southern Africa (5)	38.0	41.7	54.9	58.2	61.3	71.6
Western Africa (17)	10.2	14.5	32.5	36.1	39.8	54.6
All Africa (56)	14.5	18.3	33.9	37.3	40.7	53.9
Latin America	41.5	49.3	71.5	74.1	76.4	82.9
Asia	16.4	21.5	34.4	38.6	42.7	56.4
Europe	56.5	61.1	73.4	75.0	76.7	83.1
N. America	63.9	69.9	75.2	76.1	77.3	83.4
Oceania	61.3	66.3	70.6	70.8	71.3	75.9
World	29.2	34.2	45.2	48.1	51.1	62.0

source: United Nations, *World Bank Prospects* 1990 New York, 1991 Table A.1

This phenomenon is itself only a symptom of fundamental changes to the modes of economic production on the continent. Structural adjustment stimulated economic diversification in most countries. In agriculture, many producers have moved away from cash to arable farming and agrobased industrialisation. There has also been a greater movement of people to the service industries. Retrenchment in the public and private sectors has led to the growth of the informal/service sectors which are based mainly in cities. Other forces have also stimulated greater massive urban migration besides the traditional push-pull factors. One of these is the increased number of females having secondary education and another has been the massive movement of people in conflict prone societies to the safety of the major cities. Whereas primary education has fallen compared to 1980, secondary education has actually increased by more than double (from 10% of age group to 22% between 1980 and 1993 for females and from 20% to 27% for males (World Bank 1997: 227). Many metropolitan cities in Africa especially have swollen, and the more so if they are in countries that have experienced massive conflict in recent times. (See Rakodi 1997). Urban population has thus risen from 23% in 1980 to 31% in 1995 and the proportion of the total population living in cities of over 1 million population have risen from only 5% in 1980 to 8% in 1995 (World Bank 1997:231).

In the past, the infrastructures for the few major urban centres were financed from central state coffers via the instrumentality of central government parastatals, which were created to deliver important services. Economic restructuring has led in many countries to the dissolution of several of these parastatals and their responsibilities transferred to, or taken over by local authorities or private sector organisations (see Rakodi 1997). Urbanisation is also indicative of the increasing sophistication of the peoples of the continent and their intolerance for old forms of domination by central and local elites.

5. The conscious use of decentralisation as a political mechanism by ruling groups to neutralise, contain or seek compromises with regional or local elites (Crook & Manor 1998, Boone 1998). Decentralisation has proved to be a crucial mechanism in national and international efforts at conflict resolution in many parts of the continent. It played a role for instance in the resolution of the long conflicts in Ethiopia, South Africa and

Mozambique and looks promising in the resolution of raging conflicts in the Sudan, Morocco, Angola, Senegal, the two Congos etc.

6. Globalisation has also compelled many national governments to adopt decentralisation. Increasingly, state actors realize that they must compete for resources globally and they can no longer afford to be pre-occupied with routine management matters in cities and districts as they once did. Moreover, structural adjustment, retrenchment have reduced state fiscal and human resources. It becomes necessary to make use of the remaining officials in the most strategic areas, leaving detailed management to other institutional actors, under programmes of decentralisation.

In general, it is possible to discern in the period two forces orchestrating democratic or devolutionary decentralisation (DD). The first is promoted by donors and civil society actors aimed at empowering the people by giving them greater opportunities for 'voice', promote self-governance, and resource mobilisation. In particular, DD is sought to remedy the three most serious institutional weaknesses of African governmental systems weak accountability, poor integration between formal and informal structures of governance and poor quantity and quality of basic service delivery. Accountability is weak in most public sector organisations because public service norms and enforcement mechanisms are weak. Formal, state-based structures are also separated from the informal, community-based structures and NGOs. Finally, weak and ineffective tax instruments together with these other two problems result in poor and unsustainable delivery of basic services in most communities (Ekeh 1975, Dia 1996, Joseph 1999). The second stream of demand for DD is from central state actors who see DD as an opportunity to dump responsibilities which they can no longer deliver, given the steady decline of state financial and human resources. These two streams coalesce and have stimulated the development of DD in the continent. Nevertheless, they also contributed to some of the most serious obstacles which the implementation of DD programmes confronts.

#### **4.1 Problems and Dilemmas of Democratic Decentralisation.**

Democratic decentralisation confronts serious problems of policy design and implementation in all countries and especially in poor African countries.

In the past, the problems that DD faced theoretical objections. For example, some scholars wondered whether local government and democracy are indeed compatible even in industrial societies. They argued that democracy exalts the principle of equality whereas local governments celebrate the principle of differentiation (Langrod 1953). Moreover, serious doubts were cast on the idea of local democracy in developing countries where the preconditions for popular democracy high literacy levels, communication and education, an established and secure middle class, a vibrant civil society, relatively limited forms of material and social inequality and a broadly secular public ideology. All of these are the product of the industrial or capitalist revolution, which are yet to take place in most countries of the developing world (Huntington 1968, Hyden 1983, Leftwich 1993).

Secondly, it was also argued that local autonomy is only feasible at high levels of economic development. Fred Riggs (1964) spoke of the 'law' of circular causation in poor countries. Decentralisation would only promote the decentralisation of poverty. (See also Prud'homme 1995 and Bennett 1994). According to this view, local governments may make contributions to the allocative functions of government but they generally cannot contribute positively to distributive and stabilisation functions. However, in a developing country context, local governments are even not able to make any contributions to allocative efficiency for a variety of reasons, the absence of a democratic culture, inter-local mobility problems and most importantly, because of rampant corruption at the local level (Prud'homme 1995).

Recent experiences of successful DDs in LDCs have challenged these views. There is increasing evidence that local governments can contribute to the resolution of the governance crisis confronted by many African countries (World Bank 1989:60). Evidence also exists which shows that local people possess substantial knowledge of their environments and their societies to enable them contribute to solving their own problems locally (Richards 1985, Olowu et al. 1991, Dia 1996, Esman & Uphoff 1984). Appropriate institutional and policy design can help ensure that local governments impact positively on efficiency, equity and macroeconomic stability (Ostrom et. al 1993, Silverman 1997, Litvack et al. 1998).

Currently, the feasibility of local government in African states seems to turn on the practical problems confronting decentralisation. These can be categorised into three di-

lemmas political, economic and managerial dilemmas which confront local government reforms in Africa.

*Political Dilemmas:* Devolutionary decentralisation (DD) confronts two major political problems. The first is the unwillingness of political and administrative leaders to share monopoly power-inherited since colonial times. This is in part due to fears that devolutionary decentralisation might undermine national cohesion and fan the embers of secession which are usually real considerations in societies in which ethnic and community loyalties are quite strong relative to national cohesion. Politics is always defined in local terms. There is also the fear that devolution might compromise the integrity of nationally delivered services. In many instances, these rational fears are often a cloak for the fear of loosening their grip on political power which in many countries is monopolised by the ruling elites at the centre. Another way of looking at these problems is that devolutionary decentralisation is viewed in the lenses of a zero-sum power game in which local actors gain at the expense of the centre rather than a positive sum power game in which all players both local and centre gain over time.

Different strategies are utilised to ensure continuing central control. In Ghana, government appointed District Council Executives wield power over the elected councils. In Zimbabwe, the Ministry of Local Government dissolves the councils at will. In Tanzania, senior administrators express strong fears to decentralisation since it might lead to serious corruption and mis use by councillors (Ayee 1996, Barkan 1998).

A second political dilemma is the problem of local elite capture. In many instances, it is local elites rather than the most vulnerable that capture decentralised power which is then utilised to repress the local minorities including women and stranger elements in the various communities. Many traditional rulers in different parts of Africa have used decentralised power to obstruct development of their people by diverting decentralised resources to personal uses and are thus opposed to forms of basic modern education, health, sanitation and water supplies because of their fear that these may break their hold on local power. The strong effort made by the military to promote DD in Nigeria from the mid 1970s crystallised in the emergence in the early 1990s of very powerful elected local government chief executives who abused these powers. Similar developments were noticed in the urban municipalities of Tanzania with cities selling choice public lands reserved for

constructing school playgrounds, roads and infrastructure development, tree planting and protected species to Asians and Arabs. (Gboyega 1998, Mukandala 1998).

*Economic Dilemmas:* Decentralisation in poor countries confronts three major dilemmas. First, as earlier noted above, there is the fear that devolution may complicate the tasks of economic stabilisation, as central actors are not able to effectively control local spending. Many also believe that local governments are not very good at addressing redistribution questions although this is the case only when the focus is on inter-jurisdictional rather than intra-jurisdictional inequalities. Even the latter is based on the faulty assumption of citizens' easy mobility from one locality to another. On the other hand, evidence has been adduced to show that local governments can be effective in redressing not only intra-local and inter-local disparities if backed by appropriate intergovernmental transfer systems (Smoke 1999, For the Nigerian case see Olowu 1990)

Secondly, to what extent is decentralisation feasible in the absence of wider institutional, political and economic reforms? Centralised infrastructure investment decision by public and private agencies make it difficult to implement decentralisation. For instance, Nzokenu (1994) suggested the need for land reforms in many parts of Africa if decentralisation is to be advanced in many rural parts of Africa land is presently held by local elites or governments in trust for the people, but in reality it is only accessible to the rich and powerful. But land reform must also be accompanied with the reform of the banking system which at the present time is concentrated in the urban centres. A number of experiments of community banking have shown the great possibilities which exists for mobilising idle savings in the rural areas for economic development purposes (Webster & Fiddler 1996, Mabogunje 1995). Clearly, the development of a favourable local economic system will provide the enabling environment for the development of critical economic and social infrastructure all, which are crucial for economic development.

Similarly, an independent judiciary as an independent arbiter is also crucial to the enhancement of decentralised governance. Instead of relying on central governments to resolve disputes between local government authorities or between local government and the national governments, a strengthened judiciary can more impartially resolve these issues. Similarly, effective local legislatures can act as more effective checks on local executives than the central government in many instances.

A third economic dilemma arising from all of the above mentioned considerations is that decentralisation involves more not less costs the costs of new institutions, staffing, procedures and training for all concerned etc (World Health Organization 1997). In the short run, resources must be mobilised to underwrite decentralisation. Unfortunately, many countries have a very weak fiscal resource base and cannot therefore finance these costs. Indeed, fiscal crisis was one of the most important reasons why political and economic reforms, including decentralisation were undertaken.

*Policy and Management Dilemmas:* An appropriate institutional design that respond adequately to the above mentioned problems and how to sustain the programme of decentralisation once initiated constitute the key policy and management dilemmas. The problem is compounded by the absence of reliable data on governmental performance and also by weak policy management capacity at central and local levels in developing countries generally but especially so in African countries (Grindle & Thomas 1990, Mutahaba & Balogun 1992).

This third set of problems are usually the most difficult to resolve. Some of the most difficult design and management issues include the following: how to implement decentralisation policies in all parts of a country, given their different levels of development including the possibilities of adopting a phased approach, how to transform the zero-sum game perception of decentralisation into a positive-sum game in which all sides gain. Other critical design issues include: how to ensure that decentralisation helps national integration rather than secessionist bids, how to mobilise the necessary resources to finance the heavy cost of decentralisation reforms which are often designed in the first instance to reduce costs. Yet, other issues also include allocation of responsibilities between central and local governments and between different tiers of local authorities; the balance between financial powers and/or resources and allocated responsibilities, the treatment of regions as distinct from local community structures; and of rural and urban areas etc. Another difficult design issue is how to integrate the informal structures of community governance with the formal structures of the state without undermining the integrity of either of the two. Failure in any of these areas has often meant the death knell of local government reforms in many countries of Africa.

These problems have remained pervasive in most countries, almost negating all efforts at democratic decentralisation. Five country cases are reviewed below.

## **5. EVALUATION OF AFRICAN DEMOCRATIC DECENTRALISATION (DD) POLICIES AND PROGRAMMES OF THE 1990S.**

As already noted above, a new form of decentralisation programme is discernible in countries such as Uganda, South Africa, Mali, Cote d'Ivoire and Ethiopia. What constitutes the main elements of this new form of decentralisation?

Conventionally, evaluations of decentralisation programmes tend to focus on institutions or processes. Attempt is usually made to measure the extent to which decentralisation policies or processes increase the autonomy of decentralised agencies (See for instance Rondinelli 1981, Ayee 1996, Vengroff & Umeh 1997, etc). Selznik (1949), for instance, suggested the following four criteria: a) discretion: the powers to determine what to do; b) personnel: the power to hire and fire; c) finance: the power to raise and commit resources; and d) Co-operation: the power to establish harmonious relationships between the organisation and its environment.

Building on these earlier efforts, we propose that since decentralisation is a means not an end in itself, it is necessary to establish the **goals** which decentralisation policies seek and distinguish these from the **means or mechanisms** for realising such goals. In developing an analytical framework, the three sub-goals identified earlier for DD are utilised. These are *accountable use of resources, institutional synergy between formal and informal structures and effective service delivery*. They are intermediate to the goals of **self-governance, democratic participation, institutional diversity and differentiation and economic growth** which are mentioned either explicitly or implicitly in many decentralisation policy statements (see Adamolekun 1991, Wunsch 1991, Smith 1996, Ostrom 1996, Dia 1996, OECD 1997, Gershberg 1998, Olowu 1999, Barkan 1998, Blair 2000).

The analysis, which follows, takes four sample cases from the more progressive forms of devolutionary decentralisation and federal forms and contrasts them with one case of the conventional type (Ghana). As was pointed out earlier, deconcentration could be a legitimate policy goal. However, its objective is essentially to decongest the central government and possibly increase central government control on the localities. To the extent

that incentives are created for effective performance of central functions, it has value in increasing policy implementation effectiveness. Devolution and federalism, on the other hand, seek to create incentives for local (governance) actors to make and implement decisions in respect of crucial, locally based services, thus forcing them to mobilise resources and strategize their use in a responsible way.

Seven major mechanisms are used to implement DD and can also be used to evaluate the extent of decentralisation in any country (Table 2). The analysis starts with the allocation of responsibilities for services between central and local level governments. In a completely centralised polity, all services are delivered by the central government no matter how local. The principle of subsidiarity suggests that as much as possible the smallest beneficiary local community should provide its own services, assuming that it has access to the required revenues. As already indicated above, many countries in LDCs do decentralise *responsibilities* but not the means of financing the programme of decentralisation. A second mechanism in decentralisation is therefore the *decentralisation of financing* of devolved responsibilities. The arrangements could be in the form of granting to local governments their own revenue sources (with responsibilities to set the base and rate), cost recovery (nominal, full or partial), transfers from higher governments and granting them borrowing powers. The third mechanism is the *decentralisation of decision-making powers*. Many central governments would give financial powers to local communities but not the decision-making powers to approve budgets or laws. Such decisions continue to be made by the central government often defeating the very essence of decentralisation. For instance, there is documented evidence that central governments cause delays in approving local government budgets in Kenya and Nigeria, and that this constitutes an important explanation of programme implementation failures. In the latter country it led to radical reforms of local government in the 1980s (Oyugi 1990, Olowu 1990). But this is a responsibility that could and should be undertaken by local governments that are responsible to their constituents.

The fourth mechanism is the *management of the personnel of decentralised services* whether by central or local entities. For various reasons this often takes a longer time to fully delegate to local governments. The unified approach is a mid-way house between the extremes of integrated and separate personnel arrangements but unified services in

many African countries have ended up functioning as integrated personnel systems. Furthermore, many professionals are reluctant to work in local governments, fearing reduction in their status or job security. Different approaches have been used to resolve this problem in many countries (see Tendler's (1997) analysis of health sector reform in Brazil 1987-92 and Olowu & Wunsch's (1990) analysis of the same phenomenon in Nigeria).

The fifth and often a very difficult mechanism is the one relating to *the enforcement of local government accountability*. Should national government bureaucracies or local assemblies enforce accountability? Both are problematic in developing country circumstances. Contrary to conventional thinking, accountability is actually weak even in national governments because there are no strong institutions to canvass for or enforce accountability at this level. Many central agencies are limited to post-audit financial reports and even this is in arrears in some countries of up to 5-10 years. Similarly, citizens at the local level are not able to use either voice or exit options because of the high transaction costs involved e.g. moving from one locality to another without credit, reliable information or access to land etc. Although central governments try to enforce accountability at local levels, through inspectorates and dissolution of erring councils, this has not institutionalised higher levels of integrity among local officials or their accountability to local citizens. Clearly, a mixture of both central and local accounting institutions will be needed but the systems that have worked better are those in which effort has been made to create independent organs of accountability: special audit bodies (Uganda), local ombudsmen or complaints bodies (Nigeria).

The sixth mechanism is *the involvement of other institutional actors outside the state in the delivery of services*. There are two possibilities here to involve private and NGOs or communities as agents or privatise the services to them. In the former, they help to produce the service while the responsibility for provision rests with the council. In the latter, these organisations are responsible for providing and producing the service, under some form of local authority regulatory framework.

Finally, there is *the extent of political competition that is allowed at the local level*. Some countries legally disallow party competition at the local level even though they may as in Ghana permit them at the national level. In other countries party competition is barred at the national and local levels as in Uganda but citizens are allowed to make reasoned

choices among several candidates that are in effect sponsored by different local political forces. Yet, in others, the state may officially allow multi parties but effectively ensure the neutralisation of political forces at the local level and atimes even at the national level as well (Ethiopia).

This framework does not assume that any form of decentralisation is either good or bad. Rather, evaluation is made contingent on the three objective goals of decentralisation: accountable use of resources, institutional synergy and services delivery and the seven suggested mechanisms that are used to measure the maturity or success of any programme/policy of decentralisation. Besides, overall judgement of whether the programme of decentralisation is deconcentrated or devolved is the outcome of the analysis rather than accepting official labels, which can be very confusing. Finally, the framework analyses decentralisation from the viewpoint of polycentric or complex networks in which each of the institutional actors (central, local government, private and nongovernmental organisations) are essential players. For instance, it is paradoxical but significant fact that effective decentralisation requires the deliberate strengthening of central institutions and agencies to enable them to support the effectiveness of decentralised agencies. (Adamolekun 1999, Ostrom 1996, Tendler 1997, Gershberg 1998).

Case studies of five national decentralisation programmes are analysed using this framework below and their summary ratings are provided in Table 2.

## **5.1 Ethiopia**

Until the adoption of a democratic federal constitution of ten autonomous federal regional states in December 1994, Ethiopia was ruled for many years first as a feudal empire and from 1975, as a highly centralised Leninist socialist state led by the military. The new Ethiopian constitution, adopted after the election of the current government in 1995 stipulates that 'every nationality and people.has the right to a full measure of self-government which includes the right to establish institutions of government in the territory that it inhabits..'

The regions vary widely in population and competence. Oromiya, the largest state has a population of 17 million whereas Gambela contains only 110,000 population. They have wide (residual) powers including the ability to secede from the federation. They are

**Table 2: Framework for Analyzing Decentralization in Developing Countries:  
African Applications (Potential and actual scores)**

	Ghana	Uganda	Ethiopia	Cote d'Ivoire	Nigeria
1. Transfer of Responsibilities					
-Major/Minor Basic Services(10)	10	10	10	10	10
2. Transfer of Financial Resources (10)	6	6	6	5	8
-Major Tax Sources (5)					
-User Fees (Nominal or partial/full cost recovery)(3)					
-Central Transfers (adequacy, equity, responsiveness)(2)					
3. Decision-Making Powers (10)	5	10	10	7	10
-Budget making/Approval (6)					
-Budget Implementation (4)					
4. Personnel Management (15)	4	10	6	7	8
-Separate (10)					
-Unified (5)					
-Integrate (0)					
5. Accountability Mechanisms (10)	4	8	5	5	7
-Central (M&E)(3)					
-Local Citizens (5)					
-Central/Local Citizens (10)	2	3	2	3	3
6. Involvement of other Institutional Actors (10)					
-Privatization & Local Regulation (5)					
-Co-Production (10)					
7. Local Political Competition (15)	0	3	3	5	5
-Full (10)					
-Partial (5)					
-None (0)					
Total (70)	31	50	42	42	51

empowered 'to establish a state administration that best advances self-rule and a democratic order ' in their states. Their responsibilities include the formulation and execution of economic and social development policies, land and natural resource, state police forces and maintenance of public order. Below the regions are Zones, Woredas (or districts) and kebeles (communes) all of which are assigned specific responsibilities within the province of the state but devolution is mainly felt at the level of the Woredas. They formulate their own budgets and are responsible for front-line responsibilities such as health, education, and soil conservation, observation of legal rights and law and order. The kebele functions to all intents and purposes as a field administration of the woreda.

The Amhara regional constitution, for instance, empowers the woreda administration to implement regional laws and regulations, to make social and economic development plans for its locality, decide on its own internal affairs and to develop its locality. It also has a judicial unit from which appeals can be made to other regional courts (Zikre Gazette 1995).

On financing arrangements, Ethiopian regions are entitled to levy and collect taxes on incomes, utilities, private property, mining rent and royalties on forest resources. They also share in the concurrent taxation of profits and, mining rents etc. Given the variable institutional capacity of the regions and other sub-national units, it is not surprising that federal transfers to the states have become the major means of financing the new federal system. In 1994/5, the regions collected only 18% of domestic tax revenues but they were responsible for almost 36% of the total (recurrent and capital) expenditures in the country. In the social sector especially schools and health services the share of the centre has fallen to only 27%, with the regional agencies and others responsible for the balance of over 70%.

On Decision Making Powers, the Ethiopian regions, woredas and kebeles have elective offices, a sharp contrast to several years of imperial and socialist governments when all of these positions were appointed by the state. These organs are also helping to bridge the wide gulf between the formal and informal structures. The informal structures have been used as a platform to define a different agenda from the national level politics although the opportunity has also been used to settle political scores.

On personnel management, regional governments are responsible for managing their own personnel. From a situation in which all personnel were central personnel, today, the regional states have ten times (200,000) more personnel than the central government (20,000). Personnel at the local government level (woredas, kebeles) are however, paid by and responsible to the regional state.

Accountability Mechanisms: In spite of their heavy dependence on the federal government for funds, Ethiopian regional states were originally responsible only to themselves. In 1997, following a number of scandalous revelations of financial malfeasance in the regions, a new finance bill was passed into law, which made it mandatory for regions to account for federal transfers to the federal auditor general. Each state has its own auditor

but the capacity of the regions is so variable. At the regional level, the tradition of accountability to higher government bureaucracy has continued even though a number of structures exist at the local level to enforce accountability. For instance, many communities have been able to utilise their power of recall (in federal and state constitutions) to dismiss 'corrupt' politicians, often leading to considerable instability in some regions. In spite of some of the negative overtones of these provisions, the practice is helping to develop a new culture of accountability at the local level.

**Other Institutional Actors:** There is very limited involvement of other institutional actors in the delivery of services in Ethiopia. However, in the health sector, there are a number of non-governmental agencies that are active. Ditto for water in the arid areas of the country. However, there is very little linkage between the local government system and these organisations.

**Party Political Competition at the Local Level:** Even though the constitution grants the citizens freedom of political association, the ruling party has managed to effectively neutralise the other political parties, which are mainly ethnic based. They are not represented in the parliament and they do not control any region. The opposition argues that Ethiopian 'democratic' elections were rigged (Young 1997, Ayenew 1998).

## **5.2 Uganda:**

Museveni's National Resistance Army fought different Uganda governments (led by Okello and Obote) to a standstill and ultimately took power from the Obote administration in 1986. Museveni argued that his struggle was against misrule and chaos. Originally, the new local governments were created around the Resistance councils, which the government found useful in its guerrilla struggles. In 1993, a statute was passed consolidating these councils into five tiers of local councils comprising village, parish, subcounty, county and district councils. The district council is the apex of the system of local government and had extensive powers for formulating socio-economic development plans and providing basic infrastructure and social services. When the new national constitution was introduced in 1997, the system of local government was an important element of that constitution. A new law, the Ugandan Local Governments Act of 1997 created (from the erstwhile Resistance councils) 45 district/city, 13 municipal, 863 sub-county/city and 970 town councils.

Local authorities are given broad powers to develop their local communities. These include: education services which cover primary, secondary, trade, special and technical education; medical and health services including hospitals, health centres, dispensaries, maternity and other basic health services, water services, road services that are not under the responsibility of the national government, long list of competencies in land use and administration, forests, water, women etc. (Lubanga 1995, Timbaingana 1998).

**Financing Arrangements:** Local governments in Uganda have access to selected own revenues. These include graduated personal tax, rates, rents, property tax, royalties, tamp duties, registration fees, market dues, trade licences and fees. It is the sub-county level that collects these revenues out of which it remits 35% to the district council, 25% and 5% each to the village, parish and county councils respectively. In the cities, lower divisions remit 50% to the urban/municipal councils. But the backbone of the local government finance in Uganda are the various transfers of financial resources to the local governments by the national government. The broad responsibilities given to these councils and the relatively low levels of the revenue bases made dependence on central government transfers inevitable.

The national government has worked out a principle of transferring substantial resources to local governments. They comprise unconditional, conditional (for feeder roads maintenance, primary education, primary health care and agricultural extension) and equalisation grants. In 1996/97, the central government transfers amounted to 176.5 million Ugandan shillings. More than one half of this went to the payment of salaries in primary and secondary schools. A Local Government Finance Commission has been set up with responsibility for monitoring and recommending the appropriate formula for distributing transfers to LGs.

The fact that subcounties and divisions can retain a substantial portion of their revenue collections has led to a 70% increase in the revenue collections of the district and urban councils in that country.

**Decision Making Powers:** Before 1986, central government field officials administered local governments in Uganda. This has given way to closely contested elections at each of the five levels in spite of the absence of multiparty politics. The newly constituted

local bodies are responsible for approving budgets, rather than refer them to central government for approval as was done in the past.

**Personnel Management of Decentralised Services:** The Ugandan government undertook a major reorganisation of the system of personnel management at the local government level. Before this time, local government officials were either civil servants seconded to LGs or placed in a unified personnel system for all local governments in the country. The reforms constituted each district council into a separate personnel agency. The weakness with the unified system was that senior local government personnel were treated for all intents and purposes as central government staff. This was because central government officials managed the unified structures, as it is the case in many other African countries that utilise the unified personnel system.

District executive secretaries and town clerks have responsibility for LG employees and pay their salaries, assisted by a district service committee. Field officers of decentralised functions have been transferred to LGs. Each district has a district service committee responsible for LG employee matters. In turn, secretaries and town clerks are responsible to the local councils even though most of the salaries of LG staff are paid through transfers from the central government (see above).

**Accountability mechanisms:** There is an attempt to get the local governments to rely more on local rather than central institutions. To this end, a number of institutions have been created. They include the LG Tenders Board, an LG Public Accounts Committee, which serves as a form of Public Accounts Committee for LGs in a district and a Local Government Auditor. These institutions have been quite effective in detecting corruption in the system and the local councils are closely involved in their operations.

**Involvement of Other Institutional Actors:** Private sector and non-governmental organisations are utilised as agents for the local governments for production and provision of some services. Several services have also been privatised to private and not for profit organisations. Besides, many district and municipal councils have, for instance, contracted with private enterprises the collection of their revenues. Local level privatisation has been limited.

### 5.3 Cote d'Ivoire:

Two major forces French colonisation and the dominant single party, the Parti démocratique de la Cote d'Ivoire (PDCI), had shaped politics, economy and administration. But by the 1980s, cocoa and coffee prices slumped in the world market. Moreover, there were strong resentments against excessive authoritarianism and corruption among the ruling elites, which was perceived to have led to the immiseration of the masses of the rural peasants.

A radical reform of the system of local governance was undertaken in the late 1980s to rejuvenate the political system and to reduce the financial squeeze on the central government. Between 1987 and 1995, 135 newly elected communes (local bodies) were created for Abidjan (which had ten of these municipalities and other smaller towns and cities.

Communities formed the basis of this commune system rather than the old administrative structures the model population of each commune was around 10,000 although it was quite variable. Crook (1996: 702) notes the main features of this system:

Each commune is an authority with legal personality and 'financial autonomy'. meaning. the right to create and manage its own budget, property and resources. Legal accountability to democratically elected officials is firmly based at the local level. The mayor and his deputies who form the executive authority are elected councillors, elected to office by the municipal council, not appointed by government as in the pre-1980 system. The mayor can appoint and dismiss commune staff (except the seconded chief administrative posts) but all the employees including civil servants are accountable to the mayor. The executive is formally accountable to the council. The council itself is a wholly elected body.

Broad competence is given to these communes in terms of responsibilities provision of educational buildings and equipment, cultural and social facilities, public health and sanitary services, maintenance of local roads, markets, bus stations, administrative services including census, births, deaths and marriages, allocation plots and plot development. Some old style financial controls are still in place. The communes make and approve their budgets but they are implemented by the central government Treasury departments e.g. payment of creditors. Communes are still subject to close supervision by the Ministry of Interior and also have very little control over their rates of taxation or rates collection. Even though one of the key motivations for the reform was the mobilisation of local and private financial sources, the central government has been quite generous in providing fiscal transfers to the communes to sustain the reform.

Even though the democratic structures exist and are functional, the channels of consultation between local citizens and local political and administrative officials remain constrained and as a result communes are not always responsive to the needs of their citizens.

Crook (1996:702-3) notes that unlike many other countries with 'mixed' forms of devolution/decentralisation, Ivorian communal administration is not simply a regrouping of deconcentrated central ministries under the nominal control of an elected council.

#### **5.4 Nigeria:**

Nigeria initiated a global programme of devolutionary decentralisation in 1976 in the hope that these structures will form the basis for democratic renewal and the restoration of civilian government. Successive (military) administrations sought to sustain and deepen these reforms. In particular, from 1988 to 1992, the military government under the leadership of Ibrahim Babangida took some far-reaching decisions, which were aimed at improving the effectiveness of democratically elected local governments in Nigeria (Gboyega 1998).

This included the abolition of the state ministries of local governments, which were thought to be the clog in the wheel of local government progress. Federal transfers were now paid directly to the local governments rather than passed through the states in conformity with federal practice. In addition, local governments were granted the authority to make and approve their own budgets; in the past such approvals were given by state authorities and were often delayed. Primary and basic health education was transferred to the local governments. In view of the additional financial implications of this development, the total amount of federal transfers to local governments were increased from 10% (it was only 3% in 1976) to 20% of federal revenues. Considering the fact that this was in the hey days of an oil boom, this led to huge increases in local government revenues.

The results have been impressive. The quality of their leadership both political and administrative improved dramatically. The local governments also increased their capacity to deliver services to their clientele leading to substantial improvements in the quality of basic infrastructures a fact that was further helped by special initiatives on rural infrastructures and credit. On the other hand, the reforms boosted the power of the local chief

executives without a corresponding effectiveness of citizens' control. Under the fourth republic the state assemblies who now have the responsibility for local government oversight and policy development have captured most of powers devolved by the federal government to local governments. (Olowu 1996, Gboyega 1998).

Up to the present time, the fortunes of the Nigerian local government system have been tied to that of the country's successive military governments' political recivilianization programmes. The resulting local government system is adjudged to have facilitated the delivery of services and a more even distribution of the country's resources leading to economic progress and political stability in a country dominated by the excesses and corruption of military officials at state and national levels.

In Nigeria's fourth republic (which began in May 1999), local governments exercise all the powers of autonomous governments they were originally conceived as third tiers of Nigeria's federal democracy (Adamolekun 1984). They have access to own revenues and huge intergovernmental transfers (including a share of VAT), own personnel and budgetary powers and all political parties freely canvass for votes here as they do at other levels. Local governments are actively engaging private and non-governmental and community organisations in the provision of goods and services.

## **5.5 Ghana:**

The Ghanaian decentralisation programme transferred a total of 86 responsibilities to the new Ghanaian 110 district assemblies. These responsibilities were ones which central government departments and agencies delivered in the past primary and secondary schools, hospitals, road construction and maintenance. Generous own revenues were allocated to the local governments, which provide 80% of total revenues of the councils, the rest coming from central government transfers. Central government personnel responsible for decentralised services from a total of 22 central government departments were mandated to work in the districts thus unifying the local field administration system with the local government system.

Over ten years since the current decentralisation were initiated, the field agencies remain unintegrated into the district assemblies. They still receive their authorisation and funds from their headquarters and the relevant laws to effect the decentralised administra-

tion envisaged under the programme remain unsigned. Furthermore, the budgets of these districts must be approved by central agencies. Their topmost personnel continue to be central officials. The most prominent person at the local level is the District Chief Executive (DCE), a central government appointee who chairs the executive meetings of the council comprising elected councillors. He also represents the district assembly in the regional planning council (Ayee 1999). The major form of accountability is still to the central government but this has not prevented the loss of huge sums of money. For instance, some 25 of these District Chief Executives (DCEs) were dismissed in 1997 for corruption (Ayee 1996, 1997). Non-governmental organisations are quite active in the delivery of basic services in various communities but there is little or no direct contact with the districts (Crook 1994).

It is possible to argue that the Ghanaian decentralisation programme was rather ambitious in the sense that it expected local governments with weak governance capacities to manage responsibilities, financial and human resources of 22 central government departments in the field. In this sense, it attempted to fuse field administration and local governments. This has not worked as the critical legal and administrative instruments were not implemented ten years after the reform and there has been resistance from administrators to such draconian fusion of local and field administrative systems. Besides, the reform also represent an attempt to promote the ruling party (indirectly) in the communities by adopting the non-party electoral systems as the ruling party had all the advantages including nominating 30% of the membership, including members of the parliament as members of the district assembly councils and appointing the chief executives of the DA. As it happened, this one-party rule seems to have boomeranged in that the Ghanaian people in 2001 successfully voted out the ruling party at the national level. This is likely to bring about dramatic changes the Ghanaian local government system.

## **CONCLUSION**

The review in this paper points conclusively to the fact that among countries pursuing democratic decentralisation as a policy choice, fundamentally new orientations are discernible. Greater attention is paid to local peoples' participation and their empowerment,

the accountability of local governments to local people and close interaction with local non-state institutions. Problems encountered by these experiments include the following:

- Preoccupation of decentralisation policies with vertical intergovernmental relations involving the transfer of authority and especially of resources from central to local governments at a time when central governments are experiencing severe resource shortage. The result is that governments are not able to keep up their promises on resource transfers. And, when they do in the absence of adequate capacity in local governments, other serious problems of corruption, effective management of available resources are posed. In contrast much less attention is devoted to horizontal intergovernmental relations between different tiers of local authorities e.g. among the five tiers of local government in Uganda or among urban and rural areas (Ethiopia<sup>2</sup>).
- Uneven and unequal development of infrastructural and institutional capacities between regions and communities of devolving states belie the commitment to global decentralisation. This strengthens the case for asymmetric decentralisation starting with the most able regions, a strategy that may further such inequalities. A few countries have already adopted this approach (e.g. Tanzania, Namibia).
- Few countries have been able to allow party political competition and democratic decentralisation. Many countries seem interested in democratic decentralisation within the context of a de facto one-party state (e.g. Ghana, Uganda, and Ethiopia).
- Insufficient attention has been paid to developing alternative revenue sources. While intergovernmental transfers are necessary for equity and capacity reasons, large infusions of central grants to regional/local governments have undermined incentives for the development of local revenue effort (e.g. Ghana, Nigeria). Research shows that much more resources can be mobilised especially from property rates, user charges and investment portfolios particularly in urban centres.
- Classical accountability mechanisms of election and representation need to be complemented with additional participatory forms such as recall, referendum, local ombudsmen, service delivery surveys, and participatory budgeting. There are a number of new initiatives to encourage more active civic participation in the budgetary processes patterned after some Latin American examples and sponsored by the Municipal Development Programme (MDP) based in Harare.

The resolution of these problems will take time, resolve and determination and imagination of those involved in managing these processes in these countries. A few strategic actions might help.

First, democratic decentralisation should be approached as a process not an event. As a process, it may need to be phased beginning from the urban and fast growing metropolitan areas. There may also be a need to develop different capacities of local governments over a phased period: for the delivery of specific service sectors, for development of policy making and regulatory capacities as distinct from service delivery capacities etc.

Second, donors have provided a great impetus for the current reforms. However, they tend to pursue policies that are not feasible in many contexts e.g. private sector development when a whole array of non-governmental organisations e.g. religious and community-based organs remain largely sidelined in the process of democratic decentralisation. Yet, they could become critical players as they were in the colonial period.

Thirdly, the high incidence of inequalities in many countries indicates that by developing local governments' taxing capacities (not an easy task by any means), local governments may be better able to address serious problems of infrastructure development. Through this, they may be able to alleviate some of the worst excesses of poverty in a continent in which poverty is estimated to grow within the present century. Local governments are particularly well placed to target the informal sector, small scale industries, provide agricultural support to farmers as well as manage directly or via contracts a whole range of social development programmes at the local level. Accountability to local people may also be enhanced.

Finally, DD implies a new set of responsibilities for central governments. The capacity to undertake policy development, review and monitor decentralisation policy implementation in the central government is lacking in many countries. There is a tendency to resort to the suspension of local councils as the solution to tackling teething problems of local government institutionalisation.

## NOTES

*Eastern Africa* includes: British Indian Ocean Territory, Burundi, Comoros, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Reunion, Rwanda, Seychelles, Somalia, Uganda, Tanzania, Zambia, Zimbabwe.

*Middle Africa* includes: Angola, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Sao Tome & Principe, Zaire.

*Northern Africa* includes Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Morocco, Sudan, Tunisia, and Western Sahara.

*Southern Africa* includes: Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland.

*Western Africa includes:* Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Cote d'Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, St. Helena, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Togo.

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## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Although African socio-economic conditions have improved somewhat in the second half of the 1990s, poverty is an important reality in the continent. Africa is home to the largest numbers of least developed countries. Over a half of the countries in the *World Development Report 1998* have per capita incomes below the poverty line of US\$365 per annum or US\$1/day.

<sup>2</sup> The Ethiopian national and regional constitutions make no reference to municipal councils. A few states are beginning to consider draft statutes that give legal recognition to municipal councils in this rapidly urbanising country.