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New Directions in Social Policy

Decentralization and Social Innovations in Africa

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Alternatives for and from the Global South

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Acronyms

AG	Action Group
CAO	Chief Administrative Officer
CBHI	Community Based Health Insurance
CG	Capitation Grant
CHW	Community Health Workers
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DES	District Executive Secretaries
DHU	District health unit
DPA	Distributable Pool Account
EAO	Education Administrative Officer
EPRC	Education Policy Review Commission
ESCC	Education Sector Consultative Committee
ESR	Education Sector Reviews
ESWG	Education Sector Working Group
FCT	Federal Capital Territory
FG	Fixed Grants
HFTWG	Health Financing Technical Working Group
HFU	Health Financing Unit
HSWG	Health Sector Working Group
JADF	Joint Action Development Forum
JBSR	Joint Budget Support Reviews
JHSR	Joint Health Sector Reviews
LG	Local government
MLG	Ministry of Local Government
MMI	Medical Military Insurance
MoES	Ministry of Education and Sports
MoH	Ministry of Health
MoLG	Ministry of Local Government
NLGCBP	National Local Government Capacity Building Policy
NPE	National Policy on Education
NRA	National Resistance Army
NRM	National Resistance Movement
OAU	Obafemi Awolowo University
OOP	Out of pocket
PAF	Poverty action fund
PBF	Performance Based Finance
RGB	Rwanda Governance Board
RHIC	Rwanda Health Insurance Council
RSSB	Rwanda Social Security Board
SFG	School Facility Grant
ToT	Training of trainers
TWG	Technical Working Group
UPE	Universal Primary Education
USAID	US Agency for International Development

Abstract/Summary

This paper presents desk research-based evidence on the relationship between social policy and the interactions between central and local institutions in three countries in Africa. Many African countries, often with donor support, have a decentralization program. After discussing three theories of decentralization, the paper examines the broad thesis that sub-national institutional capacity and institutional diversity could, under some conditions, enhance the effectiveness and impact of new social policy. The three cases include two from Eastern Africa (Community Health Insurance in Rwanda and Universal Primary Education (UPE) in Uganda) and one from Western Africa (Nigeria, UPE).

The seven main findings are instructive.

First, decentralization can and does help in the delivery of social innovation.

Second, countries adopt forms of decentralization that matches their institutional, political and economic environment in which social services are being experimented. Of these environmental forces, the most prominent is the political search for legitimacy within a changing liberal political and economic framework. It also explains why different combinations of centralization and decentralization are used for social services provisioning. The predominant trend in the three countries is de-concentration, particularly so in Rwanda. In Uganda where devolution was initially tried there has been a retreat towards recentralization as the central government sought to perpetuate its regime especially after adopting multi-party politics at the central level in 2006. In the Nigerian case, decentralization of UPE succeeded when the military promoted devolution. Even though it started to falter after they left government for civilians, great gains were made to primary school education enrolment nationally.

Devolution gives an opportunity for those in the political opposition to establish their claims to governance through social provisioning performance in their localities. The opposition used devolution powers to launch successful bids to oust the government in power in some countries throughout Africa—Zambia (Lusaka), Senegal (Dakar), Nigeria (Lagos), and presently in South African cities.

Third, even when the resources are abundant, either through domestic or donor resources, decentralized arrangements work better when several key actors (individuals and institutions) have incentives to cooperate with the program of social provisioning rather than shirk, undermine or disconnect from it. For instance, the Government of Rwanda was able to upgrade and upscale successful traditional program of community health insurance practiced in a few regions earlier with the assistance of a development partner, the USAID. Similarly, the huge success of UPE in Nigeria in the late 1970s and in an earlier period of successful UPE in one region involved several actors outside the regional government. These included the senior political and administrative elites in the regional and local governments, the citizens and most importantly the wide array of non-governmental institutions—community-based organizations, civil society and even faith-based organizations.

Fourth, successful decentralization often means a redesign of systems, processes in order to actualize policy outputs and outcomes among a variety of institutional actors.

Fifth, an effective fiscal decentralization program (incorporating local taxes and intergovernmental transfers) must be roughly proportional to decentralized functions or

social programs. Central governments must resist the temptation to use decentralization to offload responsibilities on lower level organs.

Sixth, cases of corruption have persisted after decentralized functions were transferred back to central governments. Robust upward (to the national government) and downward (to citizens) accountability arrangements help.

Seventh, development partners provide many positive inputs—finance, technical resources, training, etc.—to the success of decentralized social programs. On the other hand, donor program synchronization and lack of political clout to either understand or defend localities against partisan actions by the national government are acute problems of donor involvement.

Introduction

Social policy involves state and market, formal and informal as well as central and local institutions. This paper's objective is to provide research-based evidence on the relationship between social policy and the continuing interactions between central and local institutions in Africa. The research is based primarily on desk research using secondary sources.

Decentralization and local government revitalization have been recurring themes of governance reforms in developing countries and constituted 40% of all public-sector reform programs between 1980 and 1999 (Grindle 2002). It is a reform issue in practically all African countries (Mawhood 1983, Olowu and Wunsch 2004, Dickovick and Wunsch 2014). From the early 1990s, most of the African countries, often with the support and assistance of donors or development partners from the rich world, have had specific programs aimed at improving Africa's governance and development prospects.

In spite of some six decades or more of research on decentralization in developing countries and the pervasiveness of decentralization policies in many of these countries, the concrete results of decentralization remain in doubt. This paper reviews some of the available international evidence on the contribution of decentralized governance to social policy innovation, in some selected developing countries before a detailed case study of three social policy innovations in Eastern and Western Africa in the rest of the paper

After discussing the three theories of decentralization, namely participation, fiscal decentralization and political economy the paper examines the broad thesis that sub-national institutional capacity and institutional diversity could, under some conditions, enhance the effectiveness and impact of new social policy. We then examine the following six questions.

1. What are the drivers of decentralization, its challenges and opportunities, and how are the political dynamics played out in each country to support or undermine the implementation of a new social policy?
2. Under what conditions are local or sub-national entities effective in the collection and analysis of relevant information needed for social policy advocacy, formulation, implementation and evaluation?
3. What institutional coordination mechanisms enhance or undermine social policy formulation, implementation and evaluation between central and local entities?
4. What is the relationship between successful decentralization of social policy and the correct sequencing between fiscal and functional decentralization?
5. What is the relationship between successful decentralization and quality of human resource capacities at national and local levels?
6. How can effective accountability structures be constructed for effective social policy decentralization?

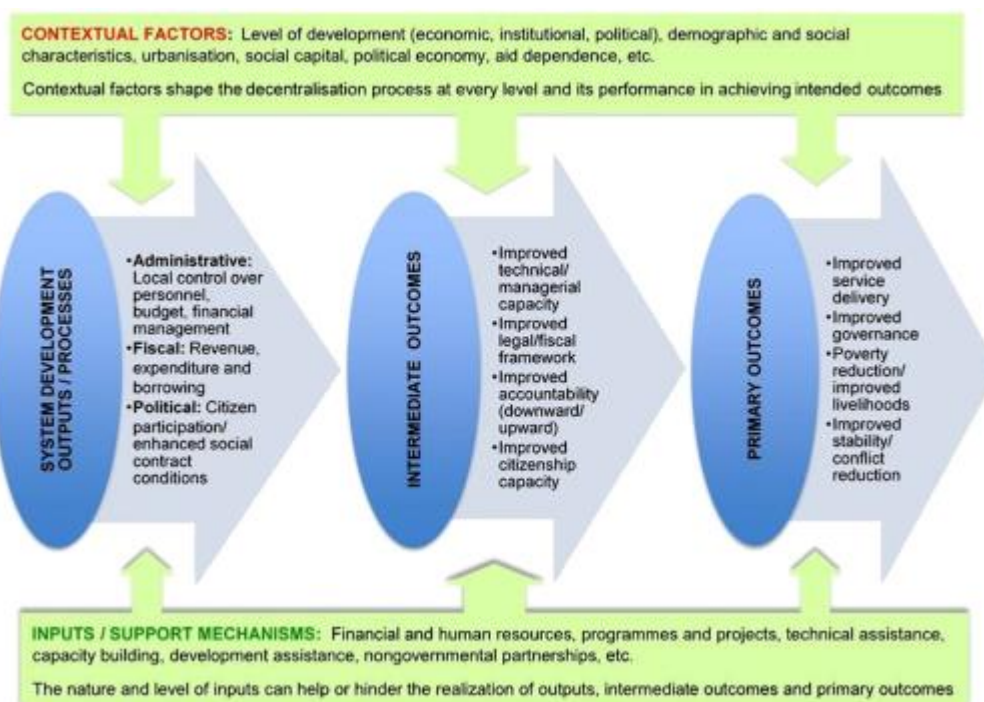
The rest of the paper is divided into four parts. In the next section, we clarify conceptual and contextual elements by defining clearly what decentralization is and the forms it takes especially as a part of reforms aimed at supporting social provisioning. The next section discusses the analytical framework including the research questions and objectives. Next, we undertake an analysis of the three cases of social provisioning that utilized a

decentralized approach. Finally, we highlight the critical lessons emerging from these experiences before the conclusion.

1. Conceptualization and Context of Decentralization

Decentralization is the assignment of public functions to subnational entities together with structures, systems, resources, and processes that support the implementation of specific public-sector goals of impacting positively on the political, social and economic context (Smoke 2015). It can come in any following three main forms: as local units of higher level governments (de-concentration); or as elected local governments with autonomous powers (devolution), or as contracts of central government functions with a public or private entity (delegation). It also has three main dimensions—administrative, fiscal, and political (World Bank 2004). Figure 1 provides a graphic representation of decentralization:

Figure 1: Decentralization



Theoretically, the degree of control or autonomy that sub-national governing institutions

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