

Decentralization in Africa: A Stocktaking Survey

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Abstract

In the last decade or so, decentralization has gained prominence as an expressed goal or as an actual pursuit in several African countries. Moreover, since independence, several countries have experimented with decentralization with varying degrees of success. The near universality of the claim to decentralization and the diverse consequences of the revival of local government structures under political liberalization suggest a need to better understand the extent, pace, and consequences of decentralization in Africa. This is critical for development work since the reformulation of state power through decentralization has implications for how and where development partners set their priorities and deploy their resources. This paper provides an overview of decentralization in Africa based on the assessments of World Bank specialists working on each country covered. The extent of decentralization was measured by three indices reflective of the three aspects of decentralization: *political, administrative, and*

fiscal. Our findings indicate decentralization in Africa is progressing but unevenly both in terms of regional spread and in terms of the aspects of decentralization that are installed. Overall, the pace and content of decentralization in the region can best be described as moderate and, where it has effectively been installed, in need of deepening. Among the 30 countries analyzed, a little less than half have high or moderate levels of overall decentralization, with the least decentralization occurring in francophone countries. While these findings suggest decentralized authorities in Africa are short on the requisites for effective administration and development response to local community needs, it is critical to recognize that these authorities are in the midst of immense change. This change is indeed in the right direction – toward a deliberate creation and enhancement of local authority. It is significant to note that in no country was the claim to *centralization* as a preferred organizational model made or implied, nor was decentralization considered undesirable, only difficult to effect and sustain.

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By

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INTRODUCTION

Decentralization, defined broadly as the transfer of public authority, resources, and personnel from the national level to sub-national jurisdictions, has been a recurrent theme in African countries since independence. In this paper, we are concerned only with decentralization to the local level, which is supposed to result in local governments and local service delivery. We are not concerned with the transfer of authority to regional, state or provincial levels, which typically has a different dynamic often tied closely to contestations over control of the state and an explicit balance of regional, ethnic or other subnational forces. We also distinguish between decentralization, which we define as entailing transfer of political, administrative, and fiscal responsibilities, and deconcentration, which we define as the mere relocation of executing agencies to the local level with responsibility and power remaining at the center.¹

In the last decade or so decentralization has gained prominence as an expressed goal or as an actual programmatic pursuit in the context of or as a consequence of two prominent movements affecting the African state. One consists of structural adjustment programs that sought to reform the public sector starting in the 1980s while the other is the ongoing transition toward more democratic and competitive politics that started in the 1990s. Although the post-independence history of governance and development in Africa is replete with expressed commitments and even actual legal and programmatic attempts at decentralization, it has mostly been honored in the breach. In nearly all African countries, structures of local administration exist but are often subordinated in their legal creation, mandate, and operation to the central state, especially the executive. Most of these structures date back to the colonial era as part of the dimensions of the state bequeathed at independence less as units of local governance and service delivery and more as instruments for administering the interior. As a result, up to the early 1990s, these local level structures either ossified along with the rest of the public sector under the weight of centralization or became conduits of the central state's repression.

As elsewhere in the developing world, political and economic liberalization have opened possibilities or at least revived claims for greater decentralization. While we are yet to understand in a systematic way where the impetus for decentralization is coming from, initial evidence suggests that it emanates from sub-national claims for greater autonomy as an extension of democratization, and from governments pressed to shed functions and commitments due to external and internal demands for a leaner, more efficient and enabling state. More shrewdly, central governments may be eager to decentralize their authority, resources (meager as they are), and personnel due to legitimacy concerns given their persistent poor performance over the last four decades. Major development donors have also pushed decentralization as a pathway to improving governance and service delivery in developing countries. In each case, the relative significance of the different causes for decentralization may well predict the extent to which it will succeed and how much governance and service delivery could improve.

¹ For definitions, see Crook and Manor 1998, pp. 6-7, also generally UNDP 1999 and World Bank 2001. For overviews of decentralization, see Manor and Crook 1998; Manor 1999; McLean, Kerr, and Williams 1998; and UNDP 1998. For overviews of decentralization in Africa see Oyugi 2000, Tordoff 1994, Vengroff 2000, and Brosio 2001. For an excellent analytical review, see Litvack, Ahmad, and Bird 1998; and Azfar et al. 1999 for an especially useful literature review.

The near universality of the claim to decentralization, the diverse consequences of the revival of local government structures under political liberalization, and the lessons from past and on-going comparative experiences (e.g. in Asia and Latin America), suggest a need to better understand the extent, pace, and consequences of decentralization in Africa. This is critical for operational work since the reformulation of state power through the validation of local authorities as arenas of agenda formulation, decision making, and autonomous implementation with regard to development and service delivery will inevitably affect how and where development partners set their priorities and deploy their resources.

Although a large number of studies on decentralization already exist, very few have sought to take stock of the status of decentralization across an entire region.² Several studies examine different aspects of decentralization and explore in detail the process and outcomes of decentralization in individual countries or in a number of countries drawn from one or different regions. Still other studies have examined decentralization and performance in specific sectors (principally health and education) either comparatively or in single country cases.³ While such studies may provide operationally relevant lessons from best practices and failed cases, they are most useful (and best pursued) once an overall understanding of the status of decentralization in a region is available. The present study seeks to provide such an overview of the status of decentralization in the Africa region. It should be handy both for operational work as a tool of quick information on a country and for further analytical work as a guide for the selection of issues and representative cases to understand decentralization in Africa.

This paper provides an overview of decentralization in Africa based on the assessments of World Bank specialists working on each country covered. It is the first of a two-part analytical effort that the Africa Public Sector Reform and Capacity Building Unit is undertaking to establish a knowledge base essential for making further decisions on how to engage and/or integrate decentralization in operational work in the region. This report catalogs the status of decentralization based on a number of indicators for each country as reported by country specialists within the Bank in response to a survey administered in January and February 2002. (See Annex for a detailed discussion of the methodology employed.) The second part of the review will be based on a comparative case study of 2-4 countries exploring the political economy of decentralization. In particular, the latter component will examine decentralization efforts in specific countries with a view to reviewing previous political and administrative reforms, and examining the contemporary impetuses, opportunities, and challenges for decentralization. The case studies will also anticipate probable outcomes and suggest possible operational responses that are specific to the case study countries and, more importantly, indicative for general sector work.

² Empirical studies include McLean, Kerr and Williams 1998 and UNDP 1998. Most other studies have been overviews of trends without true cross-national comparison or collections of case studies (e.g. Manor and Crook 1998; Oyugi 2000).

³ Most studies of decentralization deal with specific facets of decentralization such as political decentralization (e.g. Vengroff 2000), fiscal decentralization (e.g. de Mello and Barenstein 2001), or focus on specific sectors such as health or education (e.g. Anonymous 2002).

FINDINGS

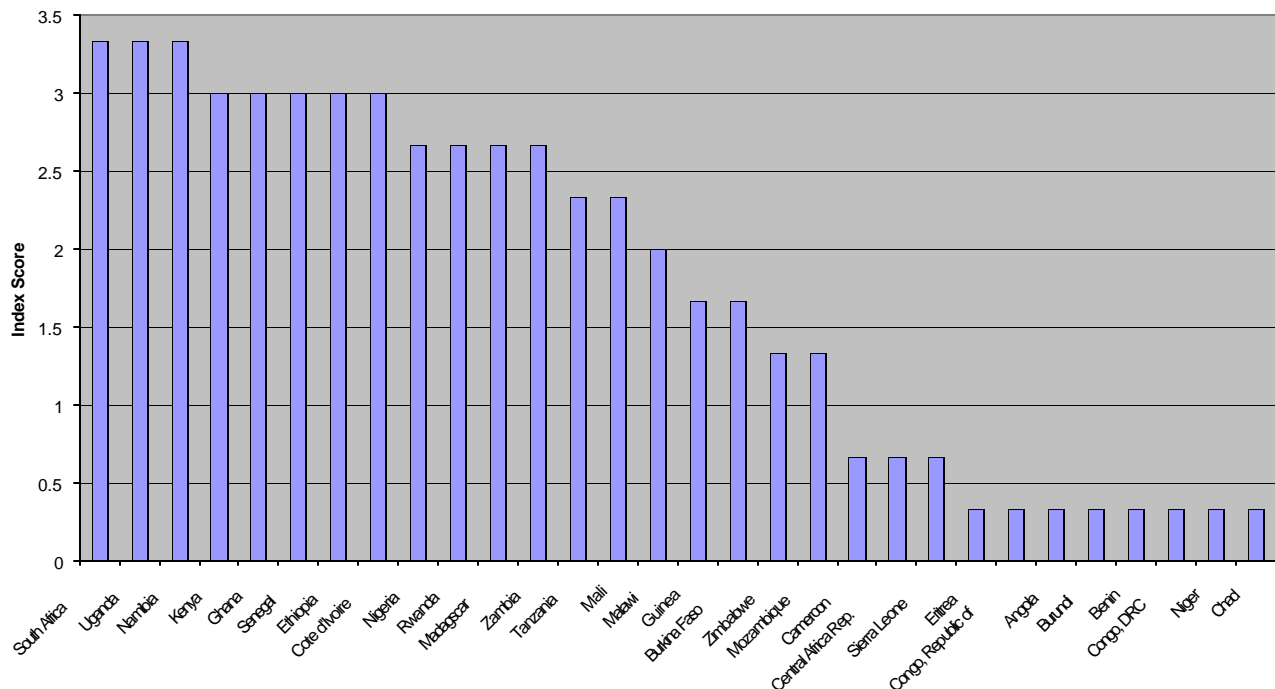
Extent of Decentralization

The extent of decentralization was measured by three indices to reflect the three aspects of decentralization: *political, administrative, and fiscal*. Assessing decentralization at this disaggregated level helps better clarify the component structures underpinning claims to decentralization as well as point to the limits of such claims. To measure the extent of decentralization we focused on the existence and overall operation of institutions and structures of governance, administration and fiscal control at the local level.

Thus, the *political decentralization* index was computed from the mean of the following: the number of elected sub-national tiers, the score for the existence of direct elections for local governments, and the score for turnout and fairness of such elections. Thus a country was likely to score high (i.e. 4) if it had more levels of sub-national government that were elected rather than appointed, where local governments in particular were elected, and where local government elections were adjudged free and fair. The highest score attainable was 4, while the lowest was 0.

Of the 30 countries analyzed, eight scored high (at least a 3 on the index) indicating a high degree of political decentralization (see Figure 1). These were South Africa, Uganda, and Namibia (all above 3.0) and Kenya, Ghana, Senegal, Ethiopia and Cote d'Ivoire. A second set of countries indicated a moderate level of political decentralization, with scores ranging from 2.0 to 2.9; these included 7 countries (i.e. Nigeria, Rwanda, Madagascar, Zambia, Tanzania, Mali and Malawi). The rest of the countries (15) indicated very low levels of political decentralization, although four of these at least held elections in part of the territory.

Figure 1: Extend of Political Decentralization

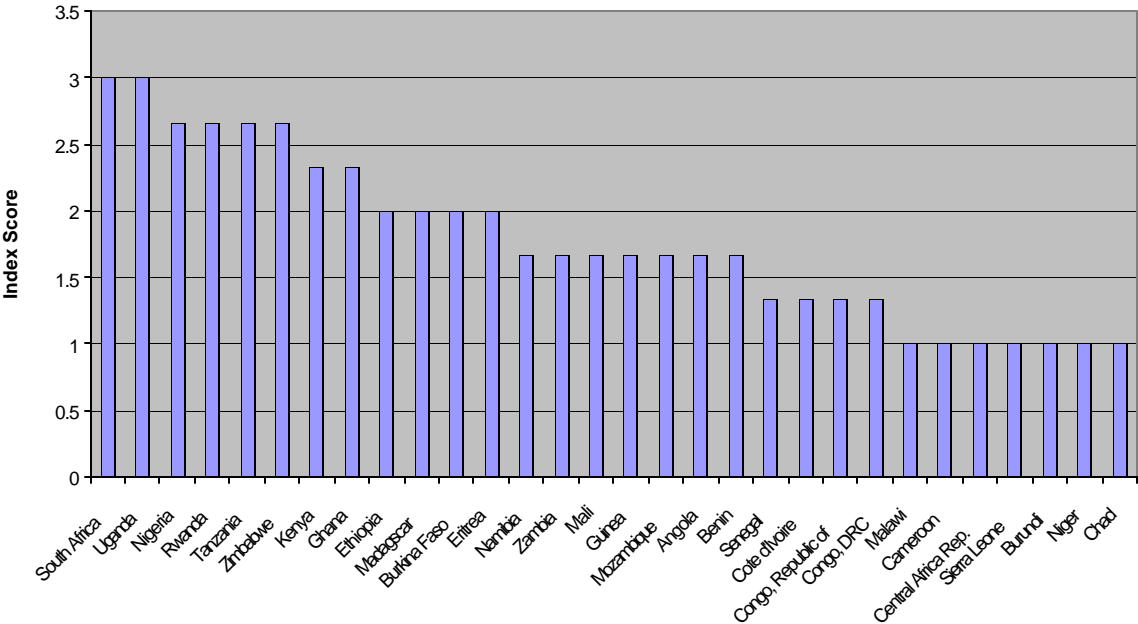


Administrative decentralization was tracked using three indicators whose mean produced the index. The index consisted of the score for the clarity of roles for national and local governments provided by the law, the score indicative of where the actual responsibility for service delivery resided, and the score indicative of where the responsibility for (hiring and firing) civil servants resided. Thus a country with a very clear legal framework demarcating local and central government roles and institutionalizing the principle of subsidiarity, with actual service delivery delegated to and performed by localities, and by civil servants responsible to local authorities, would have scored highest on this index (i.e. 4). Those with no legal framework, and with persistent centralization in service delivery and in civil service oversight (hiring and firing) would tend to score low on this index (i.e. lowest score 0).

On this score (see Figure 2), two countries indicated a high degree of administrative decentralization (South Africa and Uganda) while ten others indicated a moderate degree of administrative decentralization (Nigeria, Rwanda, Tanzania, Zimbabwe, Kenya, Ghana, Ethiopia, Madagascar, Burkina Faso and Eritrea). Of the sixteen countries that showed very low degrees of administrative decentralization, six had practically made no effort to decentralize administrative systems.

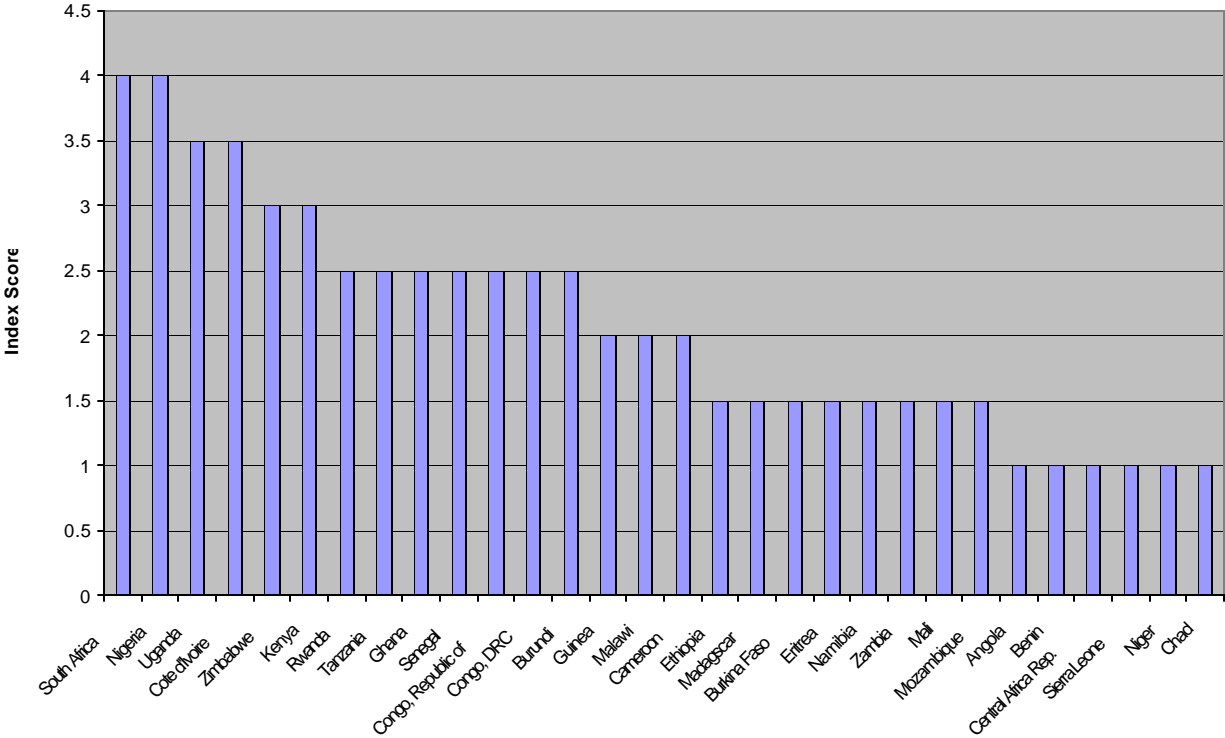
Finally, *fiscal decentralization* was measured using two indicators: the score given for the arrangements for fiscal transfers from the central government to localities and the score corresponding to the proportion (offered as a range) of public expenditure controlled by the localities. The index was simply the mean of these two scores. Thus, a country with an established and often-used formula for fiscal transfers and in which locally-controlled expenditures account for a high proportion of overall public expenditures would have scored high on this index (i.e. highest score 4). A country whose fiscal transfers to localities were ad hoc and whose localities accounted for a miniscule proportion of national public expenditures would score low on the fiscal decentralization measure (i.e. lowest score 0).

Figure 2: Extend of Administrative Decentralization



The degree of fiscal decentralization across the continent is best revealed by the fact that in 19 of the 30 countries analyzed local governments control less than 5% of the national public expenditure (see Figure 3). In fact the highest achievable category indicated in the research (“above 10%”) is lower than the average for decentralized systems elsewhere in the developing world – where an average 14% of the public expenditure is controlled at the local level.⁴ Only one country was assessed to have a very high degree of fiscal decentralization (South Africa). The countries that scored high (i.e. where local governments control 5-10% of public expenditures) are Nigeria, Uganda, and Zimbabwe. Countries with moderate levels of fiscal responsibilities anchored at the local level (i.e. where 3-5% of public expenditures are controlled by local authorities) included Kenya, Rwanda, Ghana, Senegal, Burundi, and the Congo Republic, and Congo DRC.⁵

Figure 3: Extent of Fiscal Decentralization



These rankings of fiscal decentralization should be approached with care for a variety of reasons. First, as noted above, the proportion of public expenditures controlled by the local authorities is very small such that even the ‘high performers’ are marginal in their performance compared to the global trends. Moreover, the proportion of public expenditures controlled by the local authorities is only one dimension of fiscal decentralization, which ought to include rules of fiscal control and revenue collection – almost always reported in interviews to be in favor of the

⁴ This average depends on the per capita income. For most of the decentralized countries it is well above 10%, often exceeding 40% for most Nordic countries, and hovering around 20-30% for several European countries where the average is 32% for OECD countries. For developing countries, especially in Asia and Latin America, the percentages are above 10% and often approaching 20% for the good performers, with a range of 14% and 26% for transition countries. See Bahl 2002 and World Development Report, 1999/2000, Table A1: Decentralization.

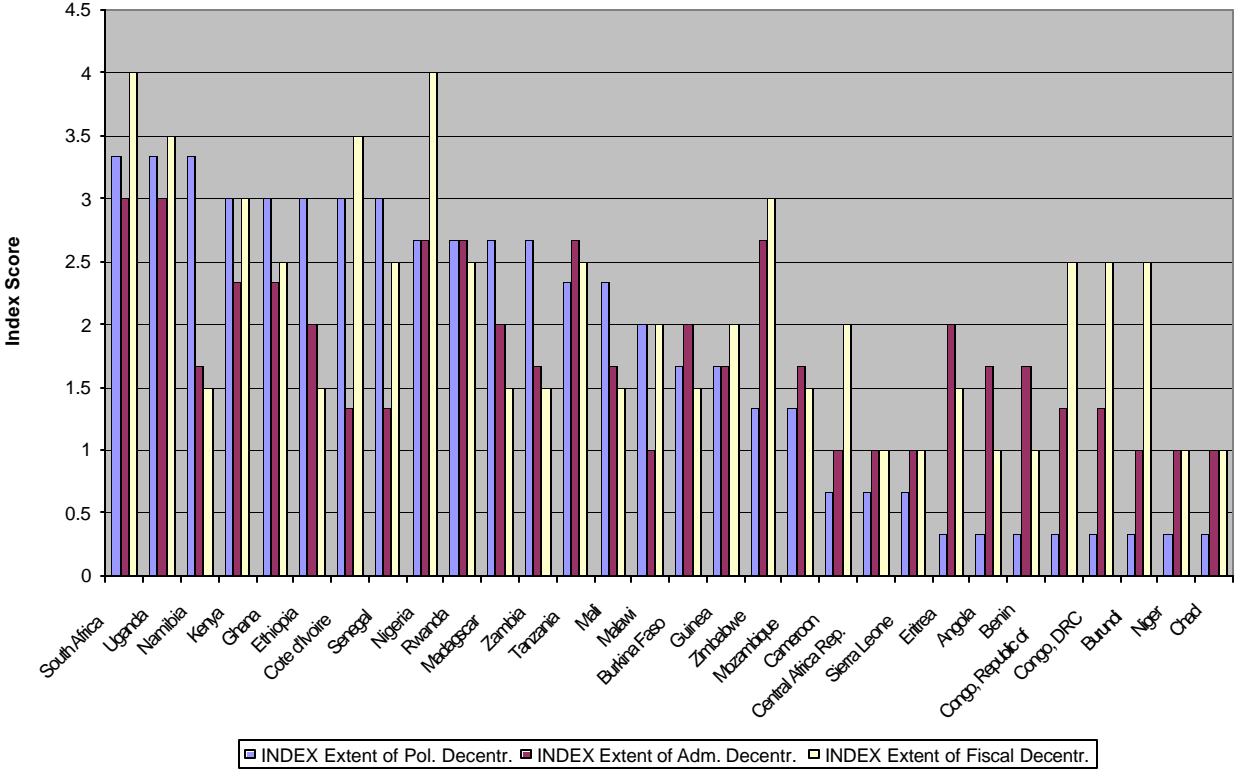
⁵ Congo DRC scored high due to an estimate based on the collapse of the central state.

central state and excessive. Second, in a number of instances it was difficult to disentangle the proportion disbursed by local authorities but actually allocated and earmarked by central ministries (e.g. salaries of sector ministry staff paid through the local payroll) and funds wholly controlled by the localities. Finally, some of the figures for fiscal decentralization may also reflect certain inaccuracies as no hard figures were found or those found were quite dated and estimates by country specialists did not always indicate very firm data given lack of tracking such data by countries or by the Bank.

Decentralization Components Compared

It is clear that the degree to which the various components of decentralization have been achieved varies markedly such that one component may be rated very high while another quite low. That *political decentralization* was the most advanced component of decentralization was not surprising. First, political decentralization is the local manifestation of the democratic reform that swept the continent in the 1990s. However, although widespread it is not necessarily deeply entrenched. Second, *administrative decentralization* appears as often and is often rated high because administrative reform was the preferred pathway to decentralization (in particular, deconcentration) before democratization. That fiscal decentralization lags behind these other variables is not surprising. Even where it seems much further along it belies the small proportions that are used for comparison to the national public expenditures rather than the advancement of fiscal responsibilities at the local level (see notes 4 and 5).

Figure 4: Decentralization Components Compared



The above graph (Figure 4) compares the three aspects of decentralization across the countries arranged according to the overall status of decentralization (measured by more

indicators than the three summarized here, see Figure 11, pp. 18-21, see also Annex II, p. 33).⁶ In general, countries that scored high on the overall decentralization score also retained their rankings in the component scores for structural decentralization, and especially in terms of democratic decentralization and administrative decentralization. For the better performing countries, decentralization was founded on an advanced political decentralization – a component on which all but six of the top sixteen countries scored higher than other aspects of decentralization. For the low performers, democratization was nominal or non-existent, which often meant no elected local governments exist. For these low performers – not unexpectedly – administrative decentralization was also minimal and, with the exception of five countries, fiscal decentralization was equally low.⁷ (See Figure 5.) Note that for the high performers political decentralization is almost consistently tracked closely by administrative decentralization, while for the low performers administrative decentralization is almost consistently ahead of political decentralization, a pointer to the concessions these less democratic countries also have to make to local administration, often the preferred form of decentralization for non-democratic states.

Accountability

Downward accountability was defined as the ability of citizens to hold the local authority to account. It is measured by the presence of institutions necessary to enforce accountability such as elections and forums for citizen participation. In the survey questionnaire, we sought to find out whether direct elections are held for local government authorities, whether these are free and fair, and whether there are other opportunities for citizen participation between elections. Countries that held elections for local authorities, that ensured these were free and fair, and that provided other channels (especially formal ones) for citizen participation were judged to have a high degree of downward accountability. Countries that did not have any of these institutions or whose institutions were judged to be operating at sub-optimal levels would have scored lower on this index. The highest value is 4 and the lowest 0. To arrive at the index for downward accountability we averaged the scores rendered for each of the three indicators.

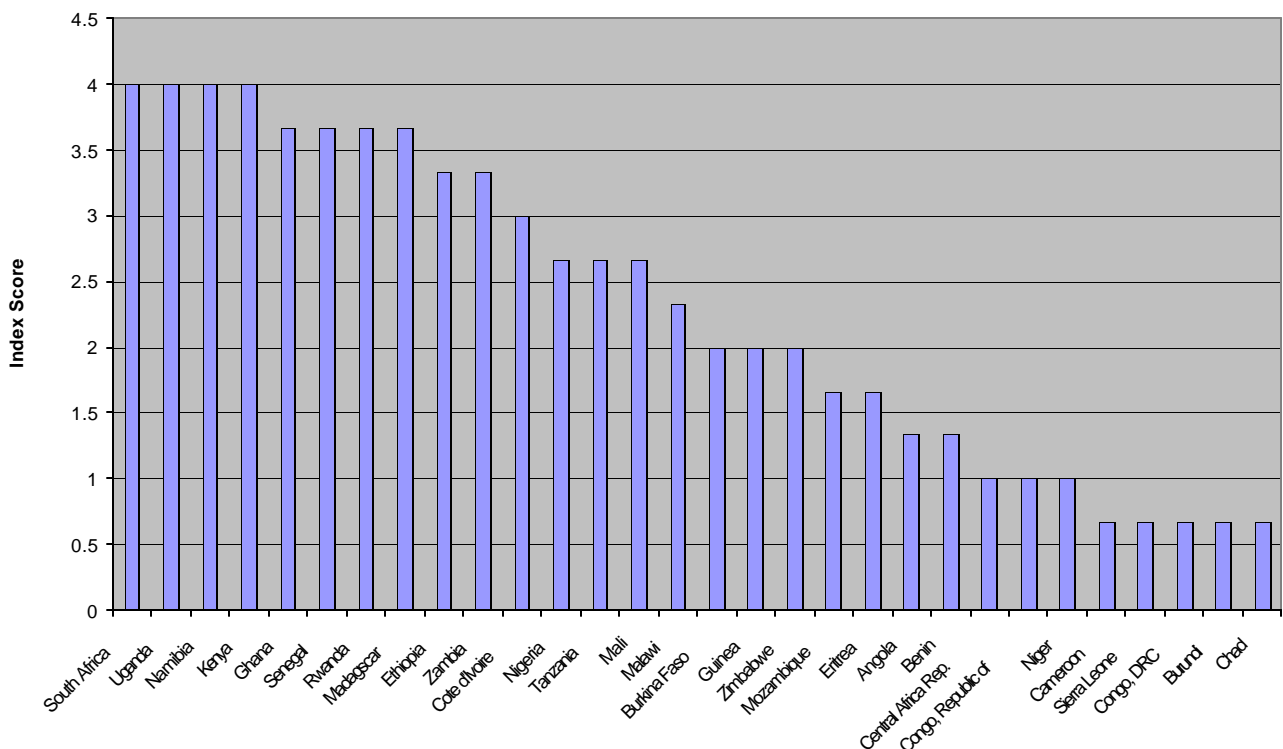
⁶ As indicated earlier, the spikes for the index of fiscal decentralization are misleading because the ranking is based on a scale whose referent values in terms of proportion of expenditure at the local level are below the average for decentralized systems. As such, the high scores should *not* be read to mean fiscal decentralization is more advanced than either political or administrative decentralization. See footnote 4 for more details.

⁷ The five exceptions occurred where fiscal decentralization was adjudged more advanced than the other two aspects. This was obviously inconsistent with what we would expect given absent or barely operative local governments. Closer examination bears out this suspicion. For example, among the five countries, Congo DRC scored high on local control of resources essentially due to central state collapse; while Burundi's was due to deconcentrated sector ministries being used as assessment referents for local expenditures. In any case, the assessments themselves are very low and only seem relatively high because democratic or administrative aspects are non-existent.

On this index, the countries fell into three clusters (Figure 6): Four countries (South Africa, Uganda, Kenya, and Namibia) scored very high (4) while another four (Rwanda, Ghana, Senegal and Madagascar) scored above 3.5 indicating high downward accountability. In a second set of countries scoring above 2.5 six were represented (Zambia, Ethiopia, Cote d'Ivoire, Nigeria, Mali, and Tanzania) indicating moderately developed accountability mechanisms. The rest of the countries (16) accounted for the low scoring set (below 2.5) and included, for example, Eritrea, Mozambique, Cameroon, and Niger which nearly always indicated no elections were held for local authorities – which tended to erode any other participation and accountability measure.

Upward accountability was defined as the degree to which local government performance is supervised (as opposed to controlled) by the central government. Primary supervisory instruments would include the auditing of public accounts, and the establishment of service delivery standards, including monitoring and evaluation systems. An average score was calculated based on the scores of these two indicators. Countries where service delivery standards were established, where monitoring and evaluation was undertaken, and where

Fig. 6. Downward Accountability



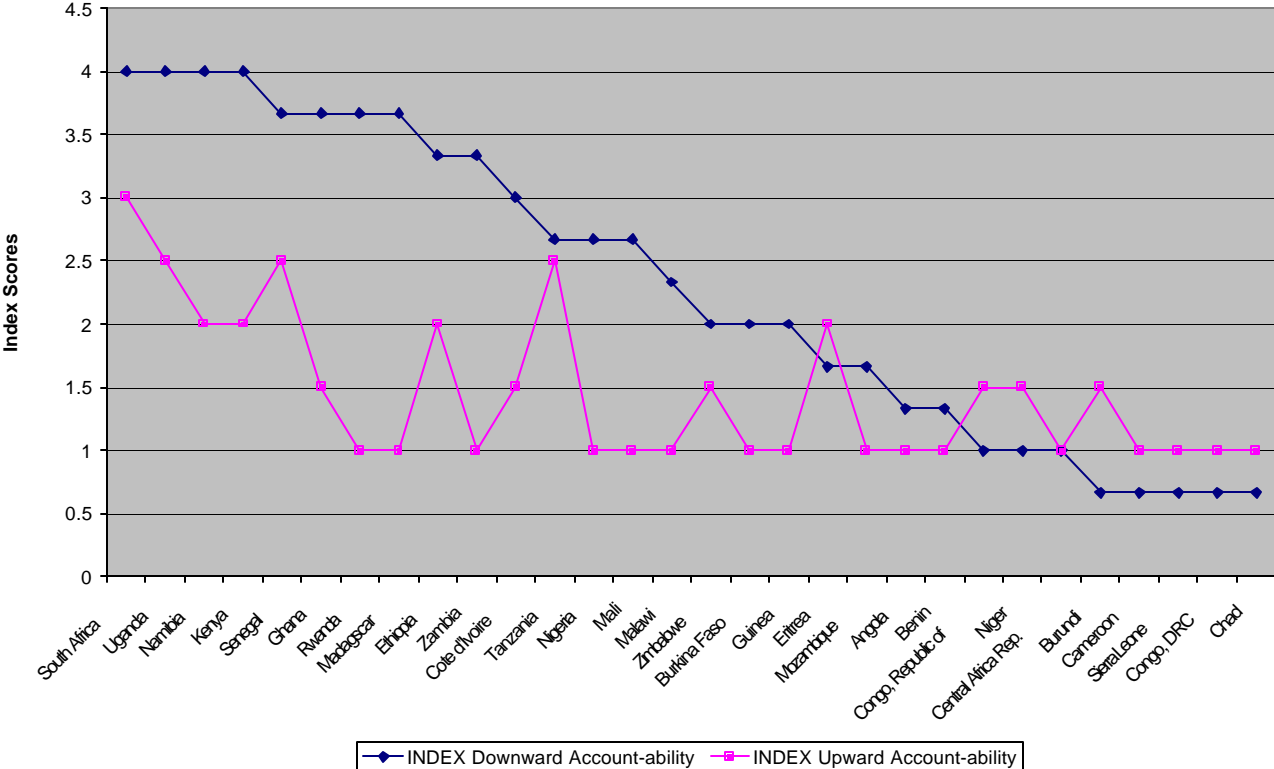
accounts were up to date and regularly audited would score high on this index (i.e. highest score 4). In countries where accounts were late or not audited or where service delivery standards did not exist or were not complied with would score low on this index (i.e. lowest score 1).

Surprisingly, given that the degree of control implied by unitary governments (43 out of 47 countries in the region), there was little upward performance accountability structured into center-local authority relations (Figure 7). For example, of the 30 countries reviewed, only four can be said to have a high degree of upward accountability in terms of the existence of

enunciated service delivery standards and up to date auditing accounts. These were: South Africa, Uganda, Senegal and Tanzania. Only one of these actually had upward accountability at the level of monitoring and evaluation (South Africa). Four other countries had moderate levels of upward accountability, with the most common failure being backlogged accounts. These were: Namibia, Kenya, Ethiopia, and Eritrea. An additional five countries scored low on this measure because they did not have audited accounts or did not articulate or comply with service delivery standards. The majority of countries however scored abysmally low on the index of upward accountability: nearly all due to backlogged accounts and non-existent standards of service delivery. However, this is not surprising given the level of monitoring and evaluation is generally low in African civil services.

When we compare the two measures of accountability (see Figure 9), downward accountability seems to be ahead of upward accountability. While this may seem inconsistent with the fact that many of these countries remain centralized, it is consistent with the definition of upward accountability used, which excludes control but rather refers to oversight of performance. It is also clearly consistent with the recent trend toward democratizing sub-national jurisdictions as part of the democratization movement. Thus, political power over local authorities has been wrestled from domineering states. However, political decentralization does not imply that the central state necessarily has developed the capacity for white-collar supervision of service delivery at the lower levels. This capacity for supervision is as important an issue as the capacity for these newly empowered local authorities to deliver on what they promise or are mandated to.

Fig. 9. Downward and Upward Accountability Compared



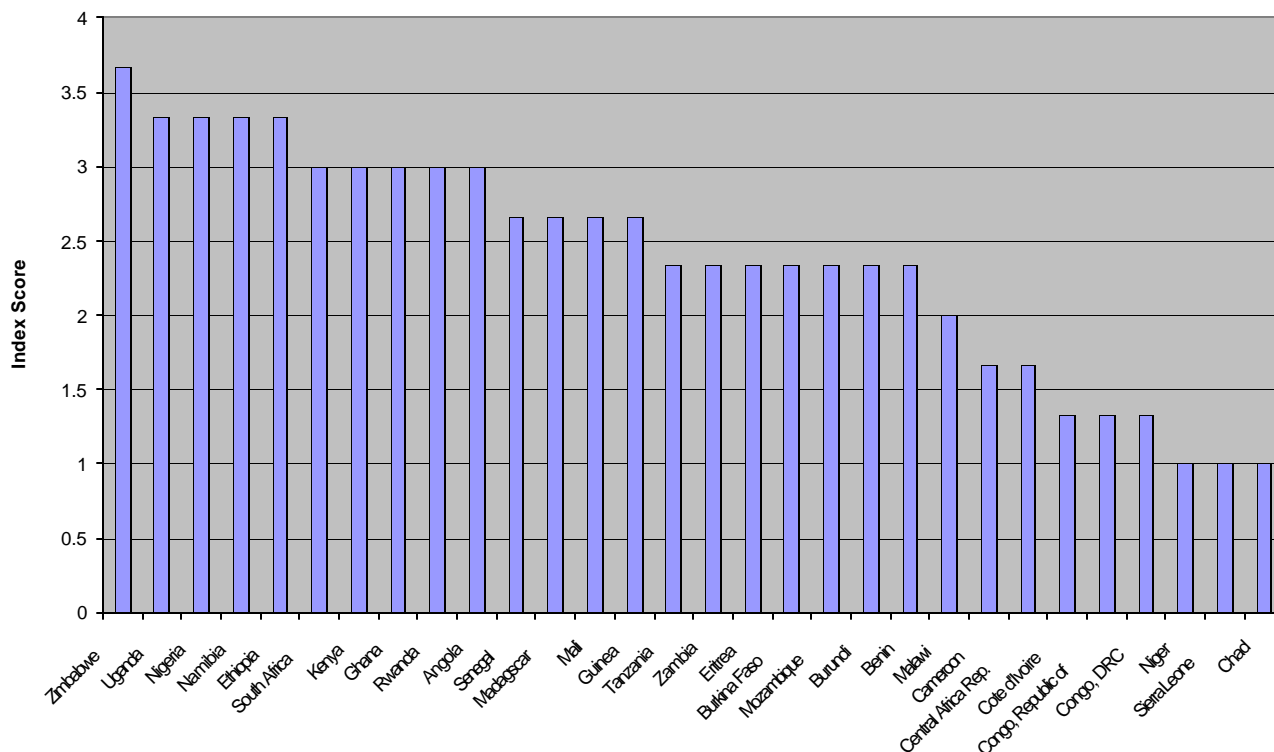
System Durability

Beyond the extent and performance of decentralized government, we gauged the potential durability of the system as indicated by its institutional foundations and by the longevity of those particular arrangements. The indicators used to assess the two structural characteristics were: the correspondence and the links between the local governance institutions and societal divisions and/or traditional authority structures; and the clarity and comprehensiveness of the legal definitions operationalizing local governance. We considered decentralized structures that mirror societal divisions, that integrate extant traditional or otherwise legitimated local authority patterns, and that are rooted in clear legislation delineating roles and especially underscoring the principle of subsidiarity to have a greater endurance potential. This is as opposed to systems that operate in an ad hoc manner or which have a vague legal definition or subsist on foundations lacking correspondence with societal divisions.

In addition, we grounded this indicator empirically by considering the actual longevity of the system of local government evaluated. Rather than the original question that sought to discover the number of local elections since independence, a new indicator for the length of time elapsed since the last major overhaul of the local government system was used. This was viewed as a better indicator of system durability since it is linked to the actual longevity of a particular set of institutional arrangements. In a context where local authority institutions are often reformed – sometimes in substantial ways while still leaving mechanisms such as elections intact – the mere incidence of elections may be misleading. Moreover, the democratization movement of the 1990s fundamentally transformed nearly all local governance institutions and practices, making previous presence or lack of elections somewhat irrelevant to the reality of decentralized government this decade. Thus, countries whose current iteration of decentralization is very new (i.e. less than 2 years old, scored at 1) were considered to have a less durable system than those whose systems were substantially unchanged for 10 years or more (highest score, 4). The referent year is 2002. Thus, in addition to the scores for local government links with traditional authorities and for the clarity in their legal definition, the index for system durability is determined by taking into account the score for the range of years since the last major overhaul of the local government system. The index was thus the mean of the three scores.

On the indicator for potential system durability, the countries reviewed fall into three clusters (Figure 10). First is a group of countries whose scores range from 3.0 to 3.7, indicating a high potential for endurance and stability. This included good performers such as South Africa, Uganda, and Nigeria, moderate performers such as Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, and Ghana, and countries facing *recent* crisis (Zimbabwe) or consistently lacking local government (Angola). A second group is that of countries whose scores are in the range of 2.0-2.9 indicating moderate possibilities for system endurance and stability (e.g. Madagascar and Senegal). Third is a group of countries where the chances for local government structural stability or endurance are low to very low: for example, Benin and Eritrea in the low category and countries such as Cameroon, Sierra Leone, and Chad in the very low category, indicating systems with little structural underpinnings to support local authorities, if they exist.

Fig. 10. Probable System Stability



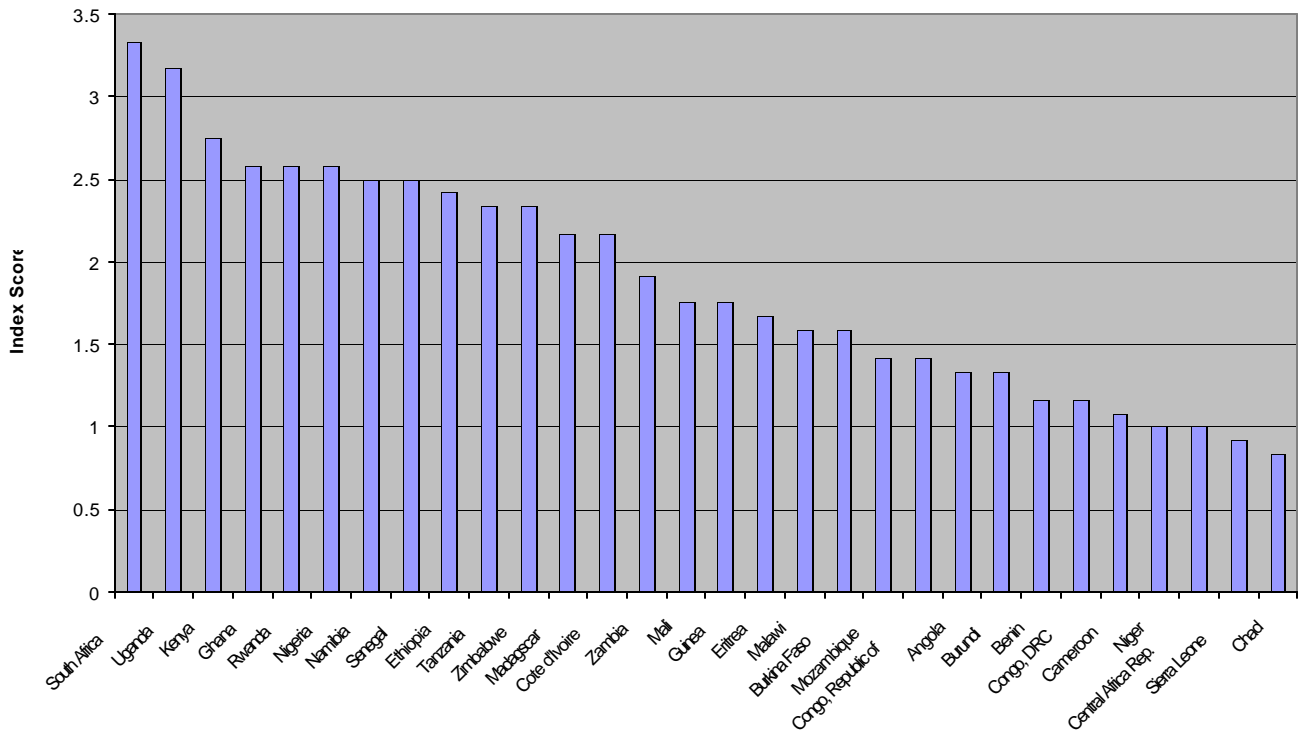
Two caveats are important. One is that the probability for endurance is effectively negated by catastrophic political or economic crisis, much as a constitutional heritage however long-lasting is typically endangered by such events. So, for instance, the high score a country like Zimbabwe earns in terms of its potential endurance is endangered by the recent political crisis facing that country, which however has yet to produce an actual institutional change (aside from stress) with regard to local government arrangements. Second, durability is irrespective of the level or progressiveness of decentralization. Countries with no local government arrangements can be remarkably stable in that status (such as Angola). Similarly, countries attempting to make progress by instituting new reforms drop in their stability and potential for endurance precisely because they introduce change. Durability therefore ought to be interpreted with the broader context in mind since its desirability is dependent on what is being preserved – local authorities or the lack of local authorities.

Overall Decentralization

Finally, a composite index was created to rank countries on their overall decentralization taking into account structural and performance factors. The index consisted of 12 distinct indicators, which are all the indicators used in the above indices except the indicator for the period since the last major overhaul of the system. (See Annex II for details.)

Overall, the data indicates a moderate degree of decentralization in the Africa region for the 30 countries for which data was complete and analyzed (Figure 11). On a scale of 0 to 4, with 0 indicating the lowest level of decentralization and 4 the highest level possible, only two countries (South Africa and Uganda) scored in the top range (3.0-4.0). The next level (2.0-2.9) indicates countries with a moderate degree of decentralization. Eleven countries were in this category (Kenya, Ghana, Nigeria, Rwanda, Namibia, Senegal, Ethiopia, Zimbabwe, Tanzania, Cote d' Ivoire, and Madagascar). The third group of countries is of those with low levels of decentralization (1.0-1.9). This group had the largest number of countries (13): Zambia, Guinea, Mali, Eritrea, Burkina Faso, Malawi, Republic of Congo, Mozambique, Angola, Burundi, Benin, The Democratic Republic of Congo, and Cameroon. The final group with nominal or no decentralization (range 0-0.9) included four (4) countries for which data was complete (The Central Africa Republic, Niger, Sierra Leone, and Chad), but could conceivably include nearly half of the 15 countries for which complete data was unavailable.

Fig. 11. Overall Decentralization Score



This overall ranking has both expected and surprising elements. For example, both Uganda and South Africa were expected to rank high on the overall decentralization score since their experiences have been documented to have achieved significant devolution and empowerment of local communities backed by both political will and clear legal mandates. All other variables (discussed above) underscore this. The surprising outcomes include, for example, the overall assessment of Ethiopia and Namibia, which appear in the same category of countries having moderate decentralization. Since its revolution in 1993, Ethiopia elaborated a constitutional framework that was most progressive in giving authority to the regions, including the power to secede. However, the actual devolution of power has been to the regions, not local governments; and the effectiveness of the local entities is still constrained as suggested by more

detailed assessments of discrete indicators (see above). Namibia, whose decentralization effort is in its infancy actually belies two contradictory realities: first operational local governments buoyed by the overall health of the Namibian democracy have existed since independence and the new policy and reform program is to reinvigorate and expand local governance; second, the lack of local governments in the most populous regions in the North. Thus, even though Namibia is only now finalizing a policy on decentralization, it does have operational local governments and scores above Ethiopia principally due to its democratic practices, which are judged healthier.

In relation to overall decentralization, it is notable that only four of the 13 countries in the upper levels (high and moderate) of overall decentralization are francophone (Senegal, Rwanda, Cote d'Ivoire and Madagascar). Of these, two (Rwanda and Madagascar) have overhauled their administrative systems substantially and can be considered to have had a major break with the established francophone patterns. Indeed, except for four countries (Sierra Leone, Eritrea, Zambia, and Malawi), *all* the countries scoring in the lower half (low and no decentralization) of the overall index are either francophone (11) or lusophone (2) – that is, countries with a roman law tradition which presume greater state centralization..

It is important to recognize two things in these comparisons. First, the overall comparisons belie some important variations in the component indicators and comparison of these indicators reveals nuances in discrete aspects of decentralization (although somewhat consistent with overall rankings). Arguably, some of the component indices may be more fruitful bases for comparison than the aggregate scores. These are discussed at length above (especially sections on the extent of decentralization and accountability). Second, in certain instances, the overall ranking may run counter to one's intuitive sense of how any particular country should rank. This may reflect some inevitable subjectivity in respondents' assessments based either on historical comparison within the same country or comparison with some unspecified 'average' for African countries.

Limitations

As with any overview study the findings reported above have a number of limitations. One is that any general, overall characterization may not coincide with the reality in particular sectors –given some sectors (especially health and education) tend to have more decentralized structures and have had them for a long time. In addition, the overall characterization rendered for any particular country may obscure radical regional differences such as between resource-rich regions and resource-poor regions or between urban and rural areas. Second, the fast pace of reform (or institutional decline) may significantly change the overall picture within a short period. For example, Chad, which scores very low on nearly all indicators, is in the midst of a major review and programmatic outlay to decentralize the state. Similarly, some indicators of decentralization (e.g. legal clarity or revenue independence for urban authorities) in a country like Zimbabwe have been diluted by the suspension of some elections by an increasingly authoritarian regime facing stiff opposition to its rule. Thus, by definition, the overview is a still frame of a (sometimes fast-) changing landscape. As such, characterizations at the country level ought to be used cautiously and updated frequently.

This need for regular updates of the database is further underlined by a third limitation of this general cross-national overview. Although the assessments offered here were collected from individuals with expert knowledge on each country, clearly assessments by different experts can

differ, especially given their different vantage points (e.g. sector specialists, economists, and institutional analysts). While we tried to triangulate assessments from surveys with published sources and additional experts, there still is room for improvement and, in particular, we invite corrections to the database. In order to achieve this, we intend the database to be available for updating as often as practical (perhaps every year or following any significant change in a country). Over time, we expect to compile a number of accompanying case studies to give greater clarity to the overview presented and to minimize the limitations noted here.

DISCUSSION

In general, the portrait of decentralization in Africa is a mixed one: it is neither as bleak as it would have been perhaps a decade ago nor is it a vista of energetic reform of the order of the political liberalization of the 1990s. On the one hand, practically all countries have structures of sub-national governance, including local deliberative or representative assemblies usually at the lowest practical level of districts, towns or communes (rather than just regions or provinces). More than a handful of countries are in the midst of reviewing and revising these structures to increase their number or to add additional tiers, or to give them greater legal and operational definition with more powers and responsibility or, in rare cases, all the above. On the other hand, beyond this near universal presence of structures of decentralized government, analysis of the critical questions of where actual power resides, where responsibility is anchored, and where effectiveness obtains yields findings that underscore the continued dominance of the centralized state.

Within the existing structures of decentralization, there were critical shortcomings in all three dimensions of decentralization: political, administrative, and fiscal. While nearly all the local authorities in countries that have had a democratic transition at the national level were elected, several showed little substance to this democratization in terms of free and fair elections. More importantly, broad-based and structured participation beyond elections was very low. Less impressive still was the degree of administrative decentralization. Even more critical was that (except for the two most impressive overall performers, South Africa and Uganda) the level of fiscal decentralization was dismal. Although no effort was made to document capacity for and actual achievement of good governance at the sub-national level, it was clear that even when decentralization was institutionally installed (laws enacted, authorities established, elected and staffed) service delivery remained limited due to financial constraints and/or the lack of congruent action by line ministries to actually devolve their functions.

Overall, the character of local governance in Africa reflects the limits imposed by the historical and contemporary governance profile at the national level.⁸ Four limitations are especially important: a) the unitary structure of the state as a starting point of decentralization; b) the colonial heritage of the administrative state; c) the general institutional insecurity of the African state; and, d) the poverty and lack of capacity at the local community level.

Overwhelmingly, the state in Africa is unitary and within such an arrangement more likely to be centralized. Moreover, efforts at decentralization even when well intentioned are less likely to effect desired change as easily as they would within federalist structures much more

⁸ While strong, these limits are not always unyielding. As the cases of Uganda and Ethiopia suggest, an array of factors and actors can be invoked to alter the otherwise predictable course imposed by these historical, institutional and political limits.

attuned to sharing power and resources. Of the 47 countries in the Africa region, only four have federal constitutions (Nigeria, Ethiopia, Eritrea, and the Comoros). And in at least two of these (Nigeria and Ethiopia) the center still projects significant dominance while in the other two intense conflicts at the center or between the regions and the center threaten constitutional integrity. With the exception of South Africa whose constitution mandates devolved powers to empower regions and which thus creates substantial space for local governance, all the other unitary countries have clear legal and de facto preferences for centralization. This centralization anchors power and resources in national legislatures, bureaucracies, judiciaries, and executives – but especially in the executive, whose prerogative tends to overrun the other institutions. This situation can be found both in countries with the British and French colonial administrative traditions. The same applies to the former Portuguese colonies given the administrative system is closer to the French and given that post-independence conflict in these countries entrenched centralization as security concerns became paramount. The recent electoral democratization of most African states has not necessarily altered such centralization and in certain instances, the new parties have replicated the domineering executive they previously opposed (e.g. Zambia, Malawi, and Senegal).⁹

This centralization of power at the national level and at the executive in particular stems from two additional reasons that limit further decentralization of the state in Africa. First, the inherited and rearticulated colonial ethos and structures of local governance largely circumscribe what these countries consider legitimate expansion of local authority. Thus, the parallel system of sub-national administrative tiers co-exists with and often dominates local authorities in the countries with British administrative traditions. In countries of the French tradition, the role of the *tutelle*, represented by functionaries of the central state, effectively neutralizes local authorities however decentralized. Only Madagascar, Uganda, Ethiopia, and Eritrea can be said to have diverged from this pattern essentially founded upon colonial administrative systems. For Ethiopia and Eritrea, it may be because they carried no weight of a colonial administrative heritage and because their decentralization efforts started in the 1990s in response to and as an antidote to the collapse of a centralized dictatorship. For Madagascar and Uganda, indigenous responses to pressures for local governance as an antidote to the dictatorship (and often brutality) of the central state have produced significant departures from the colonial administrative imprint. In Uganda, this has followed the revolutionary instruments of local mobilization dating back to the 1986 revolution. In Madagascar a technocratic search for a new system produced reform based on the German and Spanish models, far different from the French colonial heritage that had become associated with the dictatorship deposed in democratic elections in 1993.

Related to this colonial heritage of the administrative state is the heightened sense of insecurity that afflicts the state in Africa given its relative newness, its shallow legitimacy in society, its capacity shortcomings, and the intense competition for its control. Therefore, those who control state power know they control resources that are both scarce and precarious, thus heightening the intensity of contest. In this context, the state has been particularly jealous in guarding its writ and often invests heavily in securing and projecting its prerogatives or at least the semblance of such prerogatives. Principal among the prerogatives the central state has sought to secure, expand and deepen are territorial control, revenue, security and prestige. The drive for these prerogatives – once evidently preeminent within the colonial state but quickly dissipated in

⁹ For an extended statement on the pathology of centralization and its effects on development, see Wunch and Olowu 1995. For the historical basis of the nature of the African state see especially Young 1994.

the postcolonial state – led countries to centralize power to check centrifugal tendencies inherent in the new nations. The centralization gave rise to state dominance in society via the single party, personal or military rule, and state control of the economy. To the extent the underlying insecurities over state prerogatives remain (and arguably worsen), effective decentralization is imperiled even though the last two decades have seen greater democratization and economic liberation at the national level.¹⁰

Finally, decentralization is further limited by poverty and lack of capacity at the local level. While these conditions indeed make development in decentralized settings challenging, they become entrenched further as they are invoked by central governments as reasons why decentralization should not or cannot take place or should proceed slowly. Poverty – and responses to it in the rubric of state-led development – has fundamentally structured the dependence of communities on the central state, especially in a context where ‘bringing development’ to communities has been the principal legitimation tool for the African state. Thus, the centralization of power and resources – which makes development a delivery from the center – both creates dependency on the center and undermines the nascent capacity that would improve if appropriately exercised. Over time then, as poverty has endured in the interior of African countries and as nascent capacity (such as human resources) has been drawn away from communities into the cities for lack of an arena of action, the fiction of lack of capacity that central states offer as the reason decentralization cannot work to deliver development has become a reality. However, the converse is also true sometimes, in that the failure of the central state has at times opened up opportunities for dynamic responses at the local level using local capacity.

CONCLUSION

Our findings indicate decentralization in Africa is progressing but unevenly both in terms of regional spread and in terms of the aspects of decentralization that are installed. Overall, the pace and content of decentralization in the region can best be described as moderate and, where it has effectively been installed, in need of deepening. Among the 30 countries analyzed, a little less than half have high or moderate levels of overall decentralization, with the least decentralization occurring in francophone countries. Considering most of the countries excluded from analysis were anecdotally noted to have minimal or no decentralization, we can assuredly say that only about a third of African countries have effective decentralized structures of governance.

When countries that have decentralized or are in the process of decentralizing are examined more closely, it is noted that there are varying degrees of success with regard to the three aspects of decentralization (political, administrative and fiscal). While democratization is evidently the most advanced aspect of decentralization in all countries claiming to have decentralized local government, fiscal decentralization is lagging in practically all countries. The level of fiscal decentralization is particularly dismal considering that in more than half of the countries analyzed local authorities control less than 5% of the overall public expenditure. Administrative decentralization is somewhat more advanced than fiscal decentralization, but overall the posture of the central bureaucracy remains controlling or at least tutelary with regard

¹⁰ See Young 1994, Joseph 1999, and Nzongola-Ntalaja 1998.

to local authorities. Clearly, recent democratization at the local level has yet to translate into full control of the requisites of authority in localities.

In terms of the accountability of decentralized authorities, we found greater advance in downward accountability through elections in particular but less with other instruments of oversight over public officials. For example, public participation in policy formulation remained limited. On the other hand, supervision by the central state to ensure efficiency and probity within localities remained minimal, as the majority of local authorities did not have audited accounts or clearly spelt-out service delivery standards. Finally, the sustainability of the local authorities – looked at from the perspective of institutional durability – was uncertain for most countries. We found most countries' decentralization structures only moderately secured in terms of legal clarity and correspondence to social divisions or existing authority patterns which could lend them greater legitimacy. For several countries, local authorities exist precariously because they were only recently introduced, or recently (and too often easily and massively) revised, or not underpinned by clear legislation secured by the principle of subsidiarity.

While these findings suggest decentralized authorities in Africa are short on the requisites for effective administration and development response to local community needs, it is critical to recognize that these authorities are in the midst of immense change. This change is indeed in the right direction – toward deliberate creation and enhancement of local authority structures and in particular responsive to the changed context of democratic politics. It is significant to note that in no country was the claim to *centralization* as a preferred organizational model made or implied, nor was decentralization considered undesirable, only difficult to effect and sustain. Significantly, political decentralization, which is often the critical first step toward effective decentralization, has only recently taken root. There is therefore legitimate promise in the decentralization of the African state, although there are also many challenges that confront the process and, beyond it, service delivery and poverty reduction.

ANNEXES

I. Methodology

The findings reported here are based principally on a survey conducted among Washington-based World Bank staff presently or recently working on country or sector teams that would offer them the expertise to provide valid assessments of decentralization in a particular country. A survey questionnaire was developed in November-December 2001 by Helene Grandvoinet and Brian David Levy. While at least two comprehensive survey instruments for tracking decentralization exist in the Bank database, these were considered too detailed for the overview and for the turnaround sought for this study. Consisting of sixteen discrete items, the two-page questionnaire developed and deployed for this study is therefore a much-condensed version of the existing instruments (see Appendix A). A principal goal of the reduction was to economize on the time to collect information (especially for respondents who were not necessarily specialists in decentralization *per se*) while maximizing responses and especially in ways that would emphasize the overall picture rather than sector-specific assessments.

Stephen Ndegwa, the principal author, conducted the survey in January and February 2002. Analysis and writing was undertaken in March and April. Individual interviews were conducted with 33 Bank staff in Washington, DC. Each interview, while open-ended, culminated in the completion of the questionnaire. This mix of open-ended interviews and standard questionnaire completion allowed respondents to render summative assessments useful for comparative analysis and provide nuances important to understanding the broad outlines of each case. Three additional surveys were filed from field offices, without the accompanying interviews. In only two cases did Washington-based staff file a questionnaire without an interview; in one of these, a second respondent was found for the interview, while the second was complemented by the principal author's case knowledge. Typically, each interview lasted about 30 minutes in which individuals were asked to provide an overview of the decentralization process and describe the status of local authority institutions, performance, and change dynamics, if any, in the countries they were most familiar with. A number of individuals were able to complete interviews and questionnaires on more than one country.

While our goal was to ensure at least two individual responses per country, this was not always possible due to difficulties in finding a second person able to speak fluently on a country's decentralization experiences (i.e. with recent operational experience necessary to validate assessments). However, for all countries for which questionnaires and interviews were completed we were also able to supplement data from published or web-based sources, although the validity of some of the published information (e.g. number of sub-national jurisdictions) may have been superseded by events since publication or may present definitional ambiguities.¹¹ Published sources consulted included the World Development Report 1999/2000, which has an appendix with several indicators of decentralization (World Bank 2000, pp. 216-7). While it provided important benchmarks, the *WDR* had several indicators – some reliant on data dated more than 5 years before publication – that were superseded by events. Such data from the *WDR*

¹¹ For example, how different reports arrived at the total number of sub-national jurisdictions in different ways: some included administrative regions and states, while others counted only established local governments.

were used initially but replaced when recent data became available as interviews and questionnaires were completed. Other sources consulted included the Economist Intelligence Unit at <http://wb.eiu.com/index.asp>, the CIA World Fact Book which can be found at <http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/index.html>, and official websites for several countries (e.g. South Africa, Botswana, and Nigeria).

All forty-seven countries that make up the Bank's Africa Region (sub-Saharan Africa) were reviewed. Complete data was compiled for 32 countries (two thirds of countries in the region), of which 30 were further analyzed. Two countries for which data was complete (Lesotho and Cape Verde) were excluded because of size, consistent with the exclusion of other small states for which data was not gathered. Of the other fifteen countries excluded from the analysis, six were excluded for size (e.g. The Gambia, The Comoros, Sao Tome and Principe, Swaziland, Seychelles and Mauritius). Nine others were excluded for lack of data principally due to conflict situations (e.g. Somalia and Liberia) or to incomplete responses from respondents (Gabon, Togo, Guinea Bissau, Mauritania, Botswana, Equatorial Guinea, and Sudan).

A database was constructed using Microsoft Excel, which allowed for basic computation of indices and for the graphic display of descriptive analyses such as ranking countries based on various indicators and indices, and of relationships between ordinal indicators. Complex statistical analysis was neither advisable nor possible. A database of the raw data from completed questionnaires, including sources consulted, explanatory notes, and highlights on each country covered, is available as an annex as well as in a Microsoft Excel workbook.

Methodologically, this report has three significant limitations. First it captures in a snapshot a changing situation, one that is quite fluid at times. As such in the short time between gathering data and publication, some issues on the ground are likely to have changed. For example, legal instruments drafted may be enacted or entire regimes may collapse or move radically in a direction not conducive to decentralization effectiveness or programmatic extension (e.g. Zimbabwe). Positive movement is also possible in a number of cases on the cusp of introducing legislation mandating or formalizing decentralization (e.g. Namibia or Chad) or reviving collapsed administrative systems (e.g. Sierra Leone). This situation is complicated further by the fact that some of the individual country assessments may themselves rely on some dated data given not every respondent was freshly from the field.

Second, given this research is a cross-national survey its utility is limited to giving us a general outline of decentralization in the region rather than the intricate story of each country. The database and analysis should therefore be used as a first and rough guide to understanding the contours of decentralization primarily for the region and only secondarily at the level of individual countries. The most useful individual country assessment would necessarily emanate from a case study approach – examining both the macro dimensions of decentralization and, importantly, the micro reality in discrete sectors. This is the goal of the second part of the analytical project.

Third, the class and size of respondents also places limits on the findings. Our interviews with Bank specialists cannot substitute for interviews with persons working within local governance structures within the countries surveyed. Our respondents were not similarly engaged in local governance areas and sometimes these issues were only incidental to their core functions (e.g. rural development, water issues, country economic analysis). The size of the pool of

respondents (33) would also limit these findings, because it was not in all cases that we were able to double-check assessments with other specialists at the same depth as the first interview.

II. Indicators Used to Calculate Indexes

Extent of Political Decentralization: AVERAGE (F+G+H). That is, the average of the raw number of elected sub-national tiers; the score for direct elections of Local government; and the score for local government elections turnout and fairness.

Extent of Administrative Decentralization: AVERAGE (J+K+L). That is, the average of the score for the role clarity and subsidiarity; the score for responsibility for service delivery; and the score for the responsibility for civil servants.

Extent of Fiscal Decentralization: AVERAGE (M+N). That is, the average of the score for the center to local fiscal transfers and the score for local government share of overall expenditures.

Stability of System: AVERAGE (I+J). That is, the average of the score for local government links with societal divisions and the score for role clarity and subsidiarity.

Downward Accountability: AVERAGE (G+H+Q). That is, the average of the score for direct elections of local government; the score for local elections turn out and fairness; and the score for the type of local participation.

Upward Accountability: AVERAGE (O+P+R). That is, the average of the score for local government status of accounts and audits and the score for the existence of service delivery standards.

Overall Decentralization: AVERAGE (F+G+H+I+J+K+L+M+N+O+P+Q). That is, the average of all indicators used above without redundancy and excluding the indicator for period since last major review of the system.

III. Questionnaire used in 2002 Survey

Decentralization Benchmarking: Country Questionnaire

Constitutional framework

Unitary	1
Federal	2
Other	3

Notes:

Administrative tradition

French	1
English	2
Other	3

Notes:

Number of Subnational Administrative Tiers 2

Number of Elected Subnational Administrative Tiers 0

Total Number of Subnational Jurisdictions

Average population of lowest tier:

Decentralization Trends:

POLITICAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL STRUCTURES

Elections

no elected local governments	1
Local elections in part of the territory	2
Local elections in whole territory for local assemblies but executive appointed by center	3
Local elections in whole territory for local assemblies and their executive	4

Turnout/ fairness/periodicity

very low turnout and/or clearly unfair	1
reasonable turnout but questions about fairness	2
reasonable turnout and considered fair	3
reasonable turnout, considered fair and periodic elections	4

Adequacy with society's structure and links with traditional authorities

Tiers do not overlap with recognized divisions in society	1
Tiers overlap with recognized divisions in society but no links with traditional authorities (if any)	2
Tiers overlap with recognized divisions in society/ ad hoc links with traditional authorities	3
Tiers overlap with recognized divisions in society/ institutionalized links with traditional authorities	4

Clarity of roles between subnational levels (who is responsible for what?)

No specification of different roles	1
Clear legal framework but not implemented	2
Clear legal framework implemented	3
Clear legal framework implemented based on subsidiarity principle	4

Notes:

ADMINISTRATIVE

Primary responsibility for service delivery to population

Center	1
Significant deconcentration	2
Some devolution	3
Substantial devolution/center provides well-defined standard setting and monitoring (white collar)	4

Local civil service

HRM for locally based civil servants responsibility of the center	1
Some locally based staff under direct responsibility local gvt	2
All locally based staff under responsibility of local gvt	3
All locally based staff under responsibility of local gvt + incentives to attract staff outside center	4

Notes:

FISCAL

Fiscal transfer

none	1
ad hoc and erratic	2
formula in theory but not implemented or formula with arbitrary built-in	3
transparent formula implemented	4

Share of public expenditures decided by local governments

< 3%	1
3 to 5%	2
5 to 10%	3
> 10%	4

Notes:

ACCOUNTABILITY

Accounts

Accounts not up-to-date	1
Accounts up-to-date but not audited	2
Accounts up-to-date and audited	3
Accounts audited and follow-up on audits recommendations	4

Service delivery standards

No service delivery standards or not complied with	1
Service delivery standards on inputs	2
Service delivery standards on inputs and functioning M&E system	3
Service delivery standards on outputs and functioning M&E system	4

Notes:

EMPOWERMENT

Community participation in local governments

none	1
ad hoc/ individuals	2
	3

ad hoc/ structured groups (NGOS etc)	
formalized	4

Formal redress mechanisms

No mechanisms of redress	1
Mechanism exist but not publicized	2
Mechanism exists, publicized and used	3
Mechanism exists, publicized, used and yields results	4

Notes:

Decentralization Benchmarking: Country Questionnaire

Constitutional framework

Unitary	1
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Other	3

Notes:

Administrative tradition

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English	2
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Notes:

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Number of Elected Subnational Administrative Tiers	0
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	2

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Mechanism exist but not publicized	2
Mechanism exists, publicized and used	3
Mechanism exists, publicized, used and yields results	4

Notes:

IV. Respondents: Persons Interviewed and Persons Responding via Email

Bank Respondents in Washington, DC:

1. Jorge Araujo
2. Catherine Laurent
3. Helene Grandvoinet
4. Vandana Chandra
5. Catherine Laurent
6. Siaka Bakayoko
7. Hippolyte Fofack
8. Prosper Biabo
9. Ezzeddine Moudoud
10. Wolfgang Fengler
11. Eric Nelson
12. Rudy Chizungu
13. Salomon Salem
14. Suzanne Pirou-Sall
15. Mathew Verghis
16. Navin Girishankar
17. Guenter Heidenhof
18. Rob Floyd
19. Muthoni Kaniaru
20. Christina Wood
21. Louis Helling
22. Mike Stevens
23. Chukwuma Obidegwu
24. Abdoulaye Seck
25. Armand Atomate
26. Sahr John Kpundeh
27. Brian Levy
28. Denyse Morin
29. Robert Utz
30. Roland White
31. Harry Garnett
32. Hinh Dinh
33. James Hicks

Bank Respondents from the Resident Missions

1. Helen Mbao, Zambia
2. Moses Kondowe, Zambia
3. Colleen Butcher, Zimbabwe

Non-Bank Respondents

1. Jesper Steffensen, Consultant
2. Ian Shapiro, Local Government Advisor DFID/Kenya
3. Julius Nyangoro, Professor, University of North Carolina - Chapel Hill\

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