

Summary

By the end of the last century, most African countries, like other countries in the world, had revisited decentralisation policies and programmes as a part of their overall governance and macro-economic reforms. The objectives were to ensure macro-economic stability and to improve governance by making it more participative, self-governing, transparent, efficient, equitable and accountable, as well as to deliver effective and sustainable services to all citizens. Decentralisation is one of the reform initiatives adopted by many countries in sub-Saharan Africa. This report analyses and assesses the decentralisation policies of five sub-Saharan African countries: Botswana, Cameroon, Ghana, Mozambique and Tanzania. The countries are Commonwealth countries in western, eastern, southern Africa. The reports are based on three main sources: national reports submitted by each country, rapid research undertaken by independent African consultants to validate and update these reports, and a review of the main findings of the rapid research by a stakeholder workshop organised in Gaborone, Botswana from 26–28 October 2010.

While each country's experience has been distinctive, eight recurring issues and challenges emerged from the analysis of these five national experiences. These are:

- Importance of context – geographic, historic, political and economic
- Close links between democratisation and decentralisation
- Conceptual and policy ambivalence and confusion in respect of decentralisation
- Governance of cities and rural communities
- Primacy of politics in the analysis of the sustenance of decentralisation reforms
- Role of donors vis-à-vis national and local governments
- Inadequate emphasis on the human and financial resources options
- Weak links to new institutional actors involved in local governance

On the whole, all countries have endeavoured to implement the devolution and deconcentration forms of decentralisation. However, whereas some have articulated the differences between the two forms and made a choice – for example Tanzania – others have not. Some have pursued devolution in their municipalities but not in the rural areas (Mozambique), others have not made such fine distinctions in policy but have pursued similar goals in practice.

Identified good practices include:

Clear articulation of policy choice: especially between deconcentration and decentralisation, as in Tanzania. It is not an accident that the Tanzanian decentralisation programme is one of the most outstanding in terms of the policy outputs of participation and service delivery.

Learning from past experiences: Every country must design a system that enables it to *learn* from their own past experiences, in terms of what has worked or not worked. Decentralisation may be a global phenomena but how it functions in each polity and political economy is bound to vary. Again the Tanzanian case shows that there has been learning from past experience.

Need for a decentralisation co-ordination agency: The multidisciplinary nature of decentralisation suggests that it is wise to have a central co-ordination agency with political and technical clout to guide, persuade, implement and co-ordinate decentralisation policy implementation. The existence of such a body in Tanzania, Ghana and Cameroon has helped in various ways.

Separation of urban and rural governance in policy and practice: This review suggests that the differences between urban and rural are so substantial that the countries that recognised these differences in both policy and practice (especially Mozambique) seem to have had a better handle on implementing their decentralisation programmes. However, it is not enough just to make a policy distinction; it is just as important to make clear the path of convergence over time, otherwise such a policy might be counter-productive both politically and economically.

Constitutional protection for local governments: This is a commendable practice that raises the legal status of local authorities and ensures that national governments cannot easily erode the powers of local authorities. The experience of Ghana shows that this can go a long way to help in the development of local governments (LGs) in an environment in which the senior officials resist devolution reforms.

Mandatory central transfers to local authorities: This has resulted in the effective transfer of resources to LGs, and in the two countries in which this has been practiced – Ghana and Tanzania – it has led to substantial improvements in service delivery. The flip side is that LGs can become excessively dependent on this source and be lax in mobilising their own revenues. The situation might also undermine effective accountability.

Enhancing the capacity of local government chief executives: Most local government chief executives find the inherited weak mayor system (in which mayors are elected by the local councillors, who also run the council via committees) a serious challenge, and one which makes it difficult for them to effectively co-ordinate the work of the councillors or the heads of technical departments. Most would prefer the strong

mayor system in which the mayor takes responsibility for the council. Of the countries studied only Mozambique has introduced this kind of innovation in its municipalities, although a few other countries in the region (such as Nigeria use it while Kenya has recently adopted it).

Human resource management (HRM) for effective decentralised governance:

It is important that HRM for decentralised governance operates separately from the national government. Mozambique's municipalities manage their own human resources, for example, and are able to offer compensation that is more attractive than is offered at the national level. The local government service commission model that is used in Tanzania, Uganda and Nigeria is also worth considering. This can be complemented with two other HRM initiatives, performance management (which is used in Botswana) and the mandatory training of local government officials. Tanzania sets aside a proportion of its personnel budget for training and this is commendable.

Quotas for women: One third of all positions in local government are reserved for women in Tanzania. This has led to some positive developments in participation and in the quality of services delivered.

Inclusion of traditional chiefs in local government: Botswana and Ghana have used different approaches to integrate traditional chiefs (who continue to be important in African cities and villages) into local government.

This publication raises many lessons in policy analysis in respect of decentralisation policy in developing countries in Africa. Policy analysis such as this helps countries to reflect and refine their policies and practices in the area of decentralisation and governance generally, and especially in improving public sector management. Finally, the publication recommends the following potential intervention entry points for tackling some of the challenges confronting countries in the region in implementing their decentralisation policies.

- Improve the capacity of national governments to support and sustain decentralisation through learning from their own past experiences, from the available literature on local government and from best practices on implementation of decentralisation policies.
- Use central transfers to mobilise potential domestic financial resources.
- Explore alternative human resource management possibilities other than central government control.
- Reconcile centrally-led planning with decentralisation.
- Mobilise external assistance to improve policy dialogue on decentralisation and domestic accountability and include more local organisations in monitoring and discussing progress on decentralisation.

In sum, the five countries analysed have all undertaken decentralisation reforms that aimed to promote improved governance and effective service delivery. These twin objectives have been partly achieved in most of the countries. Decentralisation policy implementation is a work in progress that needs deepening. It is also important for the countries to look inward and mobilise domestic resources to support and sustain decentralisation and other related governance reforms.

The country case studies provide insights about why decentralisation has not been as successful in Africa as in other regions of the world. Lessons from these experiences underscore the fact that decentralisation is advanced by the following actions:

- Constitutional protection and a clear, articulated sense of responsibilities assigned to local authorities rather than field administration agencies.
- Clear financial and human resources provision to match the level of decentralised responsibilities.
- Reconciliation of development planning to devolution to semi-autonomous regional and local authorities.
- Mobilisation of domestic resources not only in terms of finance, but also in terms of human, knowledge and institutional resources to complement and ultimately replace external inputs.
- Empowerment of citizens and local councils to contract, co-operate and compete with other governance bodies in the public and private realms to boost local development and local good governance.

This project can help to refine the policy discourse and practice on decentralisation in Africa in which local institutions and national institutions complement one another in improving development and governance. The proposed way forward is for development partners and African countries to focus on assisting the continent's rapidly growing cities as the continent goes through its triple revolutions: demographic, capitalist and electronic.