

## Decentralisation as a Strategy for Development

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### Abstract

Despite the benefits that decentralisation is said to be capable of bringing about, attempts at decentralisation in Africa have brought no marked improvement in development drives. Policy-makers and development administrators in Africa continue to express dissatisfaction with the way decentralisation policies have been implemented. Decentralisation policies that were introduced transferred functions and responsibilities to lower levels of government without the transfer of corresponding measures of financial, human and material resources. In much the same way, attempts at decentralisation in Ghana since independence have proved ineffective and problematic. Consequently, an important question since independence has been; what kind of decentralisation is appropriate to our circumstances? That this question is still relevant today amounts to a general admission that the forms of decentralisation programmes we have experimented in Ghana over the past years had failed to achieve expected results. It is against this background of failure of decentralisation programmes in Ghana, that the P.N.D.C. government introduced its decentralisation policy with the establishment of the District Assemblies (D.A.s) in 1989. The P.N.D.C.'s decentralisation programme came with certain measures calculated to ensure the effectiveness and efficiency of the D.A.s. Notwithstanding the measures taken, the D.A.s remained ineffective and inefficient because the functions and responsibilities transferred to them were not accompanied by corresponding measures of financial, human and material resources. The situation improved for the better with establishment of the District Assemblies Common by the 1992 Constitution. Nevertheless, issues concerning decentralisation have continued to generate academic debate in the realm of theory and practice.

**Key words:** Decentralisation, development administration, policy-makers.

### Introduction

Decentralisation has become a recurring theme in political and administrative discourse for advocates of administrative reform everywhere in the world (Asibuo S.K 1991: 45). Decentralisation is probably the most frequently recommended structural reform to Third World Countries because "it suggests the hope of cracking open the blockage in an inert central bureaucracy, curing managerial constipation, giving more direct access for people to the government and the government to the people, stimulating the whole nation to participate in national development" (Philip Mawhood, 1983:1). The popularity of the concept of decentralisation in development administration and the debates it has generated could be attributed to the linking of decentralisation with such benefits as equity, effectiveness, responsiveness and efficiency (Aye J.R.A 1992: 49). Some benefits of decentralisation have been stated by Rondinelli:

"As societies, economies and government become more complex central control and decision-making become more difficult, costly and inefficient. By reducing diseconomies of scale inherent in the over-concentration of decision-making in the national capital, decentralisation can increase the number of public goods and services – and the efficiency with which they are delivered – at lower cost" (Rondinelli 1981: 18).

Despite the benefits that decentralisation is said to be capable of bringing about, attempts at decentralisation in the developing world, including Ghana, have brought no marked improvement in development drives (Ahwoi 1990: 15). Policy-makers and development administrators in the Third World, continue to express dissatisfaction with the way decentralisation policies have been implemented. Studies, as we shall see in the exploration of literature, show disappointing results of attempts in most countries to decentralise planning and management functions. In most cases, central government introduced heavily publicised decentralisation policies only to see them falter during implementation process.

Studies further reveal a kind of double-mindedness in developing countries about the desirability of transferring powers and responsibilities from the central ministries to other organisations. While local administrative organisations were given broad powers in some countries to perform development planning and management functions, adequate financial resources and qualified personnel necessary to carry out these functions were often withheld (Cheema & Rondinelli 1983: 297).

Field offices of central ministries, district planning and administrative units were established in most countries in the developing countries, but central government officials had been reluctant or lacked the political will to assist them. In their desire to minimize political conflicts and secessionist agitations, central governments discouraged

the growth of community and non-governmental involvement in decentralisation policies (Cheema & Rondinelli 1983: 297).

Consequently development planning and administration had remained highly centralised after decades of persistent attempts at decentralisation. In some cases, authority was delegated without giving local organisations the flexibility to perform new functions in the ways that met local demands and needs.

In developing administration in the Third World, performance and impact have not often matched the goals of their decentralisation policies, while control over financial resources continues to suffer severe shortages in qualified personnel. Local organisations have thus been largely incapacitated in their development efforts and exist merely to extend centrally-controlled and established priorities and are seen as solicitors of support for national policies (Cheema G.S. & Rondinelli 1983: 297).

### **Problems of Decentralisation in Development Administration**

Diana Conyers, in probing the problems of decentralisation in development administration had a series of questions to ask:

- (i) What are the functional activities over which some sort of power has been transferred?
- (ii) What types of powers have been transferred with respect to each functional activity?
- (iii) To which levels or areas (for example, state, province, district, ward etc). have the powers been transferred?
- (iv) To whom at these levels has authority been transferred?
- (v) Finally, what legal or administrative means have been used to transfer the authority? (Diana Conyers 1989: 18).

Finding answers to these questions ushers us into the problems of allocating authority, managing and implementing decentralised administration. The implementation of any sort of development policy like decentralisation; involves major changes in structure and encounters problems arising from the relationship between the management of decentralised systems of administration and implementation of reforms designed to increase the amount of decentralisation. The prevalence of these management and implementation problems, has made the rural areas by comparison with the urban centres scenes of massive poverty, unemployment, inadequate or virtually absent health care services and educational opportunities, poor road network, lack of good drinking water, low agricultural productivity, ignorance, hunger and disease (Owusu-Ansah K.A 1976: 19).

Conyers had reached certain conclusions regarding the implementation and management of decentralisation programmes. She noted that the amount of decentralisation is often woefully inadequate. Secondly, decentralisation has failed to achieve the intended developmental objectives and thirdly decentralisation has been characterised by undesirable side-effects (Diana Conyers 1989: 13).

Although some scholars are critical about the undesirable side-effects of decentralisation – regionalism, the pursuit of parochial interest, disparity in development standards and loyalty to local rather than to national leaders etc – the undesirable side-effects do not in any measure outweigh the benefits of decentralisation in development administration. Despite the weaknesses of decentralisation it is a better option as compared with centralisation in development. This is because centralisation as a strategy or model for development has marginalised decentralised organisations in development efforts in the Third World countries as a result of discrimination against the rural areas.

### **The Ghanaian Experience of the Decentralisation in Development Administration under the District Assemblies**

Attempts at decentralisation of government machinery in Ghana since independence have proved ineffective, inefficient and problematic. Consequently an important question since independence has been, what kind of decentralisation is appropriate to Ghanaian circumstance? That this question is still relevant today amounts to a general admission that that the forms of decentralisation programmes we have experimented in Ghana over the past have failed. The reasons often given for this failure have been many and have included the following:

- (i) Low development capacity of the decentralised areas, not unrelated to size and weak revenue and resource base;
- (ii) Lack of technical expertise;
- (iii) Poor financial administration and corruption;
- (iv) Inexperience and poor calibre of local government personnel, attributable in part to low prestige attached to and poor remuneration for service at the local level;
- (v) Unclear definitions of the distribution of functions between central government agencies and

- local authorities;
- (vi) Intrusion of partisan politics into local government with a view, primarily to winning political advantage and patronage for the incumbent regime; and

Juggling with local government boundaries, local pressures (particularly from chiefs) and considerations of political advantage, with the result that the number of local government areas in the country has varied between as high as 282 and as low as 50 (Republic of Ghana (c) 1991: 14).

It is against the background of ineffectiveness and inefficiency of decentralisation programmes in Ghana that the Provisional National Defence Council (P.N.D.C.) launched its decentralisation programme with the establishment of the District Assemblies (D. A. s) as the highest political authority in each district in 1989.

The “District Political Authority and Modalities for District Level Elections” – the document that outlined the preliminary aspects of the PNDC’s decentralisation programme states that:

In order to democratise state power and advance participatory democracy and collective decision-making at the grassroots level there is the need to set up decentralised political and administrative authorities with elected representatives of the people. The decentralised authorities will be the bodies exercising state power as the people’s local government (Republic of Ghana; (a) 1987: 1).

In this connection, the decentralisation programme was expected to help bring about qualitative changes in the country’s administration, to promote effective delivery of goods and services and to facilitate the involvement of the people at the grassroots in decision-making. Grassroots participation in decision-making was intended to ensure that experience and wisdom are tapped in the pursuit of development programmes (Aye 1990: 46).

To give the decentralisation programme a more meaningful push, certain measures were taken. These measures include, among others, the following:

- (i) The increase in the number of districts in the country from 65 to 110 the rationale behind this action was not only to make the districts smaller to promote effective participatory democracy, but also to make them “viable and more homogenous and manageable units” (Min. of Local Government 1991: 88). This line of reasoning in the opinion of some scholars, including Aye (1992: 51) is faulty because large units have not been proven and tested to be less effective and efficient than small ones.
- (ii) The holding of District Assembly elections in 1988/89.
- (iii) The enactment of PNDC Law 207 of 1988, to give backing to the District Assemblies and to authorise the transfer of legislative, administrative and executive powers to them. The jurisdiction of the District Assemblies, much unlike the previous attempts at decentralisation, covers planning, finance, budgeting and security (Aye 1992: 51).
- (iv) The transfer of planning and budgeting processes to the district. This measure was consolidated in March, 1990, by the appointment and posting to each district, of district planning and budgeting officers to compel ministries to actually deconcentrate their staff so as to make district composite budgeting a reality. (Aye 1992: 51).
- (v) The power to pay government contracts up to the value of 250 million cedis. In furtherance of this measure, District Tender Boards were established to advise the District Assemblies on the award of contracts. District treasuries were simultaneously set up to take over control of budgeting from departments formerly under the Controller and Accountant General’s Department in Accra. (Aye 1992: 51).
- (vi) To help the District Assemblies execute their functions more efficiently, 22 departments were decentralised (Aye 1992: 51).
- (vii) The ceding of certain taxes previously collected by central government to the District Assemblies. These ceded revenue bases meant to augment the financial resources of the District Assemblies include; entertainment tax; casino revenue; betting tax; gambling tax; income tax (registration of trade, business, profession or vocation) daily transport tax; advertisement tax.<sup>21</sup> and taxes on District Weekly Lotto Operations (Aye 1990: 49).

The establishment of the District Assemblies and the measures taken were to ensure that local people get the opportunity to elect their representatives to the District Assemblies and to participate in decision-making and implementation processes at the district level. This opportunity quickly whetted the appetite of the people for the initiation and implementation of development programmes. Unfortunately, however, the District Assemblies

assumed far more functions and responsibilities than the human, financial and material resources at their disposal could accomplish. Most District Assemblies had to resort to the imposition of unsanctioned taxes on the people of their districts (Ayee 1990: 46).

Consequently, the District Assemblies were confronted with serious challenges and problems in meeting their responsibilities and functions. They lagged behind in fulfilling the expectations of the people with regard to development projects. District Assemblies therefore remained largely ineffective in the implementation of development programmes that had been on their drawing boards for years, until the establishment of the District Assemblies Common Fund in the 1992 Constitution with the allocation of five per cent the gross national income.

### **An Exploration of Literature on the Concept of Decentralisation**

The climate of opinion in which liberal economists, as well as Marxist thinkers were urging the virtue of centralised planning mechanism as the key to rapid development is fast fading into oblivion (Mawhood 1987: 13). This state of affairs is due principally to the growing dissatisfaction over the failure of national or central planning and investment to produce results in development schemes in the Third World in the 1960's and the new grounds decentralisation is believed to have broken or to be capable of breaking (Mawhood 1987: 13). Hence decentralisation of the machinery of government has been regarded as a panacea for solving socio-economic woes of developing countries (Asibuo 1991: 45).

The wealth of literature available on decentralisation of administration and development is, therefore, worthy of critical review. This review of literature concentrates on empirical works available and relevant to decentralisation and development in general with particular emphasis on Third World Countries and Ghana.

### **Studies on Decentralisation in some African Countries**

In his case study of decentralisation experience in the 1970's and the 1980's of Zambia, Sudan and Nigeria, Asibuo (1991), revealed that insufficient political will undermined the effectiveness of the implementation of decentralisation programmes. Secondly, there was inadequate understanding of the provisions of the reforms and the new roles expected of both councillors and staff. This situation, Asibuo (1991) noted, was due to lack of adequate education on the real meaning and fundamental philosophy of decentralisation by the different actors in the drama of implementation of decentralisation programmes at each administrative level. He concluded that numerous functions and responsibilities were transferred to the local authorities in each of the three countries without the transfer of corresponding measures of financial, human and material resources. Consequently even though local autonomy and democracy were the objectives set in the restructuring processes of the three countries, they could not be realised. In contrast, centralisation of power was enhanced (Asibuo 1991: 45).

Humes (1973: 21) observed that;

'The basic weakness of decentralised local institutions as promoters of economic development has been the lack of sufficient functions, funds and functionaries to undertake the capital development so vital to economic prosperity'

Apart from the emphasis on finance, (Humes 1973: 21) stressed management problems. He stated in a study he conducted on Nigeria that the calibre of the membership of local councils had been generally low, too few qualified men were available for office and too many incumbent local government officials were illiterate and corrupt, hence the ineffectiveness in the discharge of their duties.

### **Studies on Financial Aspects of Decentralisation in Ghana**

There are empirical studies on the problems of decentralisation and development in Ghana with emphasis on lack of sources of financing development projects. Commenting on the causes of poor performance of local government councils in Ghana, Nkrumah (1990: 83) asserted that the absence of a civic sense of responsibility among the local population has made it difficult for local authorities to collect rates, hence their over-dependence on central government grants-in-aid which are grossly inadequate, irregular and often late in coming. Nkrumah argued that this chronic financial problem of local authorities could be solved through direct revenue-sharing with the central government on specified percentage basis

Nsarkoh (1980: 80) pointed out that under the Busia regime, even though local government councils had power to generate revenue for the effective discharge of their duties and responsibilities, they could not do so. Nsarkoh (1977: 28) concluded that available sources of revenue offered plenty of scope for expansion provided that the councils would apply themselves to the organisation of revenue collection as a matter of paramount importance by eliminating dishonest and corrupt tax collectors

In support of Nsarkoh's view is the study Dankyi (1987) who investigated the extent and effects of financial

problems facing local government councils in Ghana. Dankyi (1987) analysed local authority budget in the allocation of resources and examined the existing and possible new sources of revenue for local government units and came to the same conclusion as Nsarkoh (1977: 28).

Dzakpasu (1976) on the performance of the Dzodze Local Council between 1966 and 1969 disclosed that inadequate financial capacity had been the major limitation on the development efforts of the Council. In a comparative study of the financial resources of some District Assemblies in five regions of Ghana (Ayee 1990: 46), stated that the District Assemblies in Ghana lacked the necessary revenue to cope with the numerous functions conferred on them by the Local Government Law 1988 (PNDC Law 207). Ayee (1990: 46) argued that some District Assemblies have as a result, resorted to the imposition of new and unsanctioned taxes on the people.

#### **Personnel Aspects of Decentralisation in Ghana**

Apart from financial problems in the implementation of decentralisation policies, another work has touched on personnel and administrative problems. In her study entitled “Administrative Capabilities of District Councils” for instance, Pepra-Omani (1986) argued that one of the most important factors which have contributed to low productivity of local authorities had been lack of qualified personnel to man the administration at the district level. She concluded that if local government bodies are to make any meaningful impact in their bid to promote development, then training of manpower should be given serious attention.

#### **Studies on Rural Development in Ghana**

Other works have focused on the question of development strategies adopted by Ghanaian governments in their development efforts. Nkrumah (1979:22) writing on “Centralised Administration and Rural Development in Ghana”, hypothesized that centralisation has caused rural atrophy in Ghana. To him, centralisation as a model of development has discouraged popular participation and generated apathy in people towards government. He concluded that centralisation as a model for development has failed to deliver the goods in Ghana.

Boachie-Danquah (1984: 79) in a study akin to Nkrumah’s work analysed some of the causes of the failure of decentralisation programmes in Ghana. Boachie-Danquah (1984: 79) blamed the failure on mismanagement, corruption, poor planning, poor calibre of staff, non-determination of national priorities, irresponsible defence spending, low agricultural output, weak currency and an almost cavalier towards public property. As a remedy, he propounded what he called “The Four Factor Theory for Development”. The theory involves four elements; basic needs strategy; industrial dispersal and special development agency strategy; institutional decentralisation strategy and integrated rural development strategy.

In his contribution to the existing literature on strategies for development, Brown ((a) 1976: 7) propounded what he called “A package deal for Rural Development’ which perceives rural development as a comprehensive national programme including agricultural development; land reform, human resource development and the formation of development co-operatives.

Brown ((b) 1976: 41) added another reason for the failure of many rural development programmes. He noted that the inability of entrenched social, cultural, political and customary institutions and attitudes to adapt themselves to changes especially in the rural areas had accounted for the failure of many development programmes. He enumerated some of the development inhibiting attitudes as land tenure system, status reinforcing customs, wasteful ceremonies and religious expenditures, unnecessarily extravagant funerals, negative attitudes towards birth and population control programmes and adherence to outmoded customs and taboos.

It is clear from the review of literature that there have been several studies on the problems associated with the implementation of decentralisation programmes in which the financial, personnel and administrative problems have featured prominently. It is true that finance and personnel problems are important in accounting for ineffectiveness of decentralised units of administration.

From the bulk of literature reviewed, six conclusions may be drawn. First, in order to promote popular participation in decision-making processes, ensure accountability of the elected to the electorate and responsiveness and effectiveness, developing countries including Ghana; have transferred certain powers and functions to decentralised local bodies to provide certain services to their population.



Second; the transfer of these functions were, in most cases, were not accompanied by adequate qualified staff and financial and material resources. This has resulted in the failure of many well-publicised decentralisation programmes.

Third, most of the decentralised local bodies lacked adequately trained manpower or personnel resources. This problem has accounted for mismanagement, poor planning, corruption and sheer incompetence.

Four, there had been lack of adequate education on the real meaning of decentralisation programmes as well as lack of clearly defined functions, responsibilities and powers of the different actors in the drama of decentralisation.

Five, the adherence to certain obsolete and unprogressive cultural, social and customary practices has impeded development efforts. Finally, central governments were particularly unwilling to transfer adequate power to the decentralised local bodies for fear of secessionist agitations and the pursuit of parochial interest. Instead they tended to re-concentrate power at the centre while giving profound publicity to decentralisation programmes.

### **Theoretical Framework of Decentralisation**

Decentralisation as a concept is loaded with a lot of confusion concerning its appropriate or exact meaning. This confusion surrounds not only the definition of the concept, but also the various forms of decentralisation which include devolution, deconcentration, privatisation and integrated or fused hierarchy model Cheema & Rondinelli (1983: 18).

Despite this terminological confusion, decentralisation may be defined in general terms as “reversing the concentration of administration at a single centre and Cheema & Rondinelli (1983: 18) also defined decentralisation as “transferring of planning, decision-making or administrative authority from central government to its field organisations, local administrative units, semi-autonomous and parastatal organisations , local governments or non-governmental organisations”.

Diana Conyers (1989: 14) sees decentralisation as more than just a form of sub-national organisation to which power and authority has been transferred. To her, it is an organisational form for remedying some of the problems related to development in the Third World. Decentralisation in this sense is considered as a tool or strategy for development.

Cheema & Rondinelli (1983: 14) have stated that advocates of decentralisation have emphasized the claim that the concept brings about popular participation, responsiveness, accountability, speed, flexibility, co-ordination and stability in both the planning and implementation of development activities, thereby not only creating a more “democratic” society, but also making projects and programmes more relevant to local needs and demands and engendering local commitment and in some cases contributions in kind or in cash.

Decentralisation in the opinion of Diana Conyers (1989: 15) may speed up the process of decision-making since decisions can be made locally without reference to a higher level and enable administration to be more efficient, flexible and responsible to popular opinion. Decentralisation she pointed out may encourage co-ordination between sectoral agencies at regional or local level thereby creating a more integrated approach to planning. For these reasons, she concluded that decentralisation can at least in theory; result not only in a more effective and efficient use of local resources and government’s financial and manpower resources, but also the development potential of the local population.

Finally, decentralisation has been seen as a means of strengthening development administration in rural areas. This is partly because attention has tended to focus on rural areas since it is there that the vast majority of the population of most less developed countries lives (Diana Conyers 1989: 15).

### **Forms of Decentralisation**

The two types of decentralisation which are relevant to this work are devolution and deconcentration. Devolution is a more comprehensive form of decentralisation and entails the transfer of political authority to formally constituted sub-national units of government known as “local government” Cheema & Rondinelli (1983: 22).

In a sense, devolution is power-sharing between the centre and its constituent parts, where specific functions and responsibilities are developed to these units of government in partnership system designed to promote national and local interest. Under devolution, which applies mostly in federal states, there exists miniature political

system with an elected chief executive, a legislature and a well constituted judiciary (Dotse 1990: 45). In its purest form, devolution has certain fundamental characteristics. First, local units of government are autonomous, relatively independent and clearly perceived as separate levels of government over which central authorities exercise little or not direct control. Secondly, the local government units have legally recognised geographical boundaries and perform public functions.

Finally, devolution implies active popular participation in development efforts on reciprocal basis and in partnership with central government.

Deconcentration: on the other hand, involves the redistribution of administrative responsibilities only within the central government. It principally entails the shifting of workload from central government ministries or headquarters to its own field staff located in offices outside the national capital without transferring to them the authority to make decisions or exercise discretion in carrying them out. (Cheema G.S. & Rondinelli 1983: 18)

### **The Integrated Local Administration or the Mixed or Fused Hierarchy Model**

The integrated local administration or the mixed or fused hierarchy model exists where the central government field administration, as established usually through deconcentration is integrated or fused with representative local institutions.

In such a situation, there is only one integrated or fused form of organisation for government and administration at the local level. This is made up of officials of both the central government and the peripheral institutions. The administration consequently established is usually headed by a central government appointee of the general administration type (prefect, governor, district commissioner, district secretary, etc) (Dotse 1990: 45).

Although the integrated local administration or the fused hierarchy model has the advantage of minimizing conflicts and promoting co-ordination, it nevertheless, has the tendency to encourage central government domination of local government institutions (Mawuena Dotse F 1990: 50) and an attempt to pursue participatory values without paying the political cost involved (Dotse 1990: 13).

Ghana during the 1974 decentralisation programme, adopted the integrated model by merging local government services with central government appointed officials. The country's decentralisation programme under the 1992 Constitution is also to a large extent, fashioned along lines of the integrated or fused hierarchy model (Dotse 1990: 50).

Writing on the fusion of activities of both central and local governments in Ghana, (Akuoko 1989: 4) stated that:

... 'given the fusion of central government field administration with local government, the distinction between central and local governments has in effect been abolished; through a process of institutional integration and personnel absorption, a single integrated administration has been provided for each regional or district level'.

### **Relationship between Decentralisation and Development**

Development, in this study is conceived of as a multi-dimensional process involving major changes in social structures, popular attitudes and national institutions, as well as the acceleration of economic growth, reduction of inequality, eradication of absolute poverty, provision of employment and the basic necessities of life – water, food, clothing and shelter – without which life becomes impossible. Development is also characterised by a general movement away from those conditions of life widely perceived as unsatisfactory towards a situation or condition regarded as materially and spiritually better (Todaro Michael P 1985: 85).

In concrete terms, development involves such social goals as improved conditions of health and nutrition, augmented educational opportunities, expanded social welfare services and increased mobility, as well as such economic ones like raised incomes, higher agricultural production and increased employment opportunities Owusu-Ansah (1976: 19).

Attempts to decentralise administrative systems are seldom initiated solely for developmental reasons. This is because decentralisation is fundamentally a political process in the sense that it involves a change in the distribution of power and influence. For example, if local government units are dominated by opposition political groups in a multi-party system or if there is any risk of political secession Diana Conyers (1989: 15).

It therefore becomes necessary to examine not only the developmental aspect of decentralisation but also its political role and dimension which are often very complex. For example, it is important to recognise the difference between “top-down” decentralisation, which is initiated at the national level of government and consists of the transfer of some of the powers and authority of the central government and the “bottom-up” decentralisation where the major initiative comes from local pressure groups seeking greater power and participation Diana Conyers (1989: 16).

Most of the recent decentralisation programmes in Africa (including the District Assemblies in Ghana) belong to the former category, since they were initiated at the national level. The division of Nigeria into states after the Biafran war of 1966/67 and the devolution of powers to the provinces in Southern Sudan are examples of “bottom-up” deconcentration (Diana Conyers 1989: 15).

Furthermore, since no government is likely to give away power willingly without good reason, one finds that “top-down” decentralisation programmes inevitably have some sort of ulterior political motives of a centralising nature in the sense that they are intended to strengthen, rather than weaken the role of central government (Diana Conyers 1989:16). A good example, of this is the appointment of the District Chief Executives by the government as the Chief Executive Officers of a largely elected body of representatives as the District Assembly in Ghana (Republic of Ghana (b) 1988: 6).

### **Conclusion**

Decentralisation may therefore be seen as a means of increasing democracy or tackling widely recognised social and economic problems or as a means of avoiding an even greater loss of power. Moreover, some fashionable and well-publicised decentralisation programmes have strong elements of centralisation. This may mean the degree of decentralisation is actually very limited or that the reform involves both decentralisation and centralisation – in other words “the central government gives with one hand and takes back with other.

There are other factors which have to be taken into consideration in analysing the role of decentralisation in development. Firstly, although decentralisation may have a positive impact in terms of achieving objectives such as popular participation, speed and flexibility and intersectoral coordination, it may, under certain conditions, hinder attempts to achieve other national objectives, such as the implementation of nationwide sectoral policies, reduction in public spending and inter-regional equity.

Secondly, objectives such as popular participation, administrative efficiency and intersectoral co-ordination are very complex phenomena which are difficult to define precisely, let alone to actually achieve. Moreover, these objectives only constitute part of the overall objective of development.

Finally, the extent to which decentralisation will achieve any objective will depend, to a very large extent, on the form of decentralisation adopted and the political willingness to genuinely involve the people in decision-making processes as against mobilising them to endorse a predetermined development agenda of the central government, which might not reflect the true wishes and development aspirations of the local people.

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