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Decentralization in Africa: The Paradox of State Strength

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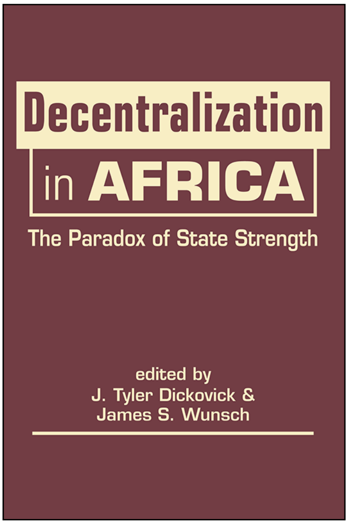

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Decentralization: Theoretical, Conceptual, and Analytical Issues

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Decentralization is one of the leading political reforms that developing countries have undertaken in the two decades since the end of the Cold War, and it has arguably been undertaken (at least in name) in more countries in Africa than anywhere else in the world. In the past twenty years, the majority of African central governments have initiated or deepened the transfer of power and resources to a range of subnational government (SNG) bodies, including regions, states, provinces, districts, and municipalities. This book uses a structured comparative approach to bring together and examine a wide range of decentralization processes across Africa; we focus on ten countries, examining each of them according to a common conceptual framework and preestablished set of criteria. Our structure enables us to shape a coherent debate on the impact of decentralization while exploring the topic's empirical breadth on a continent where the term itself has taken many forms and had many meanings. We conclude that the legal, fiscal, and administrative authority of SNGs has increased in all ten country cases, though country experiences have varied. While the authority of SNGs has increased, there are fewer achievements for them in other dimensions of governance, including autonomy, accountability, and capacity. Through comparative examination of these characteristics of governance that matter to both scholars and practitioners, we believe this volume makes a unique contribution to academic and public policy discussions on modern-day decentralization.

We ask two key questions throughout the book. First, what have been the characteristics of decentralization in Africa? Specifically, how has it been done and how has it varied from place to place? This raises a question of how we conceptualize and classify decentralization in Africa as countries have undertaken rather different processes under this rubric. To make sense of the empirical variation and to render comparisons useful in an area of such conceptual complexity, all of our chapter authors adopted a common framework that highlights how decentralization in each country fared by measuring subnational governance on four dimensions: authority, autonomy, accountability, and capacity (see USAID 2009 for an original elaboration of this framework). We believe this conceptual and empirical treatment is inclusive yet parsimonious, and can serve as an underpinning for the future of debates on African decentralization by integrating varied country experiences.

Our second question goes beyond empirical detail to implications for politics and public policy: what have been the consequences of decentralization processes in Africa? Looking at individual cases and comparatively across countries, we find that results have been mixed, but that findings can be illuminated according to our four criteria. There have been considerable achievements in the decentralization of legal *authority* to SNGs and subnational administrative units, but less positive impacts in other areas. Subnational *autonomy* remains quite restricted by several top-down forces, especially the control exercised by state authorities and by the dominant political parties in many African countries. Similarly, there is some downward *accountability* of SNGs to local citizens through increasingly institutionalized subnational elections, but accountability in many cases continues to flow mostly upward to actors at the center. Finally, most of the country studies note that *capacity* remains a challenge, but this is true at all levels of government and not just at the subnational level.

Taking these findings together, we argue that decentralization in many countries in Africa exhibits a paradox: it can actually strengthen or entrench national-level actors, even as it changes little in governance at the local level. There are a number of reasons that central governments might reconcile themselves to decentralization, or even embrace it. Decentralization appears to have helped stabilize and maintain several African regimes where the hold on power may have been precarious in the absence of decentralization. In other cases, it may well be helping to entrench certain governing parties in power, especially in dominant party systems. Still other cases have witnessed central states and governing parties that have found ways to delimit decentralization when it risked an actual dispersion of power. In short, decentralization has strengthened central authority as much as it has weakened it. The chapters in this book show how such dynamics have played out (with a number of variations) in ten countries. The structure of the comparison means that the country chapters "speak to one another," a feature reinforced by the early establishment of common themes that enable both empirical breadth and theoretical contributions.

Since the groundbreaking work by Diana Conyers (1983) and Dennis A. Rondinelli, John R. Nellis, and G. Shabbir Cheema (1984), decentralization has been understood to include three forms or strategies: deconcentration, delegation, and devolution. Each one moves governmental prerogatives and initiative from the center to the periphery, with the last of them including local accountability, usually through elections (Conyers 1983). This volume considers all three strategies in its coverage of decentralization in Africa although, as it shows, there seems to be a good deal more deconcentration and delegation than devolution, both in law and in fact.

While many studies have emphasized only devolution—sometimes called "democratic decentralization"—in their analyses, we have chosen this broader understanding (Olowu and Wunsch 2004). We believe a narrower definition limited to devolution would be an error for a truly comparative study of Africa—conceptually, theoretically, empirically, and operationally. *Conceptually* all three forms fit the standard definition of decentralization, which involves the transfer of authority, powers, resources, and responsibilities from central to lower-level actors. Thus, while devolution may be a prerequisite for democratic local governance, it is not the only form of decentralization. Regarding the outcomes of decentralization in *theoretical* terms, it is possible for delegation and deconcentration to provide many of the beneficial outcomes that devolution is intended to provide, such as more local responsiveness and improved service delivery, particularly if issues of providing effective accountability can be resolved. These issues remain challenging under devolution as well, leading it at times to failure in achieving these very goals. For example, in many cases devolution plus local elections has led to elite capture, high levels of corruption, continued poor administrative performance, exclusion of citizens, and so on (Crook and Manor 1998). In these circumstances, it is unclear how democratic decentralization advances democracy any better than delegation or deconcentration, notwithstanding the existence of subnational elections. Also, when one considers the goals of economic development and stability, the theoretical case for devolution is again unclear, given that deconcentration and delegation may offer greater personnel and institutional capacity, opportunities for coordination, economies of scale, and consistent enforcement of the rule of law (Connerley, Eaton, and Smoke 2010). Of course, as research by scholars such as Goran Hyden (2006) and Pierre Englebert (2000, 2009) suggests, including Chapter 3 by Pierre Englebert and Nestorine Sangaré in this volume, much depends on the specific nature and efficacy of the national regime relative to SNGs.

To be sure, however, neither does this book presume that devolution—when it occurs—results in necessarily worse outcomes. This is an empirical question that the cases are intended to explore. These questions help illustrate how complex and uncertain theories of decentralization are at this point. In part to help disaggregate this theoretical complexity, the volume places considerable emphasis on determining the extent to which the four key dimensions of governance—authority, autonomy, accountability, and capacity—have actually moved downward to SNGs and with what consequences.

Our reasons for including all three forms of decentralization in this study are also *empirical*. In virtually all of the ten cases in this volume, African governments have undertaken mixes of devolution, delegation, and deconcentration. In making policy and implementing decisions concerning decentralization, for example, even those African decisionmakers placing a high priority on democratic outcomes are commonly constrained by consideration of the likely effects of decentralization for national integration and stability (Eaton and Connerley 2010). Thus, their efforts generally also include deconcentration and delegation. While possible exceptions might be seen among the federal states that have more extensive forms of devolution, even in these cases the central state (or party) continues to weigh heavily on subnational governance, as seen in all three of our federal state cases, Nigeria, Ethiopia, and South Africa. The outcomes of decentralization are strongly influenced by the mix of these strategies.

In looking at the ten countries, we can see this mix of strategies. All have subnational elections, some degree of formula-based transfers, and legal frameworks that transfer responsibilities in major social service areas to SNGs, which are elements of devolution. However, the ten countries also have provisions that allow substantial ongoing central governmental administrative and political oversight, which are elements of deconcentration and delegation. That is, they all reflect significant political, fiscal, and administrative aspects of decentralization and these are expressed in operational mixes of devolution, deconcentration, and delegation. Thus, in including all three forms of decentralization, this book matches the empirical facts of decentralization in Africa.

Operationally, all regimes seek and need varying forms of legitimacy in the eyes of their citizens and external actors. This requires continued institutional innovation to try to improve performance, and it may generate incentives for the pursuit of improved economic and social outcomes through decentralized governance. Because this is an additive process, the creation or empowerment in recent years of elected SNGs—devolutionary democracy—usually occurs in the context of previously or contemporaneously deconcentrated or delegated units of government. Thus, regimes utilize a variety of mechanisms to delegate powers or responsibilities of the central government to SNGs and nonstate actors. These patterns can be seen in all of our cases.

The assumption of the equal importance of devolution, delegation, and deconcentration as forms of decentralization thus facilitates empirical description and analysis of each form as it is encountered in African decentralization. The case studies in this book describe the multistructural realities of African decentralized governance, and comment on the interactive effects of and tensions among deconcentration, delegation, and devolution. The objective of the book is to present a balanced discussion of decentralization's three dominant forms and an accurate portrayal of their mixed results among its cases.

Theorizing Decentralization: Issues of Principal-Agency and Collective Action

One cannot understand the strength and duration of Africa's decentralization efforts apart from the economic and governance crises that the continent has gone through over the past thirty to forty years. The economic decline of the 1970s that ended with the crash of several economies and the wrenching structural adjustment era in the 1980s, along with the crises of governance where single-party and highly centralized regimes lost legitimacy and at times also collapsed, led African civil society and leaders alike, as well as donors, to search for new governance strategies (Ndegwa 2002). Even in recent years as international investment flows returned to Africa, particularly from China, decentralization continues to be seen, and at times pushed, by donors and developing country governments as a way to pursue a variety of goals. Prominent among these goals are democratization, social and economic development, and stabilization of new or existing governing regimes (Connerley, Eaton, and Smoke 2010; USAID 2009). We recognize that such goals are ideals, and are at times more rhetorical than they are faithfully pursued in practice by policymakers or donors. As noted in the concluding chapter, the third goal—regime stability—appears to be the most consistent, notable impact of decentralization in Africa.

Much academic theory links decentralization to these goals (Wunsch and Olowu 1990; Grindle 2007; Ndegwa 2002). It has been linked to such pressing issues as reducing the costs of central government, mobilizing more resources from the grassroots, and, in particular, resolving some of Africa's chronic governance problems. The governance problems revolve around chronic corruption, rent seeking, inability to deliver services to the grassroots, poor maintenance of public infrastructure, poor implementation of public programs, and lack of initiative at local levels. One key reason that decentralization has been seen as means to resolve some of these problems is its potential to reduce problems of principal-agency.

Principal-agent problems are caused primarily by ineffective accountability mechanisms and structures (see Hiskey 2010). They short-circuit the relationship in democracies between the citizens as principals and the government officials as their agents, which is necessary to keep the latter working in the interests of the former. These kinds of problems are a primary cause of moral hazard, which occurs when government officials have opportunities to secure rents or otherwise use their office for private gain. When uncontrolled, this leads to poor and irresponsible policymaking and implementation as well as vast opportunities for corruption. Administrative hierarchies which are top down, overly centralized, with multiple levels, and/or which lack balancing downward and lateral accountability, leave principals unable to control their agents. This is because these structural factors frequently lead to information leakage and effectively to weak administrative sanctions. Nominal agents then can use their power and authority simply to pursue their own interests (Tullock 1965). This is accentuated when relevant information and managerial and supervisory capacity are limited by organizational weakness and when the public—either as individuals or as members of civil society organizations (CSOs)—has little or no control over its officials. This is typical of politics in Africa, even when there are active party systems, and it leads to abuses at all levels of government, particularly at the grassroots as noted by Englebert (2009).

The logic of decentralization as a remedy for this is that enhancing lateral, local, and at times grassroots control over local officials, along with strengthening key elements of upward accountability, will reduce these problems (Grindle 2007). The dilemma here is in ensuring that local political and administrative leaders will not also fall victim to moral hazard and become irresponsible agents (Englebert 2009), which would simply reestablish the same governance problem at the local level. One way of addressing this problem is to mobilize the grassroots and subnational civil society, assuming that they can assert control over local administrators and that the new heads of local administrative hierarchies will respond to these accountability mechanisms. This also assumes that local officials will have sufficient information and rewards/sanctions to be effective managers and supervisors (Hiskey 2010).

The challenge for accomplishing this is in assuring that competent and honest supervisors can be put in place, that effective management and information mechanisms can be developed and instituted, and that local public constituencies can be mobilized and empowered. Further, the latter must not become fragmented by their heterogeneity or divided by side payments, but instead must hold local officials accountable. This is in part a collective action problem and the rarity with which it has been surmounted suggests that it is a significant one, even at the local level where smaller numbers of people to organize and fewer issues to deal with would seem to make it easier (Olson 1965; Wunsch 2008).

Collective action problems are thus a serious impediment for effective subnational governance in Africa. While some issues and areas have seen conspicuous success in overcoming these problems such as public schools in the Ugandan city of Jinja, villages in rural Uganda and Mali, the Sungusungu movement in rural Tanzania, community associations in southern and eastern Nigeria, education initiatives in rural Chad, development initiatives in rural Senegal, community regulation of scarce water in northern Nigeria, and emerging governance systems in Somaliland, most African states are generally characterized by passive local governments and fragmented communities (Wunsch 2013; Dauda 2004; Wunsch and Ottemoeller 2004; Coulibaly, Dickovick, and Thomson 2010; Heald 2005; Barkan, McNulty, and Ayeni 1991; Smock 1971; Fass and Desloovere 2004; Galvan 2007; Fiki and Lee 2004; Shivakumar 2003). A parallel result of this, and the ineffectiveness of many centrally established formal government organizations, is that collective goods are generally underprovided at local levels (Wunsch 2008, 2009). This speaks directly to the potential of decentralization to enhance development and stability.

Roads, public education, public health measures, trash pickup, security, and the like are woefully short in the rural areas and even much of urban Africa. Public choice theory suggests that these problems are partly explained by the costs of getting diverse people who are dispersed across wide areas to agree on the issues and agree to work together in addition to the issue of resolving problems of free riding on public goods (Olson 1965). Decentralization, as a means of enhancing the institutional capacity and resources of local units of government as well as reducing their area and population, is in theory a mechanism to overcome these problems and encourage collective action. It would accomplish this by its abilities to reduce decisional and organizational costs through smaller and less heterogeneous populations; to utilize social capital, social pressure, and existing social infrastructure to discourage free riding; and to reduce the operational costs of large organizations by enhancing the capacity of smaller, subnational governance institutions (Wunsch 2008, 2013).

To understand the theoretical potential of—and obstacles to—decentralization, it should be recalled that effective political institutions can be understood to be public goods themselves, entities whose actions benefit all in an area whether those residents help pay the initial costs in establishing them or the sustained costs involved in supporting them over time (Ostrom 1990). Given an understanding of political institutions as public goods and the problems of mobilizing the resources to pay for them, the relative rarity of effective local governments in Africa can be more easily understood. Elinor Ostrom (1990) shows how new local institutions frequently grow from existing local institutions and shared understandings among members of communities. However, the large and heterogeneous areas of most local governments and the decades of top-down and authoritarian rule—both colonial and postcolonial—may have suppressed the ability of the existing social and political institutional infrastructure to develop into new institutional arrangements able to resolve contemporary public goods and common property problems, including the development of new institutions. As a result, formal local institutions able to facilitate collective action, as well as manage principal-agency, are weak. Reports of effective governance in Somaliland emerging out of the historical collective choice institutions of the Somali demonstrate the potential of this process, at least in some circumstances such as the absence of juridical sovereignty and other opportunities for rent collection by political elites (Jackson and Rosberg 1986; Englebert 2009; Shivakumar 2003). However, these enabling circumstances often do not exist and long-since compromised historic governance institutions frequently work poorly (Lund 2003, 2007). Researchers who have found historic institutions important in effective local governance emphasize their growth through a syncretic process where principles and understandings embedded in the institutions are used by contemporary actors to solve current governance problems, rather than by specific, historic actors or organizations that have reemerged (Wunsch 2000, 2013; Shivakumar 2003; Galvan 2007; Heald 2005; Fass and Desloovere 2004).

Insofar as decentralization policies and programs help reduce the costs of establishing and sustaining effective local governance institutions, one might reasonably expect them to strengthen and eventually lead to greater provision of local public goods. However, unless communities can be persuaded to believe that these institutions will be accountable to them, it is unlikely they will be willing to pay the costs—in time, resources, cooperation, and trust—necessary to sustain decentralized political institutions. This can easily become a self-fulfilling prophecy and, as a result, local political institutions are likely to be captured by smaller (privileged) groups of persons who can easily organize to reap private goods (rents) from decentralized governments (Bueno de Mesquita et al. 2001). Chapters 6 and 8 on Mali and Nigeria, respectively, are examples in this volume of the reappearance of rent-seeking behavior at formal decentralized units. When this happens, there is no reason to expect that such institutions will work for the benefit of anyone but such small groups, and the public goods provision problem will remain as well as issues of principal-agency (Bardhan 2002; Bierschenk and Olivier de Sardan 2003; Lund 2007). The difficulty that SNGs have in raising local taxes, as seen in all the cases in this volume, may reflect this problem. Much of the same logic applies to the management of common property, be it natural resources and ecosystems or local government budgets, vehicles, buildings, and so forth. Whether or not Africa's decentralization reforms can resolve these problems is one of the most important questions relating to the likelihood of these countries to make progress on such broader governance issues—a core topic of this volume. The successes of organic institutions, such as those in Mali's villages described in Chapter 6 and as Dan Ottemoeller and James Wunsch (2004) found in villages in Uganda, suggest that decentralization has this potential but will require continued innovative design to accomplish it. When organizations such as these begin to solve these problems, decentralization's potential to occupy empty political space will begin to contribute most effectively to development and democracy. The rarity with which this is seen among the cases presented in this volume may have to do with the overly large size of many decentralized units, the continued limits on local autonomy, and the upwardly focused accountability found in most of these cases. If this is true, placing more focus on enhancing the capacity for communities to engage in collective choice and less on their technical and administrative capacity might be a fruitful strategy to pursue.

Establishing local collective choice institutions—here, decentralized governance arrangements that have grassroots confidence in them—is anything but simple. This cannot be done with the wave of a hand, or the passage of a law. Political elites must first find it in their interest to establish them. Then, common understandings among key local actors about rules and their meanings must be reached, credible commitments to follow them must be made, credible sanctions to buttress local decisions must be agreed on, role occupants must be selected and supervised, workable boundaries as to who is included in the decisionmaking system must be agreed on, and a track record of success must be achieved before any institutions can be expected to develop broad local support and trust, produce collective goods, manage common property, or resolve issues of principal-agency (Ostrom 1990, 2005; Treisman 2007). These challenges apply alike to devolution, deconcentration, and delegation.

Disaggregating Decentralization

In reality each form of decentralization, while conceptually distinct and an important way of defining and setting a strategy, is a mix of several critical dimensions of governance. In part to pry apart, assess, and analyze the diverse and complex mixes of decentralization found in real-world cases, the authors of these studies have not tried to force them into categories which, while useful at a general level, might better be seen as Weberian heuristic constructs (deconcentration, delegation, and devolution) than as summary labels that can describe a state's strategy. Standard usage of the three forms of decentralization reflects an expectation, in the above order, of generally increasing levels of authority, autonomy, capacity, and downward accountability by SNGs. However, these three general terms mask the subtleties of the decentralization process as found in the empirical world. As noted, none of the ten cases can be accurately described by any one of these terms alone. Thus, the book assesses the extent to which four key dimensions of governance—authority, autonomy, accountability, and capacity—are found in each case among diverse elected SNGs and subnational administrative units. This framework was first developed by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) in its evaluations of decentralization in the developing world, and it serves as a useful organizing principle for this volume where it is reflected in the structure of each of the country chapters (see USAID 2009).

According to standard usage, in this book we mean the following by these four dimensions of governance:

Authority is the legal right to undertake actions in the name of government. It can be understood as prohibiting, authorizing or facilitating actions by officials or citizens. In rational-legal orders, it must be allocated to officials or citizens through such mechanisms as constitutional or statutory provisions; court cases and administrative actions; or, as authorized by these measures, by elections. Important dimensions of authority for decentralization include the number and range of activities authorized as well as their scope of independence from oversight.

Autonomy refers to the extent to which one level of government—here, SNGs—may undertake actions without the permission of other levels of government. There are of course national, legal provisions that must be observed by subnational levels of government, but significant levels of autonomy exist when subnational levels of government are allowed to initiate actions subject to post hoc oversight by administrative and judicial institutions rather than being required to obtain permission before action. Autonomy also is determined by SNGs' fiscal ability to undertake actions on their own. The latter can be compromised by a lack of authority to raise revenue on their own, a lack of local resources to tax, and detailed prior control by superior governments over how SNGs are allowed to spend their fiscal resources.

Accountability is the ability of actors to reward or sanction in a meaningful way officials or institutions that initiate actions. It can be understood as flowing in three directions: upward to administrative, judicial, or political institutions and officials; downward to the public or civil society; and laterally (or horizontally) to other units of government and, in some cases, to professional bodies with standard-setting and regulative functions. In rational-legal systems it is also regulated by law, which sets forth the actions that can be sanctioned, the circumstance when sanctions can be applied, the procedures that must be followed, the sanctions that may be applied and who may apply them (Ostrom 2005).

Capacity refers to the presence of resources and skills adequate for governmental units and personnel to be able effectively to undertake the functions that have been assigned to them. For decentralized governments, capacities would also be important in regard to those of superior levels of government; professional bodies; other decentralized entities; civil society;

individual citizens where they share authority; and, for the latter two, in their roles as mechanisms of accountability.

Authority, autonomy, accountability, and capacity are thus dimensions of governance important to understanding the extent and nature of decentralization. In real-world decisionmaking about decentralization, achieving a theoretical maximum level of any one—or all four—of these characteristics is not possible. This is partly because decentralization is crafted over time as a complex series of incremental decisions made by diverse actors, dealing with these various dimensions, and is usually made within severe resource constraints. It involves numerous trade-offs among valued options as well as high degrees of uncertainty about future outcomes. The relationship among the four dimensions is a product of an evolutionary process. According to the research reported in this book, African decentralization efforts are universally mixtures of varying intentions, strategies, and outcomes.

The Dynamics of Decentralization

Our reasoning with respect to the importance of these dimensions in describing and analyzing the development of effective subnational levels of governance is as follows: (1) Without some degree of authority, subnational units of governance of any sort, whether the goal be devolution, delegation, or deconcentration, cannot lawfully act. (2) When devolution or delegation are sought, without autonomy subnational units of government become mere extensions of central government bureaucracies and represent no change from existing systems. (3) Without accountability they become powers unto themselves and vulnerable to serious problems of moral hazard in which SNGs might act in ways where offices are used for private gain and disregard the governance roles of other levels of governance and nonstate actors. (4) Without capacity to act, subnational units of government are mere placeholders and, therefore, meaningless and irrelevant. Only when appropriate mixes of these qualities are present can we expect units of government to be effective and responsible vehicles for action. Various forms of decentralization initiatives emphasize different levels of these qualities. For example, deconcentration initiatives might emphasize subnational capacity and upward-oriented accountability, but limited subnational authority and autonomy. Similarly, delegation might emphasize greater levels of subnational authority, carefully defined autonomy, and enhanced subnational capacity, but only upwardly oriented accountability.

These dimensions can be used as valuable analytical tools in moving toward a deeper understanding of the complexity and dynamics of decentralization for each of the ten case studies, both because they assist in prying apart the various tactical and strategic options state leaders have taken and because in reality these dimensions exist in tension. By breaking these dimensions out, the operational tensions are highlighted. For example, in pursuing devolutionary decentralization—a strategy arguably important at least by law in nearly all of the cases—it would appear valuable for SNG units to have significant levels of authority and autonomy. But in pursuing improved governance as an overall outcome of decentralization, these very qualities must be balanced against the need to prevent SNGs from causing negative externalities (e.g., drawing down or ruining another jurisdiction's water shed or dumping waste in another jurisdiction) and to maximize positive ones (e.g., linking road networks, efficiently locating schools, reinforcing public health programs, and synchronizing market towns). They also must be balanced against the danger that jurisdictions thereby empowered might discriminate against political and ethnic minorities, women, and the poor; fail to maintain quality control and professional standards; act to erode national initiatives in key areas such as road networks, flood control, education, health, and agriculture programs; lead to waste and corruption; and so forth.

In part, the remedy for these problems lies in enhancing accountability. However, accountability is also problematic in operation. For example, to whom should SNG officials be accountable, and regarding which functions? As noted above, accountability in decentralization can always be understood as potentially going in three directions: downward to citizens and civil society; upward to superior levels of government and courts of law; and laterally to other branches of government and to professional organizations regarding professional standards, qualifications, and practices. In some situations, lateral accountability also reaches to neighboring units of government regarding negative and positive spillovers and regional initiatives. While this seems complex enough, the reality is that any office—and many individual officials—are likely simultaneously accountable in two or all three directions, and to multiple actors in each. For example, executives in devolved governments are accountable to their publics via elections and regarding performance in office. They are also accountable to superior levels of government and courts for their technical performance, conformity to national policies, respect for and support of national prerogatives, and in general regarding the faithful execution of laws that apply to them such as those regarding hiring and firing personnel, procuring supplies, and awarding contracts. At times, of course, officials receive contradictory directions from the several actors at this level. Also, some wishes of the local population should not be met, such as ones that entail waste and corruption, or disregard the rights or interests of minorities and the politically weak and marginalized. Downward and lateral accountability also raise issues of the need for effective CSOs and local councils or legislative bodies, institutions that often have been weak at subnational as well as at national levels and are critical checks on malfeasance and misfeasance by each level of governance. Similarly, professional and administrative personnel face equally complex patterns of multidirectional accountability, ones that may pull them in contradictory directions regarding any policy, program, or personnel issue. Finally, as Stephen Ndegwa (2002) and others note, effective upward accountability has generally operated poorly in Africa (Olowu and Wunsch 2004).

Capacity would seem without controversy for all three general forms of decentralization, but it too is problematic, if only because resources are limited and needs are vast. Where should governments deploy those limited resources, and what strategies best enhance subnational capacity? Traditional training programs frequently have been ineffective. Also, the tendency of those with training and skills to leave outlying areas for the capital cities or other large urban areas means the sustained impact of training rural personal on local institutions has been limited. Furthermore, expanding subnational responsibilities generally requires stronger if different roles for national and regional governments, which requires their capacity to grow as well. Thus, the demand for resources is great, but which level should be emphasized first is unclear. Finally, what priorities should be set among competing local needs for enhanced capacity? How should choices be made amid enhancing skills among local legislators and elected executives in devolutionary decentralization as well as managers in all forms of decentralization; developing civil society to take on accountability roles; and strengthening offices of planning, audit, contracting, community development, agricultural outreach, public health, medical services, and so forth? A cross-cutting issue is that, even where there are trained personnel, SNGs often lack the resources to pay enough to attract them to poorer and more isolated areas, and national resources are too limited adequately to fill these local gaps. States that seek to establish multiple levels of SNGs to engage the grassroots, such as Ethiopia, Nigeria, and Uganda, particularly, face this problem.

It is important for several reasons to emphasize the mixed outcomes of and trade-offs among the four dimensions of governance as they relate to decentralization (authority, autonomy, accountability, and capacity). First, the different mixes of devolution, delegation, and deconcentration found among our cases imply emphasizing these four aspects to different degrees. Second, there are clear trade-offs among them regarding the governance values that they maximize. In other words, none of these is without the risk of some adverse outcomes; neither can all four dimensions be maximized without introducing contradictory tensions into subnational governance. Third, for any single dimension, there are ambiguities, trade-offs, and negative consequences that policymakers must understand, and among which they must choose. Policymakers are forced to make these decisions even when the trade-offs are ambiguous and the outcomes unclear. This is part of why decentralization and its outcomes are so idiosyncratic to each state. In brief, an increase in each of these dimensions is not necessarily possible or, for some of them, even always good.

African governments have made choices regarding their approaches to the tensions and challenges inherent in these four dimensions of decentralization as well as the sequence in which they were pursued. What were these choices? What were their consequences for development, stability, and, when relevant, local democracy? For example, Nigeria chose to enhance local capacity through extensive training and large grants of monies derived from its oil exports before developing effective structures of accountability. Other states such as Mali, Ethiopia, and Uganda pursued a sort of big bang strategy where they pushed all aspects rapidly and simultaneously. What were the consequences of these choices? For Nigeria, Chapter 8 suggests that this led to extensive corruption. For Ethiopia, Mali, and Uganda, Chapters 4, 6, and 11, respectively, suggest that it led to severe problems of SNG capacity. The consequences of choices regarding accountability, for example, have also been important. As noted in Chapter 7, Mozambique's municipalities, which had a greater emphasis on downward accountability than districts, seemed to perform much better than the districts in delivering services. Describing, analyzing, and evaluating the choices made by African governments regarding these four dimensions of decentralization are major goals of this book.

A number of the case studies in this book describe the constraints placed, often deliberately, by central governments on devolved levels of government by deconcentrated units at the same or higher levels. As shown in Chapter 9, South Africa reflects these tensions. This is also seen in francophone Africa such as the description in Chapter 3 of Burkina Faso's conflicted struggle to decentralize. Burkina Faso is a remarkable example of stark differences between policy as reflected in sweeping national legislation and the functional realities of rural SNGs. Though national decentralization legislation was enacted in 1998 (under an acknowledged policy of gradualism), implementing decrees were enacted only in 2009. Nonetheless, almost all rural communes (key units of devolved governance) are still unable to deliver the services formally devolved in 1998 because they have not yet signed required operation protocols with the responsible governor, a deconcentrated official of the central government. Remarkably, communes in Burkina Faso are responsible to three such deconcentrated authorities: a regional governor, a provincial high commissioner, and a departmental prefect. To a lesser extent this is also true in Mali, as described in Chapter 6. Mozambique (see Chapter 7) also uses a rather complex mix of strategies emphasizing deconcentration among other forms of decentralization, which seems to have hampered development of effective SNGs. This use of deconcentration to constrain devolution reflects an important running theme in the book: African decentralization has resulted in robust changes to legal frameworks, but has been circumscribed by strong centripetal forces.

The Political Economy of Decentralization in Africa

At the theoretical level, one can understand why choices among autonomy, authority, capacity, and accountability are challenging and frequently problematic. If sorting through these challenges and trade-offs to make rational choices among them were all that affected these dimensions, the situation would be difficult enough. However, in the real world of applied politics, theory gives way to the options and choices dictated by political considerations. Thus, another goal of this book is to understand why African leaders have made their choices in implementing decentralization. The importance of this challenge can be seen, for example, in the reality that every state reviewed in this book—some more than others—has made constitutional or legislative and policy commitments to devolutionary decentralization, as well as substantial efforts to achieve it, yet few have made much progress in reaching it. Why? While the answers at times hinge on balancing the sorts of tension referred to above, they are also intrinsically tied to Africa's unique political economy.

Overwhelming evidence regarding the African political economy points toward the state and access to it as the primary determinant of wealth for virtually all Africans (Englebert 2000; Hyden 2006; Wunsch and Olowu 1990; Reno 1999; Villalón and VonDoepp 2005; Bayart 1993). It occurs at the top levels of the state where access to rents associated with sovereignty in the international arena, such as export taxes, natural resource revenues, international aid, and access for investors and exporters to the domestic economy, provides great wealth. It occurs within state bureaucracies where control of contracts, jobs, promotions, and location of field offices and intermediate and local government headquarters are decided. It also occurs at field levels where local personnel eagerly seek pathways to urban postings, and even poorly paid personnel are able to extract rents from the grassroots through their control of access to licenses, official papers, permits, or local services. One way or another, the state, control over elements of it, and the opportunities it provides largely determine who prospers, who just gets by, and who lives in poverty. Even in post-2000 conditions, when investment flows returned to Africa, there is no evidence that the state-centric political economy has substantially changed, as Englebert (2009) shows in his study of state sovereignty and rent-seeking behavior at all levels of government.

Decisions regarding decentralization are intrinsically involved in this political economy. With relatively weak private economies and civil societies—ones in any case usually dependent on access to or tolerance by state actors—the pathways that decentralization reforms take and the goals that they are able to support are largely driven by the interests and relative influence of diverse state-based and state-focused actors. Thus, as seen in this volume, the impetus for decentralization will grow from the interests of those at the center, rather than how effective it may be made as a tool for development or democracy. As our cases illustrate, if state leaders in Mali, postrevolutionary Ethiopia, or Nigeria find decentralization useful to deal with regionalism or to legitimize military rule, those at the center will support it. If leaders in postcoup Ghana, postrevolutionary Uganda, or transitional South Africa find it useful to consolidate and legitimize their rule, they too will support it. However, if leaders in postapartheid South Africa, postsettlement Mozambique, or contemporary Ethiopia and Botswana find it a likely base for opposing parties or regional and ethnic factions, they will limit it in practice if not in law. Similarly, subordinate actors in each state will support it insofar as it serves their interests. A major goal of this volume is to describe and explore those choices, the reasons for them, and their consequences.

Beyond the impetus of the political center, the political-economic interests of various ministries that stand to gain or lose control over resources such as appointments, budgets, personnel, and substantive areas will lead them to block, slow, or try to direct it in their favor. Local-level officials will make similar decisions, as will members of the public, insofar as they can affect it. Of course, these are broad generalizations, and interests at any level in any state may express themselves in varying reactions to certain general forms of decentralization (delegation, deconcentration, devolution), and by support for specific institutional arrangements that affect authority, accountability, autonomy, and capacity.

For example, local executives will usually support strong-executive models over those with strong local legislative bodies. Thus, they will likely encourage steps that enhance general local authority, autonomy, and capacity if they enhance executive authority, but not ones that encourage local legislative capacity or any forms of local popular accountability such as to civil society (Crook and Manor 1998; Wunsch and Ottemoeller 2004). This can be seen in nearly all of our cases. Ministries of planning may well support local authority and capacity to do decentralized planning, but only if they retain effective control over final capital investments. This is particularly the case if by doing so they can capture budgetary control from a ministry of finance or from sector ministries such as agriculture, education, health, and transportation. Thus, they will likely also oppose local autonomy in choosing projects and accountability by the local populace. We can see this in Uganda. Finally, as Englebert (2009) suggests, local officials who collect rents from the public will often be enthusiastic about greater authority and autonomy decentralized to them. However, they will not be enthusiastic about measures that enhance their accountability to anyone, particularly about those that enhance local government's capacity to supervise and manage them.

The circumstances and situations of political parties have also strongly affected decentralization in the ten cases. The highly competitive parties in many Nigerian states along with massive oil rents have caused decentralization to be intrinsically connected with intense local-level rent seeking as well as patronage. Nigerian local governments in turn were used to build bases to capture control over state governments and their oil accounts. Ghana also has highly competitive political parties, but its economic system historically has not been distorted by lucrative oil rents. There, each party has supported decentralization as a general policy because it provides the party with regional bases to build on after national electoral defeats. Alternatively in states where there are single dominant parties, such as in Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Mozambique, South Africa, and Tanzania, dominant party influence can negate nominal legal local autonomy and accountability. National party structures have preempted local concerns in the nomination of candidates and have considered SNGs primarily as mechanisms for clientelism to reward local party cadres and to keep competitors weak. In different ways a similar dynamic plays out in Botswana and Uganda, which have clear leading parties in the case of the Botswana Democratic Party (BDP) and the National Resistance Movement (NRM), respectively. Mali, prior to the 2012 coup, had a more fragmented party system. Each state's pathway toward decentralization is a result of these kinds of diverse political patterns and interests, and the effectiveness of actions taken in support of them.

As a result, the progress of decentralization along the four dimensions varies substantially among our cases. Similarly, their success in achieving democracy, development, and stabilization also varies substantially. In substantial measure a major purpose of this book is to describe and explore the circumstances that nonetheless encourage effective progress along these dimensions toward broader goals, and to develop generalizations regarding when, in these state-focused political economies, they are most likely to occur.

Issues of Finance, Administration, and Political Structure

Several recurring and tangible choices regarding specific policies and institutional arrangements are likely to deeply affect authority, autonomy, accountability, and capacity. These include fiscal issues such as financing SNGs, administrative ones such as the nature (or indeed existence) of a unified SNG civil service–personnel system, and structural choices among federal and unitary governmental systems as well as the size, design, and number of tiers of local government. Existing political-economic factors certainly influence these choices but, once made, they have their own evolving and profound influence on the functioning of SNGs. This is because these choices allocate power and influence; generate new and evolving interests; and, thus, modify the incentive structures that local officials and citizens face, thereby influencing what their subsequent actions are likely to be (Ostrom 2005).

The way that decentralized governments are funded deeply implicates the meaningfulness of any authority granted to them as well as their capacity, accountability, and autonomy. In particular when one considers delegation and devolutionary decentralization, large and unconditional central grants may enhance SNG capacity (though not necessarily). However, because these grants are cost-free flows of resources from outside, they also reduce the incentive for local officials to raise local resources, seek efficient operations through good management, develop effective policies and programs, and build effective institutions to perform those tasks. They erode the likelihood of developing longer-term and enduring capacity at subnational levels, and tend to encourage rent-seeking behavior by local officials and local interests that want a share of free money, which itself also reduces local capacity. Any sort of grant is also likely to erode downward accountability by reducing the incentives for local citizens to invest energy in holding local governments accountable over taxes that might otherwise have been raised locally and for local officials to listen to them. Conditional grants may reduce rent-seeking opportunities, but also reduce local autonomy, downward accountability, and local leaders' abilities to respond flexibly to particular local needs. This will also likely reduce the incentives for local dwellers to pay much attention to local governments. These dynamics mean that the probability of decentralization leading to local development and possibly enhancing security is reduced. Nonetheless, the local poverty typical in most of rural Africa means that local governments will have few resources and little capacity without such grants.

A key topic in this book is exploring how African states have dealt with these financing dilemmas and what the consequences of their choices have been. It is arguable, for example, that South Africa, Uganda, and Ghana's systems of substantial grants have enhanced immediate local capacity while undermining aspects of the other three qualities: autonomy, effective local authority, and accountability to local citizens and CSOs. Nigeria's massive grants appear to have set off intense rent seeking at local and state levels. The grants themselves and these rent-seeking behaviors have seriously undermined autonomy and accountability as well as damaged capacity because of how the rent seeking has affected Nigerian subnational personnel in general. Mozambique's grants have stimulated local corruption and rent seeking as well as partisan patronage at local levels. Ethiopia's grants have led to clientelism.

One of the recurring administrative issues among the ten cases is human resources management (HRM). Tanzania, Botswana, Nigeria, Uganda, and South Africa, among others, have wrestled with these issues. These systems have been difficult to design without mixed and often problematic consequences for all forms of decentralization since they have important implications for capacity, accountability, and autonomy. Theoretically, Africa's choices include a single national personnel system where employees of all levels of government work under the same terms of service and are assigned to subnational units by a central ministry. This can be seen in Burkina Faso. Mozambique also has a personnel system dominated by the national government, though several agencies are involved in its hiring process. A variation of this pattern is utilized in Uganda where subnational personnel are members of a national personnel system under a single set of terms of service, but are engaged, paid, evaluated, and discharged by SNGs at their discretion. HRM systems also include dual civil service–personnel systems, where national and subnational personnel are divided. One variation of the latter can be seen in South Africa, Botswana, and Ghana where most subnational personnel, though part of a separate SNG civil service organization, are engaged, discharged, paid, and assigned by a central agency. In another variation used by Nigeria, national authorities set terms of service, but local authorities engage and discharge their personnel. Finally, as in a system that was proposed for Ethiopia, there might be no national personnel system for subnational personnel who would be engaged, discharged, and paid at the discretion of subnational units of government. In reality, most systems are a bit of a hodgepodge of these models such as Mali where most local government civil servants are hired by the center or by centrally appointed local civil servants, but some are nonetheless paid by local governments. The latter frequently are paid after long delays, which means that engaging and retaining such personnel can be difficult.

The advantages of a single national-government personnel system that serves localities are believed to be greater security and therefore satisfaction for personnel, more protection for personnel from politicized and arbitrary local actions, and more homogeneity in training and qualifications among personnel, and a more even distribution of personnel among poorer and wealthier areas (Wunsch 2001). Such a system might work to enhance local-level capacity. Alternatively, nationally established and revised terms of service, because of their vulnerability to pressure from organized civil-service personnel interests at the center, can become overly fiscally generous and a burden for subnational units. This in turn sustains and intensifies SNG's dependence on central grants. This can lead to reduced local autonomy and eroded long-term capacity when fiscal burdens weigh heavily on SNGs, as can be seen in Nigeria. Similarly, national control of personnel assignment, transfer, and promotion can disrupt local authority over personnel and, thus, local plans and programs. Botswana and Mozambique have experienced such outcomes. Alternatively, greater local control over personnel, as seen in Uganda, seems to have led to more cohesive local governments, but also to eroding morale and greater discontent among local employees, possible loss of professionalism, and fewer protections for such personnel from arbitrary local decisions.

Overall, then, personnel systems that have a stronger national role seem to enhance the fundamental personnel capacity of SNGs while reducing SNGs' authority over employees and autonomy from national control. However, they can commit subnational units to greater personnel and fiscal burdens. This in turn can reduce funds available for supplies and capital investment to meet local priorities, thereby eroding the programmatic capacity of SNGs. Alternatively, personnel systems where subnational units have a greater role in engaging, discharging, and setting terms of service can enhance local authority over personnel who play key roles in defining and implementing their programs, thus strengthening local autonomy and, one might hope, the ability to respond to unique local needs and problems. However, more locally focused systems may also erode the capacity of these personnel and reduce the upward accountability of local political leaders and administrators with regard to their fair and professional treatment. Local or downwardly focused accountability systems and structures (e.g., elections and an involved and active local civil society) might be expected to incentivize local leaders to do a good job managing local personnel. However, the general underdevelopment of these structures and systems in Africa and the dynamics of the African political economy, which place greater power and resources in the hands of government officials, mean they are unlikely to do this well. Single national civil service systems, which are generally found in Africa with respect to senior professional staff such as medical, financial, and agricultural personnel, have many of the same trade-offs as national-local government systems, but with even less authority granted to subnational units, consequently eroding their autonomy and potential for downward accountability. In most cases in Africa, HRM has been characterized by instability and mixed arrangements, which themselves have been problematic for decentralization.

A key structural issue has been the number of levels of subnational government. This has had important implications for each of the four dimensions of decentralization, and depends on decisions regarding federalism and the number of tiers for local government systems. Related to these are issues and decisions regarding the size, overall number, and territorial criteria for local government. South Africa, Nigeria, and Ethiopia are Africa's only federal systems. Several countries, including Uganda, Mali, Ethiopia, and Ghana, have multitier systems. Mozambique is characterized by parallel devolved and deconcentrated systems of subnational governance. The number of local governments ranges from a high of nearly 800 units in Nigeria and some 550 in Ethiopia to a low of 14 in Botswana. The number of subnational federal units similarly varies from thirty-seven in Nigeria to nine in South Africa, with eleven in Ethiopia. Finally, design can be based on relatively organic principles where communities with socially and economically integrated centers of balance are designed, as is generally found in Ghana or Uganda, to arbitrary ones such as in Nigeria where areas are frequently designed in ways that divide interdependent communities into separate local governments. The establishment and physical definition of SNGs has frequently become a political football, which has led to the loss of much of their demographic, economic, and social coherence; to units that are too small to be fiscally viable; and at times to civil violence, as in Nigeria.

Issues surrounding the number and size of levels of subnational units of government include their cost; their functions; the distance between the grassroots and governmental units; and the extent to which multiplying levels of government leads to problems of ambiguity in responsibility, management and quality control, coordination of activity, and redundancy. Nigeria's states, for example, were supposed to play major roles in supporting local governments in management and quality control of local services, but they have not done much of this (Olowu and Wunsch 2004). Instead, they have become arenas of rent-seeking behavior and serious drains on national revenue. Alternatively, Ethiopia's regions can and do play a large role in supporting the country's local units of government. At the lowest levels, the functionality of Uganda's subdistrict levels has been unclear, and Mozambique's complex parallel deconcentrated and devolved systems seem to have led to ambiguity regarding which system has the authority to do what as well as serious coordination problems. On the other hand, Mali's bottom-up strategy for organizing villages into communes appears to have encouraged initiative and accountability at the lowest levels of government. The chapters of this book explore these patterns and their consequences.

Conclusion

The complex African political economy must be navigated in ways that enable viable units of subnational governance to be established. The complex puzzles surrounding this task suggest that, even if there are valid reasons why Africans should pursue decentralization, it may take many years before these steps begin to make a difference. Nonetheless, there is evidence from studies of decentralization in Africa, as well as informal de facto initiatives that have grown alongside decentralization reforms, that decentralization can make a major difference in the lives of Africa's peoples. In each of the ten states discussed in this book, decentralized governance entities—some formal, some not—have made collective choices and effectively gathered the resources necessary to resolve issues of principal-agency, provide collective or public goods, and manage common property. Some have done so through formal decentralized governance institutions and others have established their own decentralized governance entities without help or authority from central governments (Wunsch 2008, 2009, 2013). The most effective ones have utilized both of these and worked through institutionalized mixes of delegation, devolution, and deconcentration (Dauda 2004; Heald 2005). The conspicuous failures in local governance have not utilized such an institutional mix (Harnishfeger 2003; Baker 2002). These ten cases and related scholarly material illustrate the potential of decentralization to resolve chronic governance problems and how it has thereby facilitated local development, security, and democracy. The challenge for scholars and practitioners of decentralization and improved governance in Africa is to sort through the contemporary evidence to see what arrangements of authority, autonomy, accountability, and capacity work best to facilitate progress for Africa's peoples in this process. The intent of this book is to help continue this work.