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Does decentralization have a positive impact on the use of natural resources?

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ABSTRACT

Decentralization is widely debated as a device for conservation and management of natural resources. While the objectives and the principles of decentralization are well known, there are still controversial ideas on its potential and effectiveness in conservation and management of natural resources. Furthermore, while the decentralization strategies are sometimes well implemented as in the case of Community Based Natural Resources Management, their outcomes are positive in some countries and insufficient in others. These outcomes suggest for an important question –Does decentralization have a positive impact on the conservation and use of natural resources? Based on the analytical framework and literature review this paper dwells into this question by presenting the several case studies where decentralization has shown positive and negative outcomes. We find from this work that decentralization has achieved moderate success in some countries, moderate failures in others and both in many countries. Most of the decentralization is not the outcome of democratic decentralization per se but rather an outcome of hybrids of deconcentration, privatisation, or partial, poorly designed or highly circumscribed decentralization. We see however that given the right impetus with respect to implementation of true subsidiarity, empowerment and building of social capital among the locals, decentralization may be effective in the conservation and use of natural resources.

1. Background

1.1 Introduction

The last two decades have witnessed a paradigm shift in conservation and natural resources management away from costly state-centred control towards approaches in which local people play a much more active role. These reforms purportedly aim to increase resource user participation in natural resources management decisions and benefits by restructuring the power relations between central state and communities through the transfer of management authorities to local-level organizations (Faquet, 1997 Shackleton *et al.*, 2002). The need for a more decentralised system came as a result of increased dissatisfaction brought in by centralised system existed in the past. This system was driven by the secular growth of the welfare state in the industrialized world, and in the developing world initially by the political imperative of creating national identities out of the ashes of colonialism, and subsequently by developmentalist attempts to guide the economy to growth and prosperity through central administration (Faquet, 1997). With centralized policy control, regulation and production came high concentrations of political power and discretion over resource allocation, which in turn brought proportional incentives to corruption and clientelism.

It is important to note at the outset that bureaucratic shortfalls and increasing clientism was the subject of the development discourses politically and economically in the late sixties and early seventies. However, it was in the early 1980's that decentralization emerged as a valued political and economic goal in most developing countries (Agrawal and Ribot, 2000). Arguments for and against decentralization frequently assumed the character of sweeping, cross-disciplinary claims about the effects of administrative measures on the quality and efficiency of both government and social interaction (Faquet, 1997). The lexicon in which discussion occurs is as varied as the backgrounds of those who participate (i.e. Economists, Political Scientists, Sociologists, Anthropologists, Public Administrators, etc.). Partly as a result of this, the economic and political literature on decentralization is inconclusive. The debate - both theoretical and empirical - on whether decentralization increases or decreases social welfare and efficiency is still very much unresolved. Often proponents of decentralization assume away the central problem of decentralization by asserting that "it brings decision-making closer to the people" which result in better decision-making and the consequent increase in social welfare.

It is important to note further that disproportionate representation triggered the need for decentralization process in various sectors including natural resources management. There are two opposing views of decentralization in natural resources management. Critics of decentralization (see for example, Faquet, 1997) argue that things are not going to change when municipalities' receive authorities for conservation and

management of natural resources found in their areas. In some cases it could even worsen the current situation. But a growing group of supporters argue that decentralization, with all that it implies for institutionalising social participation, is essential for conserving the healthy of our natural resources and increasing possibilities for benefit sharing (Agrawal and Ribot (2000). This as argued by Agrawal and Ribot (2000) and Schulz and Yaghmour, (2004) includes increased efficiency, equity and greater participation and responsiveness of central government to its citizen.

Given these polarized ideas one would still ask whether decentralization is effective in bringing about equal use and benefit sharing of natural resources. We answer this question by examining the potential and effectiveness of decentralization in natural resources conservation and management. Our discussion on decentralization is based on the understanding that the contemporary natural resources management strategies require the revolution of the divergent interest among a host of actors so that externalities associated with natural resources use, conservation and management are not disproportionately born by any subgroups. The paper starts by giving out some background information on the definition and the theoretical background of the concept of decentralization.

1.2 Definition of decentralization

Before entering into the analysis of the effectiveness of decentralization in natural resources conservation and management, it is important to review the various meanings which the word has been given by both authors and the governments that implement it. Perhaps the best general definition of decentralization is the one given by Rondinelli, *et. al.*, (1981) who defined decentralization as the transfer of responsibility for planning, management, and resource utilization and allocation from the central government to (a) field units of central government ministries or agencies; (b) subordinate units or levels of government; (c) semi-autonomous public authorities or corporations; (d) area-wide regional or functional authorities. Others including Mowhood (1983) and Smith (1985) defines decentralization from slightly different perspectives. Mowhood (1983) and Smith (1985) cited in Schulz and Yaghmour, (2004) defines decentralization as any act by which central government formally cedes power to actors and institutions at lower levels in political administrative and territorial hierarchy. The objective as argued by Ribot (2002) includes dismantling or downsizing central government by increasing local participation in democracy and strengthening local government.

Earlier forms of decentralization as described by Mamdani (1996) emphasize national cohesion, effective rules and efficient management of rural subjects. In Contrast, the most recent decentralization presented by

Larson and Ribot (2004) introduce the new emancipatory language of democracy, pluralism and rights. Into this new direction, a distinction is made between democratic decentralization and deconcentration. Democratic decentralization also called political decentralization or devolution involves the transfer of power to elected local authorities (Ribot, 2001). According to Ribot (2001) democratic decentralization integrates local population into decision making through better representation by creating and empowering representative local governments which are having autonomous domain of powers to make and implement meaningful decisions (Ribot, 2001).

When powers are transferred to lower level actors who are accountable to their superiors in a hierarchy, the reform can be termed as deconcentration (Agrawal and Ribot, 2000). The same authors notes that you may have lower level appointed and/or elected members and yet fail to achieve a democratic decentralization if elected or appointed leaders are still upwardly accountable. Thus, deconcentration is a weaker form of decentralization since the mechanisms by which deconcentrated decision makers are responsive and accountable to local populations are weaker (Ribot 2002). Thus if efficiency and equity benefits arise from democratic processes that encourage local authorities to serve the needs and desires of their constituents (Smoke 2000, Cook and Sverrison, 2001), then democratic decentralization should be the most effective form of decentralization.

It is clear that the underlying concepts regarding the forms which decentralization takes are broadly similar, but the taxonomic exercise could continue through innumerable divisions, definitions and categorizations. The reasonable course to take is to decide on a working definition and proceed. We have decided to base our discussion on decentralization as the devolution by central (i.e. national) government of specific functions, with all of the administrative, political and economic attributes that these entail, to local (e.g. villages or municipal) governments which are independent of the center and sovereign within a legally delimited geographic and functional domain. We choose this definition because first, the clarity of the proposition greatly simplifies analysis, allowing it to focus on discrete, well-defined decentralizing measures and exogenous variables in order to gauge the empirical effects of each on policy outputs. Second, the empirical case which will be used to describe this relationship involves precisely this form of decentralization implemented in various countries as will be described at a later stage. Third, the definition is supported by theoretical orientation of decentralization presented in the next section.

1.3 Theoretical background

Is decentralization good for natural resource use and management? Theories tell us that decentralization can lead to a number of positive outcomes (Schulz and Yaghtmour, 2004). Some of these positive outcomes include democratisation and participation, rural development, public service performance and poverty alleviation. Most of the local benefits from decentralization are believed to come from increased popular participation, which in turn, leads to increases in democracy, efficiency and equity (Agrawal and Ribot, 1999 and Ribot, 2002). Like decentralization advocates, natural resources theorists and practitioners also emphasize the need for local participation as a means for increasing management effectiveness and equity (Schulz and Yaghtmour, 2004).

Local participation can be achieved through local representation of local authorities which can be institutionalised and incorporated into policies. Manin et al., (1999) define representation as a situation where authorities act in the best interest of the public. Representation as noted by Agrawal and Ribot, (1999) and Smoke, (1999) is the mechanism that makes decentralised institutions effective. Representation is part and parcel of democracy, which can be substantively defined as leadership that is accountable to the people (Moore, 1997). Citing Manin et al., (1999), Schulz and Yaghtmour, (2004) breaks representation into responsiveness and accountability. They model the policy process as a chain in which preferences expressed through various signals become mandates and are translated into policies and then outcomes. They show that responsiveness is the relation between signals and outcome while accountability is the relationship between outcomes and sanctions. A government is responsive if it adopts policies that are signalled as preferred by citizens and it is accountable if citizens can sanction it appropriately (Manin et al., 1999). This theoretical background tells us that empowering local institutions that are not accountable to local population may not produce outcomes that decentralization promises. Similarly, creating accountable local authorities without powers and abilities will certainly not deliver the goods.

It is important to note that the concepts and theories of decentralization have also been evolving with challenges they face throughout the world. The modern case for decentralized government is well represented by Wolman (in Bennet, 1990). Wolman groups his arguments concerning decentralization under two main headings: Efficiency Values and Governance Values. *Efficiency Values* comprise the public choice justification for decentralization, where efficiency is understood as the maximization of social welfare. *Governance Values* comprise Wolman's second grouping, in which he includes: (i) responsiveness and accountability, (ii) diversity, and (iii) political participation. The first values, responsiveness and accountability,

are the most important of these and comprise the political parallel to the argument about efficiency detailed above.

Note further that most of the decentralization processes are built around the assumption that greater participation in public decision making is a positive good itself or it can improve efficiency, equity, development and natural resources management (Mill, 1993 and Dahl, 1981). Others including Cook and Manor (1998) argue that decentralization plays an important role in democratisation and people participation, public service performance, poverty alleviation and political and macroeconomic stability. By bringing the government decision making closer to the citizens, decentralization is widely believed to increase public sector accountability and therefore effectiveness (World Bank, 1997). Decentralization theorists and policy makers evoke developmentalist arguments contending that the increased efficiency, equity and inclusion that should arise from decentralization results in better and more sustainable management (Larson and Ribot, 2004). Ribot (2002) shows that under natural resources management, decentralization is promotion of both efficiency and equity among users and managers of natural resources. More recently, natural resources decentralization is being promoted as a means for giving substance to political rights to (all stakeholders and especially local population) to own and manage their own resources (Anderson, 2002, Kaimowitz and Ribot, 2002).

However, with regard to natural resources democratic decentralization has proven difficult to find and the results of the existing policies are highly varied (Larson and Ribot, 2004). This paper discusses decentralization in its broader perspectives and examines case studies to determine whether decentralization is effective in bringing about sustainable use and conservation of natural resources or otherwise. Before looking into specific cases we introduce the methodology and the analytical framework used in this paper.

1.4 Methodology and analytical framework

Most of the information contained in this work comes from an extensive literature survey and personal communication from colleagues at ZEF. We proceed and analyse issues brought from literature search by building up an analytical framework. In the framework decentralization is based on our working definition where the central government cedes power to actors and institutions at lower levels in political administrative and territorial hierarchy. Power is defined by Fisher (2000) as the capacity to affect the outcome of decision making process. This implies a genuine role in the decision making not just a token input in the form of consultation. In addition to power, the issue of accountability is also considered to be important for effective decentralization. Accountability used in this study refers to the mechanisms through which countervailing

powers are exercised by those subject to actors holding decentralised power. Therefore all acts of decentralization discussed in this paper cuts across three important elements; actors, power and accountability. Key actors in this study include appointed or elected officials, NGOs, chiefs, powerful individuals or cooperative bodies. Each of these actors is typically located in particular location of accountability and certain type of powers based on ideology, election, appointment, political constitutions culture and belief. Power as seen the framework may be legislative, executive or judicial. It can be seen from figure 1 that effective decentralization may be realised when accountability is directed downwardly to local actors.

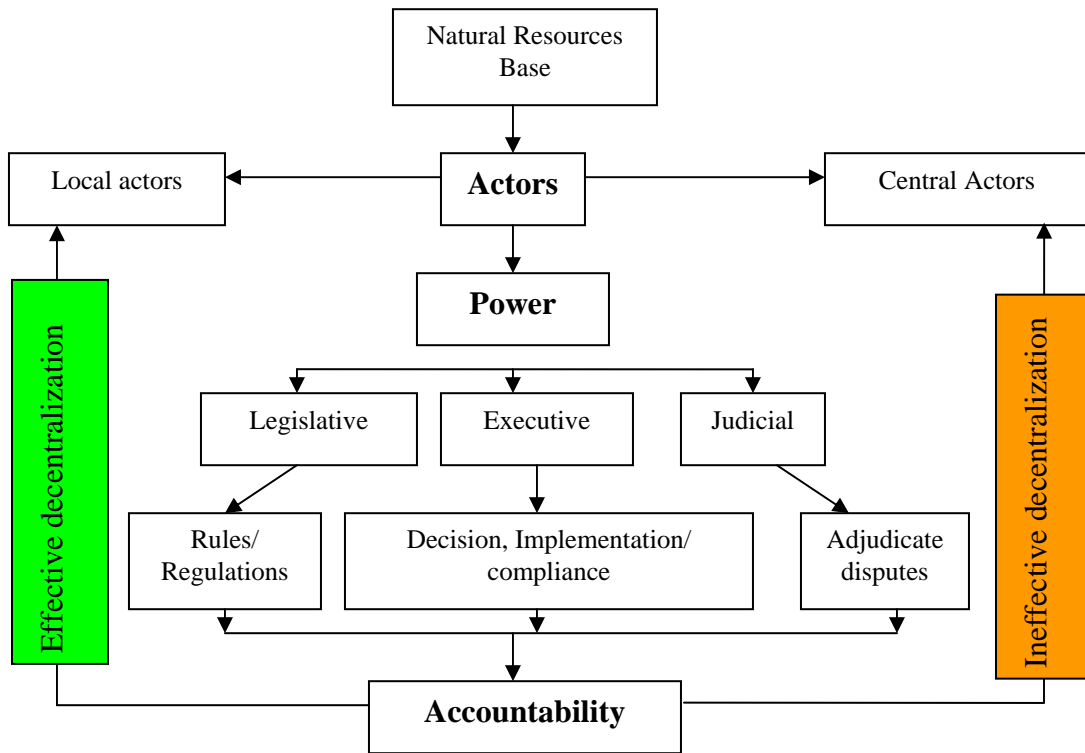


Figure 1: Analytical framework

Having presented the analytical framework used in this study it is clear that there are greater challenges to decentralization when power and accountability are to be shared among actors away from the central administration. We use this framework for the analysis of the decentralization process by presenting some of the positive and negative outcomes of decentralization in the next sections.

2.0 Analysis of decentralization process in natural resources management

2.1 Overview

Unfortunately there are many examples of inadequate and unsustainable natural resource management by central governments and large private interests from both the developed and developing worlds. In developing countries, where governments are often distant from the resource base and have little means to effectively manage and control natural resources utilization. In some cases natural resources reserves (e.g. Forest) exist only on paper, having long ago been exploited and converted into other land uses. Perhaps because of these failures, decentralization has been viewed as a promising way of achieving more sustainable natural resource use and management. Decentralization in general, and its usual accompanying concepts like participation and co-management, holds prospects for increased proximity to clients, local ownership, reduced transaction costs, increased equity, and enhanced sustainability (Van de Sand, 1997). It is also envisioned to improved management, accountability, agricultural and economic productivity, and cost recovery (Vermillion 1997). Brown (1998), discussing the rationale for community involvement in natural resources utilization and management, mentions proximity, impact, local livelihoods, capacity, equity, cost-effectiveness, adaptation and development philosophy as key elements.

However, decentralization as a means to improve resources management and promote sustainability has had a great number of adherents over the past decade or so. To many, it is a less naive form of participation that recognizes political and administrative realities, and moves beyond the isolated, small-scale, success of some participatory rural development projects. This view is examined by presentation some of the positive and negative outcomes of decentralization in the next sections.

2.2 Positive outcomes

Using examples from Botswana, Zimbabwe (CAMPFIRE) and Zambia Shackleton (et al., 2002) shows that decentralization helped local people to retain and therefore gain financial benefits from natural resources. It is indicated by the same authors that decentralization opened channels for rural dwellers to communicate their priorities to the government decision-makers and in some cases improved community government relationship. By encouraging local people to join new networks and forge new relationships, decentralization may have also contributed to local people organization capacity and political capital. Decentralization has allowed local associations of small-scale loggers in Bolivia to access forested areas declared as municipal forest reserves. The municipalities also provide technical assistance. It has also brought larger financial

resources to support community forestry in Guatemala and Honduras. There are also reports from Bolivia and other countries in Africa and Latin America (box 1) where decentralization show some positive outcomes.

It appears from the positive outcome that decentralization has increased access of the people to local resources previously held by the central government; have improved participation and enlarged the capacity of the local administration and that national administration increasingly take account of the regional and local level administration. However, a growing number of voices point out that decentralization is not sufficient and although access to some subsistence products and limited decision by the local communities the central government continues to dominate using “scientific management” to justify continued central control over valuable resources. To illustrate this let us examine some case studies of decentralization with insufficient outcomes.

Box 1: Some successful stories of decentralization

- Since 1989, the CAMPFIRE program in Zimbabwe has given rural local authorities some rights to manage wildlife and collect revenues from such activities as game hunting and tourism (CAMPFIRE 2003).
- Viet Nam's 1998 Water Law calls for a more integrated approach to watershed management and has devolved irrigation management rights to local “Commune People’s Committees” (Dupar and Badenoch 2002).
- In Mali, 1994 regulations give rural communities the right to protect all or part of their forest resources (Ribot 1995).
- Nepal's 1993 Forest Act legalized “forestry user groups,” giving them the right to own the trees, although ownership of the land remains with the state. User groups develop management plans, set prices for forest products, and determine how surplus income is spent (Agrawal and Ribot 1999:483). By June 1997, there were 6,000 user groups managing 450,000 hectares of forests, with another 6,000 waiting for formal registration (DFID et al., 2002).
- Thailand's ambitious experiments in decentralized government include granting nominal responsibility for the sustainable management of land, water, and forest resources to new local government entities at the sub-district level called “tambons.” Tambons are charged with formulating development plans and funding them based on proposals submitted by villages within their jurisdictions (Dupar and Badenoch 2002).
- Guatemala's regulatory framework for forest management grants municipal governments the right to 50 percent of the taxes levied on logging permits, plus subsidies for reforestation. Municipalities are also responsible for establishing environment commissions that work closely with the national agency in charge of the forestry sector to control illegal logging and supervise legal logging, and to develop municipal forestry plans with popular participation (Larson 2003).
- In Honduras, the Law of Modernization and Development in the Agricultural Sector (1992) gave elected local governments the right to make decisions about logging and management plans (including controlled burning, land use plans, the creation of protected areas, and citizen watershed protection projects) for about 30 percent of the country's forests (Larson 2003).

Source: World Resources Institute United Nations Environment Programme, World Bank, 2003. World Resources 2002-2004: Decisions for the Earth: Balance, voice, and power. Online <http://governance.wri.org/pubs>

2.3 Insufficient outcomes of decentralization

Writing on collaborative and community-based forest management in Ghana, de Grassi (2003) reports that most of the forest management power remains in the hands of a centralised forestry administration. The author continues to show that when challenged to devolve forest management powers to local people, the central administration have misconstrued agro ecological processes for national interest to justify retaining the control. Reporting decentralization process in Indonesia Resosudarmo (2004) shows that while the intention of decentralization was to give opportunities to local population it became clear that the local government rushed to raise income and it was only the local elites who actually benefited from the decentralised arrangement of forest and timber harvesting. Studying how power is allocated to various players in natural resources management in Mali Kasibo (2002) and Kassibo (2004) shows that while some powers are given to local authorities, the state still maintains the dominant role in the management of the environment in spite of the legislative innovations designed to encourage broad popular participation. Similar experiences are noted from Mongolia (Mearns, 2004), Nicaragua (Larson, 2004) and South Africa (Ntsebesa, 2003).

2.4 Discussion

In general, the case studies from both positive and insufficient outcomes shows that decentralization has achieved moderate success in some countries, moderate failures in others and both in many countries. Moreover, most of the outcomes observed from the case studies are often not the outcomes of democratic decentralization but rather hybrids of deconcentration, privatisation, or partial, poorly designed or highly circumscribed decentralization. Though some powers are being transferred in Bolivia, like other cases in this paper, local government decision making, and access to and control of benefits from the forestry and other natural resources, is still limited and circumscribed by government controls. Further, despite elected local authorities, downward accountability remains highly problematic. It is evident from some of the cases presented that the structure of elections does not foster downward accountability. In this case whether outcomes improve the lot of marginal people or reinforce asymmetries of local power relations in favour of the elite, depends on the degree to which authorities are accountable to local constituents.

The decentralization process in Indonesia gives another controversial outcome of decentralization. The rapid transition from strong, authoritarian central government to more decentralized, democratic structures, may lead to a temporary breakdown of nation's natural resource management. In the midst of the crisis of change, the rules of natural resource governance are highly vulnerable to insecurity, particularly where resources are valuable, as in Indonesia, or under common property management, as in Bolivia and other countries. While

local people have benefited to some degree from new access to forest resources, the primary benefits have not gone to those who need it most. The Indonesia case highlights the importance of downward accountability as well as the need for a balance of powers between central and local authorities in decentralization. It highlights the danger of decentralization that happens too fast and with almost no central government oversight, and the dangers of reactionary re-centralization threats that increase insecurity. What was learnt from the previous section is that implementation of decentralization in its true sense is difficult to achieve. It seems what we normally see and say about decentralization is just a relocation of administrative functions away from the central location. This relocation doesn't necessarily involve changing of the locus of decision making, or devolving power. Nevertheless, there is enough evidence to indicate that, under the right circumstances, the theory can hold true: democratic decentralization can improve efficiency, equity, democracy and utilization of natural resources.

It is important to note that whatever the impetus toward decentralization in a given situation, a number of complications can undermine the assumptions of state reformers and conservationists alike about the promise of decentralization in regard to their aims. For one thing, the potential results of any decentralization effort do, understandably, have a lot to do with the breadth of the process itself. As several case studies illustrate, political boundaries often do not correspond to the ecologically determined boundaries of interest for natural resource use or conservation. As the case studies also show, decentralization rarely transfers power as a single package of responsibility, authority, and funding capacity for natural resources management. Instead, the elements of power are usually broken up and transferred in piecemeal.

Also, those who favor placing more responsibility in local hands often assume that local hands are prepared for it. But which local entities can or will take on new responsibilities, and to what end, actually depends on factors largely beyond the control of the reformers themselves. Often it may even prove difficult to predict, from the shape of legislation alone, which groups decentralization will favor to receive and exercise power, and which it will not. Decentralization does not make socioeconomic relations more equitable. In fact, frequently it may give the local elite more power as compared to national entities and enhance the power of the local elite relative to that of less privileged sectors of the population, as some of the cases illustrate. Thus, while we acknowledge difficulties in implementation of an effective decentralization process, it is evident (from theories and some of the presented cases) that decentralization, if well executed may bring effective conservation of natural resources. This can be effectively achieved when the principles discussed in the next section are implemented.

3.0 Implementation of effective of decentralization

3.1 Overview

Many attempts at administrative decentralization and devolution exhibit a common pattern in which the “periphery” is expected to implement objectives set at a central level (Fisher, 2000). Fisher notes that very often there is a discrepancy between the responsibilities people are given and the rights and power to act on their responsibilities. Unfortunately, devolution of responsibilities is rarely accompanied by devolution of authority. Examples given from Fisher (2000) includes the situation where forest staffs are given the responsibility to encourage local people to participate in forest development activities, for which there is a budget, but do not have the authority to make agreement about that budget. Agreements made (in good faith) by the field staff are often reversed by the senior officials from the centre. The question at this point is to what extent and under what conditions is true decentralization possible? We answer this question by saying that effective decentralization can only be achieved when conditions described in our analytical framework are achieved through subsidiarity, empowerment, pluralism and building of social capital maintained throughout the decentralization process.

3.2 Subsidiarity

Subsidiarity is the principle that decisions should be made at the lowest possible level where competencies exist. It aims for the effective implementation of tasks within a given policy and a hierarchical level, which minimizes costs and maximizes social well-being (Anderson, 2000). Using forest resources Babin and Bertrand (1998) cite two examples of the concrete use of the concept of subsidiarity in forest management. One is the development of "rural wood-energy markets" in Niger. The Government of Niger developed a framework that confers extensive local autonomy to local populations on the basis of a contract negotiated between the state and a local management structure. The process does not impose technical solutions, but promotes the emergence of possible solutions and self-organization. It does not assume that the central level has all the answers, technical or otherwise, but assumes that solutions will emerge as challenges are encountered. In their words "the state plans and manages forest resources at the national and regional levels and leaves local management to the local population". Some results of this process include 150,000 ha of forest under management, appropriate quotas and harvesting techniques, high tax collection rates, increased incomes for local populations, and increased levels of social investments.

It is important to note that the principle of subsidiarity can be implemented at various levels as indicated in figure 2. Figure 2 shows that the transfer of authority can go to lower level of the government (deconcentration or decentralization) or to non-governmental institutions (user groups or private firms (Dorings, 1997). The lower level of authority presented in figure 2 involves various actors including government bureaucracies, local government bodies, the private sector, as well as user groups. The important point to note here is that subsidiarity involves transfer of both decision making and payment of responsibility to lower level of government. Although still within the government it provides a stronger role for local bodies, which are presumed to have greater accountability to the local populace including both users of the resources and others who live in the area.

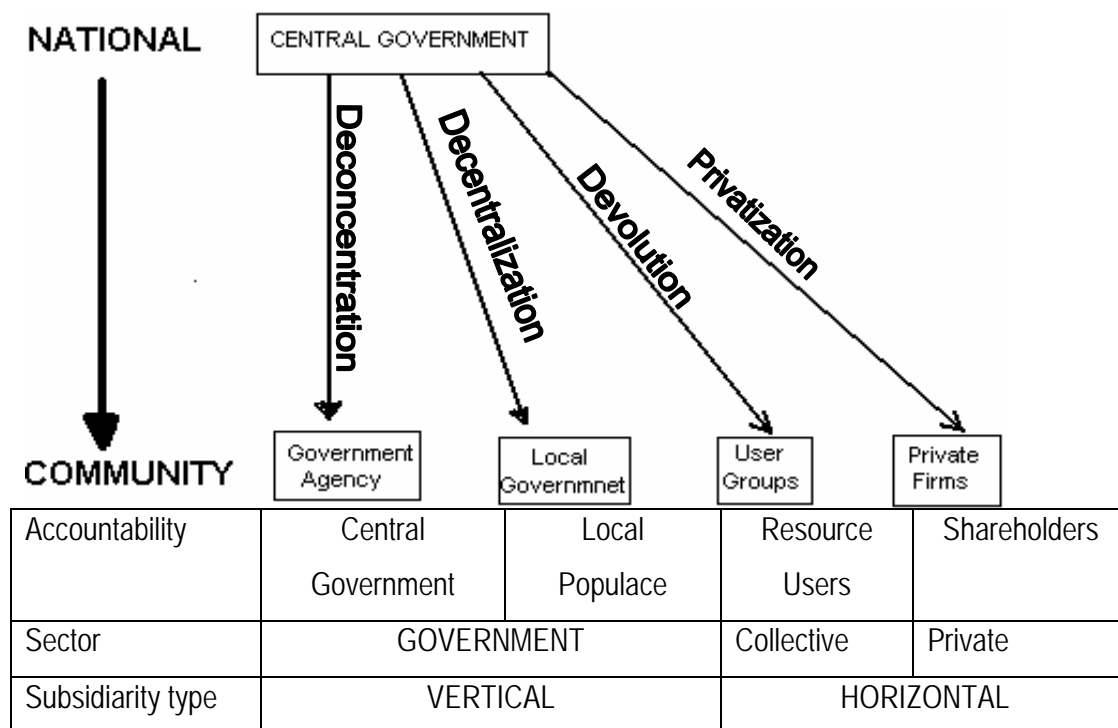


Figure 2: Levels of transfer of authority from the central government as described by Doring, 1997]

It is this kind of power and responsibility sharing that results into a range of natural resources management regimes including Community Based Natural Resources Management (CBNRM) and Joint or Co-Management. Community Based Natural Resources Management happens when control over resources is transferred more or less completely to local populace while Co-Management or Joint Management happens when the state retains a large role in the resource management in conjunction with the expanded role of users. This is particularly important in cases where conservation is for both local and national interest.

The devolution presented here involves the transfer of rights and responsibility to user groups at local level. However, the user groups are accountable to their membership, usually those who depend on the resources but do not represent others in the local community or society at large (Ribot, 1999). Likewise privatization involves transfer of power to individual or firms, who are accountable to shareholders and NGOs who are accountable to their donors (Uphoff, 1998). While devolution and privatization shows horizontal accountability, the prospects for local populace/users under decentralization are high first; because local populace often has intimate knowledge of the resource. This is especially important where the resource is highly variable over space and time. By living and working in the area, local populace may also have a comparative advantage over government agents in monitoring resource use and rule compliance. Furthermore, because their livelihoods depend on the resource local populaces are often assumed to have the greatest incentives to maintain the resource base over time. With growing pressures to use resources more efficiently, equitably, and sustainably, optimism that local populace may be able to manage the resources more effectively than government agencies forms the basis for many programs that attempt to create or recreate local common property management regimes (World Bank 1996). However, the role of government in partnership with the local populace remains to be fundamental in defining policies and protecting both local and national interests. Given this partnership, it is important that the local partners are empowered to take actions and implement effective natural resources utilization and conservation strategies. Other important step as described in the next section includes use of pluralistic approach and building of social capital among various local actors.

3.3 Empowerment

Empowerment is an important outcome of community development (Labonte, 1996). Empowerment has been defined in the literature in two ways: individual empowerment and community empowerment (Arai, 1995). Individual empowerment refers to benefits individuals attain from being involved in a community development or other similar process. As individuals become involved, they gain invaluable personal skills. Individuals have the ability to tap into potential they never knew existed within them. They acquire self confidence and self esteem. They acquire a variety of important leadership skills such as organizing and leading groups, problem solving, and decision making (Lord, 1994; Lord & Hutchison, 1993). Community empowerment, on the other hand, refers to broader benefits to the overall community. The community development process attempts to instill a growing sense of community awareness in individuals, which ultimately carries over into the enhancement of community life (Edginton et al., 1989). Individuals develop a sense of caring for their community and are therefore more motivated to be involved in their community and to have an impact on it.

There is a greater sense of interdependence, cohesion and cooperation among members of the empowered community (Arai, 1995;

However, the notion of empowerment is problematic by the inherent character of the powerful to prevent the powerless to share or to have their own power. Thus dependence on power sharing and the good will and altruism of the powerful (either in government or in the private sector) is a highly risky and unpredictable affair for the less powerful. In most instances, local communities and user groups will have to be organized (to demand power) before power is shared (Anderson, 2000). They have to be organized to take it - otherwise they are condemned to wait for a few altruistic people to come along. To paraphrase Bratton (in Robinson 1996) once the question was "how can development and government agencies reach the poor majority?" - the participation question. Now it is more likely to be "how can the poor majority be enabled to influence meaningfully public policies and choose those who will implement them?" - the empowerment question. It is only when those in the "periphery" are fully empowered that the real decentralization will take place.

3.4 Pluralism and building of social capital

Successful decentralization often implies new and more open and equitable relationships between a range of groups and organizations - community, government, private sector, NGO, etc. - at the local level. As Fiszbein (1997) states, "After all decentralization means that certain functions previously performed by national bureaucracies will be performed by a given combination of public and private agents at the local level". This combination means that multiple and, at times, conflicting interests are in play. Decentralization implies an emerging pluralistic situation grounded in the need to ensure that several decision-making powers should find expressions thus creating a series of checks and balances between groups (Anderson, 2000). As applied to the analysis of society, it asserts that experiences differ as well as opinions, behavior and reactions. It usually refers to the existence of a number of social groups who coalesce around certain apparently common traits or experiences.

However, pluralism needs to be considered along with enfacement of the social capital and capacity building among various actors in the decentralization process. It is important to note that social capital is often seen in vague and ambiguous terms and often remains as a secondary consideration for many involved in decentralized resource management (Harriss and de Renzon, 1997). Harriss and de Renzon (1997) distinguish an array of different types of social capital including family and kinship connections, wider social networks or associational life, cross sectorial linkages, political capital, institutional and policy frameworks and social norms and values. The concept of social capital may be of particular relevance to the decentralization

debate. In an important study, Putman et al., (1993) shows how the differences in existing social capital (meaning norms of reciprocity, networks, and trust) impact and condition the success of decentralization efforts.

To illustrate this Harriss and de Renzon, (1997) gives an example of the situation in the farming community where one farmer's rice is ready for harvest today and another's will be ready tomorrow. The second farmer does not help the first because s/he is not sure that the other will help him/her the next day. Both farmers lose in real economic terms because of the lack of "norms, trust, and reciprocity networks that facilitate mutually beneficial cooperation in a community" (Harriss and de Renzon, 1997). Thus building of a strong capital in natural resource management is of necessity. A study of social capital in Tanzania (Narayan and Pritchett, 1997) revealed that higher village social capital is associated with higher levels of individuals' incomes even after controlling for household education, physical assets and village characteristics. Thus, building of social capital and empowerment are important entry points for implementation of decentralization in natural resource management.

4. Conclusion

It is evident from the theoretical background presented from this work that decentralization have the potential for not only utilization but also sustainable conservation and management of natural resources. However, the implementation of effective decentralization is still a challenge given the realities that there are The fact that most of the outcomes of decentralization are just hybrids of deconcentration, privatisation, or partial, poorly designed or highly circumscribed decentralization, shows that there is a need to rethink the way we design and implement our decentralization strategies. Rethinking our strategies may go hand in hand with employment of subsidiarity principles, building local capacity and empowerment of local partners.

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