

Conceptualizing Decentralization: Reflecting on some Existing Literature

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ABSTRACT

Decentralization has been advocated by development partners and agencies as well as civil societies in both developed and developing nations as an essential mechanism for broadening citizen participation and improving local governance. Its aim is the enhancement of the socio-economic conditions of the citizens to facilitate poverty reduction. Indeed, the resurgence of decentralization has become a momentous dimension of political, fiscal and administrative reforms in many developing countries in recent times due to globalization and progressive improvement in technology. This appears to justify the unmatched attention given to decentralization as a form of government by scholars and organizations. The apparently unending debate over the concept is a demonstration of the fact that caution ought to be taken in terms of the appreciation of decentralization so as to avoid confusion. This paper sought to contribute to the debates on decentralization through an analysis of some the existing literature in order to help situate the concept into its proper perspective.

1. Introduction

The aim of every development policy is the improvement of the well-being of the people. Indeed, the outcome of development is not simply growth in the economic sense but is strongly related to the notion of quality of life. In support of this assertion, the UNDP (2002) submits that development is a dynamic process which empowers people and promotes important changes in their lives. However, for development to occur, it requires an educated population, physical, financial resources and viable programs and policies. In pursuance of this, governments, all over the world, have initiated several approaches aimed at adding meaning to the socio-economic well-being of their peoples. One typical approach is the adoption of decentralization which has been touted as commanding a better alternative than centralization. Indeed, in recent times, decentralization of government functions has been declared the newest, most current and dramatic fashion within social arena and political sciences (Campbell, 2001; Conyers, 1983). This wave of decentralization, as Diamond (1999) indicates, has been provoked by a variety of pressures including urbanization, democratic transition, shifts in international donors and societal demands. In particular, the international community and donors have identified decentralization as a viable tool to consolidate democracy (Grindle, 2007; Lederach, 1997; Manor, 2011).

In this regard, the need for bringing governance to the level of the local people as has been the core issue of decentralisation became compelling (Diamond, 1999; Government of Tanzania, 2009; Wood, 2000). Decentralization, as a form of government, has assumed a multi-dimensional popularity the world over within the last two decades. Various governments in both developed and developing countries have made unrestrained efforts at reforming and strengthening local government systems (Dillinger, 1994; Manor, 1999). Given the uncompromising relevance of decentralization, many authors and scholars have written a number of articles and also expressed varying views, ideas and positions regarding the concept. Mention could be made of scholars including Agrawal, Grindle, Manor, Ribot, and Smith, as well as organizations such as the UNDP, World Bank and UN that have posited their understanding of the concept, decentralization. For instance, Agrawal and Ribot (2000) observe that with decentralized local government, the accountability of power-holding actors to their constituents is important indices as this broadens popular participation. The diversity in conceptualizations is attributed to the different schools of

thoughts and angles from which scholars and researchers tend to look at the concept. Suffice to note that a variety in conceptions in itself does not present problems to the concept, but rather suggests that a great care ought to be taken in order to avoid generating too many meanings or too few (Lakoff, 1987). The essence, without doubt, shows that either extreme will produce conceptual jumble and causal uncertainty, in particular when researchers tend to delimit the meanings and indicators to accord with their individual belief systems. This is very problematic when the researchers' beliefs lead them to associate the concept with normative values, as in the case of the generally positive value associated with decentralization. This paper seeks to help bring to the fore a clearer perspective of the conceptual intentions of decentralization; discuss the forms and examines the typologies of authority of the decentralized local government, with foci on the variations and linkages amongst the views of some theorists and authors. For me, the need to clearly distinguish between and amongst the different types of decentralization becomes even more compelling due to the different features, policy implications, and conditions for viability and success of each of them.

2. CONCEPTUALIZING DECENTRALIZATION

Decentralization as a concept defies a single definition. This is ascribed to the divergent understanding and contexts within which the concept is conceived. However, to be able to better envision what decentralization means, how best it can be planned and implemented there is the need to understand the concept. Manor (1999) concedes that the conceptual relevance of decentralization in development discourse cannot be over-emphasized. In his attempt to deepen the discussion on the importance of decentralization, Manor (1999) adds that decentralization is seen in an amazing diversity in developing and transition countries, by solvent and insolvent regimes, by democracies (both mature and emergent), and autocracies, by regimes making transition to democracy and by others seeking to avoid that transition, by regimes with various colonial inheritances and by those with none. Its manifestations and thriving are evident in nations where civil society is strong. Its appeal is inviting to people of the left, the center and the right and to groups which disagree with other on a number of other issues (Manor, 1999). In the views of Rondinelli (1981), decentralization refers to the transfer of authority to plan, make decisions, as well as manage public functions from a higher level of government to any individual, organization or an agency at a lower level. Transfer of authority as used by Mawhood (1983), means the sharing of part of governmental power by a central ruling group with other groups, each having authority within a specific area of the state. In terms of analysis, what is common to the above definitions of decentralization are the fundamental areas in the decentralization process-power, authority and responsibility, which start from the centre and are then diffuse to the periphery. However, what in my view appears short of the positions of Rondinelli (1981) and Mawhood (1983) on the concept of decentralization lies in their apparent failure to clearly define what constitutes the transfer. Indeed, I believe that in order to help bring clarity to the concept, the idea of transfer as postulated by Rondinelli (1981) and Mawhood (1983) is defined so practitioners could easily tell what does not constitute decentralization.

Unlike Rondinelli (1981) and Mawhood (1983), Cheema (1983) argues that the basics of decentralization is the transfer of authority for decision making, planning, management or resource allocation from the central government to the local government. Indeed, Cheema's (1983) conceptualization of decentralization from the viewpoint of transfer appears clearer than that of Rondinelli (1981) and Mawhood (1983). What is more, Cheema (1983) strengthens the discussion by listing field units, districts administrative units, local government, regional or functional authorities, and other semi-autonomous public and private authorities as part of the periphery. Despite the seeming clarity Cheema (1983) brings to the concept, he also appears to have failed to situate the discussion within the issue of accountability which forms an integral component of decentralization. For me, any definition of decentralization that does not clearly make provision for the issue of accountability is inadequate in terms of its intellectual anchor. In a study conducted by Grindle (2007), for example, it was found that the issue of accountability becomes crucially important when people can elect their local government officials they can be held more directly accountable for their actions or inactions. However, I find it very difficult to agree with Grindle's

(2007) position on accountability in decentralization since it (accountability) only tends to address political decentralization as seen in electing one's own leaders. On their part, Agrawal and Ribot (2000) observe that with decentralization, the accountability of power-holding actors to their constituents is an important index as this broadens popular participation. Agrawal and Ribot (1999) further define decentralization as an action by which the central government officially cedes power to actors and institutions at lower levels in a political-administrative and territorial hierarchy. The usefulness in their position lies in their belief that actions require the creation of a realm of decision-making in which a variety of lower-level actors exercise some level of autonomy. Again, it is clear to indicate that, as a concept, decentralization does not merely increase resource use, efficiency, promote equity but also help to ensure greater participation and accountability of the local government to local actors and poverty reduction. However, it should be stressed that despite the benefits of decentralization, as envisaged by Agrawal and Ribot (1999), its usefulness may not receive a universal recognition across nations. For instance, in their review of decentralization within the education sector in Chile, Winkler and Rounds (1996) concluded that although there was an improvement in efficiency of educational provision, the country experienced decline in score on cognitive tests. What is more, using data from 140 countries, Khaleghian (2003) found that while decentralization improved the coverage of immunization in low income countries, opposite results were obtained for middle income countries.

Decentralization is about "reversing the concentration of administration at a single center and conferring powers on local government" (Smith, 1985:1). This implies that decentralization ought to be seen as an act through which central government formally cedes powers to actors and institutions at lower levels in a political, administrative and territorial hierarchy. This theorizing of decentralization has been supported by other scholars including Ribot (2002) and Gibson (2005) who see decentralization as a political problem that represents, in Latin America for example, a stark departure from centuries of centralism but which does not appear to have brought sufficient hope to the people. Ribot (2002) further identifies some objectives of decentralization policy which include consolidating national unity, and central power by shedding risks and burdens. The strength of Ribot's (2002) appreciation of decentralization, in my considered view, lies in his admission that the concept also deals with increasing local participation and local democracy as well as improved efficiency and equity of local service delivery. Suffice to posit that the success of decentralization is largely dependent upon the existence of a civic cultural tradition, informal civic institutions such as solidarity, increasing local participation, local democracy and the requisite human resource capacity at the local level (Ayee, 2000; Odoom, Kyeremeh and Opoku, 2014; Ribot, 2004).

According to Crook and Sverrisson (2001), successful decentralization lies in centre-local ability of the central government to ensure that substantial resources allocated to local authorities are judiciously used in providing development services that improve the lives of the local people. Inherent in Crook and Sverrisson's (2001) conception of decentralization are issues such as respect for local autonomy, establishment of accountability mechanism through enhanced participation which are critical to practitioners. However, I submit that Crook and Sverrisson (2001) also appear to have overlooked the requisite human resource capacity that ought to accompany the allocation. Indeed, human resource capacity at the local level is one crucial determinant of the success of decentralization. The rest is allocation of substantial amounts of financial resources. Though Jutting, Kauffmann, McDonnel, Osterrieder, Pinaud and Wegner (2004) support the above views, they bemoan governments must not largely rely on external forces for the success of decentralization. They believe that strong donor support does not guarantee the success of decentralization in terms of poverty eradication. In his study, Opoku (2014) found that most district assemblies in Ghana are not able to gain financial independence mainly because of their inability to internally generate substantial revenue. This, I find it particularly problematic given the potential danger such situations have for the practical intention of decentralization. It is little surprise when Opoku (2014) further cautioned that even though under decentralization the central

government assists local authorities, local actors should not be seen over-depending on central government finance.

The UNDP (2005) sees decentralisation as the systematic and harmonious interrelationship resulting from the balancing of power and responsibilities between central governments and other levels of government and non-governmental actors, and the capacity of local bodies to carry out their decentralized responsibilities using participatory mechanisms. The above definition seems to have broadened the scope of the concept of decentralization. What is even more noticeable in the UNDP's (2005) definition is the assertion that decentralization is a means for providing more open, responsive, and effective local government for ensuring community development. However, the apparent weakness in the UNDP's conception lies in its failure to consider the issue of increased autonomy which, according to Ahwoi (2006), is a vital element in any effective decentralized government system. Although Gyabaah (2006) does not appear to offer a rebuttal to Ahwoi's (2006) position, he maintains that the issue of autonomy which does not appear strongly in Ribot (2002) and UNDP's (2005) conception of decentralization is a critical ingredient in any effective decentralization. Gyabaah (2006) adds that the effectiveness of decentralization must be appreciated in terms of the response it has to people's needs and priorities; thereby meeting a variety of social, economic and political needs and expectations. Beyond this, Ahwoi (2006) defines decentralization as the transfer of functions, powers, means, resources, skills and competence to lower levels of governance, usually structures of local government. Gyabaah (2006) agrees with Ahwoi (2006) that the functions transferred ought to be accompanied by relevant skills and competencies and the needed autonomy.

Decentralization is the spread of power away from the centre to local branches of the central government (Koranteng, 2006). Koranteng indicates further that in decentralization, planning and decision-making process moves from the control by powerful bureaucrats and decision-makers at the centre to ordinary people at the local level. To suggest that decentralization means spreading of power from the centre to local branches (Koranteng, 2006) without regard to how far the spread is done also makes it difficult to fully clutch the concept. I believe there should be a limit to the spread as opined by Koranteng (2006). In Ghana for instance, the spread of power is extended up to the unit committee level, so one could clearly tell to what extent power can be transferred under decentralization in the country. Beyond this, the success of the powers and functions that are spread to local branches of government, as Tetteh (2006) and Odoom, et al. (2014) submit, will depend on the capacity of the local authorities. Tetteh (2006) indicates further that if LGs and private organisations are to carry out decentralised functions effectively, they must have a sufficient level of revenues—either raised locally or transferred from the central government as well as the requisite human resource capacity that better understand the authority they have to make decisions about expenditures. An important issue regarding representation and accountability in public service delivery is the choice between centralized and decentralized provision (Treisman, 2002).

A number of theoretical reasons explain why provision may differ in decentralized systems of development services. The first is the possibility of tailoring policies more effectively to heterogeneous populations and improving accountability (Ayee, 2000; Treisman, 2002). However, decentralized government may be less able to reap economies of scale and internalize spillovers across jurisdictions due to poor capacities (including human) (Gyabaah, 2006). Whether decentralization is a good idea from a theoretical point of view, as I agree with Falleti (2004) and Ahwoi (2010), will depend upon the nature of the service and the capacity of personnel entrusted with the provision of service. Secondly, local conditions such as availability of resources are also critical for the sustenance of decentralization. I share in the sentiments expressed by Bardhan (2000, 2006) that the reality especially in most parts of Africa is that local governments are often at the mercy of local power elites, and this is an additional factor in evaluating the costs and benefits of decentralization in these settings. In their study in Philippines and Uganda, Azfar et al. (2000) concluded that although local governments do appear to be aware of local

preferences, their response is often laughable as they are hamstrung by procedural, financing and governance constraints.

Even though they agree with Ribot's (2004) assertion, Falleti (2004) and Atakora (2006) believe that decentralization projects and programs should support not only the participation of the citizenry but also reorganisation of financial, administrative, and political service delivery systems to bring about quality changes in the lives of the local people. I support Falleti (2004) and Ahwoi (2010) and Tetteh's (2006) assertion that the virtues of decentralization including democracy, popular participation, responsiveness, accountability and equity have generated the belief that decentralization will lead to greater improvement in the living standard of the people especially, the rural poor. This is so since the poor are clutched in difficult conditions under the centralized government through political exclusion and poor enjoyment of public goods and services. My point of departure is on the obvious silence of scholars regarding how meaningful democracy, popular participation, responsiveness, accountability and equity have been addressed under decentralization. For me these concepts, in the sense of decentralization, seek to only offer greater political participation to ordinary citizens whose voice is more likely to increase with commitment, relevance and effectiveness of government's policies and programs. Such tendencies only make decentralization as a tool for poverty reduction become a mere virtue of necessity, not a policy backed by deliberate actions. Thirdly, the basis of responsiveness is the authorities' ability to fulfill their own promises, rather than inflating expectations of constituents (Smith, 1985). Local government responsiveness demands initiative and responsibility for the policy implementation to be conducive to the needs of citizens (Manor, 1999). The notion is that local councils must quickly implement projects according to what they have been entrusted to do (Bardhan, 2000; Grindle, 2011).

Decentralization as a process of state reform is made up of a set of public policies that transfer responsibilities, resources, or authority from higher to lower levels of government in the context of a specific type of state (Bardhan, 2006; Mensah and Kendie, 2008). Four important observations can be made in respect of this definition. First, decentralization is viewed as a process of public policy reforms and not as a description of the state of being the political or fiscal systems at a point in time. Second, lower levels of government are the recipients of the transferred responsibilities, resources, or authority. Third, because decentralization is a process of state reform, a transition to a different type of state inevitably implies the beginning of a new decentralization sequence (Mensah and Kendie, 2008; Sharpe, 1981; Stanton, 2009). In essence, the contents and intentions of decentralization policies and their interaction with the broader political and economic systems are greatly determined by the type of state they seek to reform. Thus, a proper analysis of decentralization policies across countries requires a comparison of policies taking place within the same type of state. The policies and programs must help empower local governance structures with appropriate autonomy to bring public administration closer to the people and also to ensure proper accountability to the citizenry (Odoom, Kyeremeh and Opoku, 2014). More importantly, I agree with Martinez-Vazquez (2011) that decentralization does not necessarily constitute erosion of central control or of powers over issues and processes with national dimensions. Rather, it has political, administrative, and fiscal dimensions that are replicated virtually absolutely in different vertical spheres (i.e., regional and local).

2.1 Forming a Typology of Decentralization

In an attempt to deepen the discussion, Asante (2000) submits that the relevance of decentralization relies on the degree to which local actors and intended beneficiaries of development programs and policies actively participate in the development decision making process. Asante (2000) further asserts that the dividends of decentralized approach to development include access to basic human needs (food, shelter, health care, education, safe water, etc) and equitable distribution of goods and services. In essence, effective decentralization process is crucial on the agenda of governments. Falleti (2004, 2005) and Tetteh (2006) contended that the relevance of decentralization finds expression in the transfers of administrative, fiscal and political responsibilities to the local governments. Falleti (2004, 2005) attempts to further show

the different facets of decentralization with varying characteristics, policy implications, and conditions for success. This includes political, administrative, and fiscal decentralization. Grindle, as cited in Stanton (2009), summarizes decentralization mainly as the assignment of specific political, administrative and fiscal responsibilities to lower levels of government, and in some instances to the private sector. Cohen and Peterson (1999) also identify four main dimensions of decentralization namely, political; spatial; market; and administrative decentralization. However, in the views of Stanton (2009), there is no clear distinction between fiscal decentralization and Cohen and Peterson's (1999) market decentralization. Even though he supports Ayee's (2000) assertion, Tetey (2006) believes that decentralization policies must engender effective service delivery systems to bring about quality changes in the lives of the people. Tetey (2006) further agrees with scholars such as Grindle and Falleti as regards the types of decentralization. Nevertheless, in terms of analysis, what appears short of Grindle and Tetey's argument, as I agree with Manor (2011) and Ahwoi (2010), is the fact that there is clearly an overlap in defining any of these forms and types of decentralization and that precisions in definition are not as uncompromisingly important as the need for a comprehensive approach for understanding and actualizing the gains of decentralization.

2.1.1 Political Decentralization

Besley and Coate (2003) look at the political decentralization from the perspective of representation in a world of multi-issue political competition. They reflect on what happens when there is direct election of officials who have responsibility for specific policies compared with such officials being chosen by an elected representative. According to Ahwoi (2006) and Stanton (2009), political decentralization often begins with establishing democratic local government elections and distributing public policy-making power and the authority to make independent decisions both vertically (between levels of government and citizens) and horizontally (within a level of government). Stanton (2009) explains further that sometimes political decentralization is referred to as democratic decentralization since it offers local authorities to be elected. Thus, making the authorities answerable to their local constituencies, with the authority to pass by-laws in their sphere of jurisdiction. The main contention is that direct accountability of officials increases the salience of that policy dimension compared with other issues as determined in general elections. This will tend to produce policy outcomes closer to the majority preferred outcome. In view of this, political decentralization ought to be allowed to fully operate where the local people will directly elect their officials at the local level without any interference from the central government as pertains in most developing nations.

Dahal et al. (2002) see political decentralization as the "transfer of decision-making authority to previously underrepresented or marginal group". These underrepresented or marginal groups are usually include the poor, illiterates, vulnerable groups like women and minority ethnic groups who are mostly at local level. Political decentralization produces the power and capacities of subnational politicians and public officials for the negotiations over the fiscal and then administrative decentralization. This is a set of constitutional amendments and electoral reforms designed to open new-or activate existing but dormant or ineffective-spaces for the representation of sub-national politics. Policies of political decentralization are designed to devolve political authority or electoral capacities to sub-national actors. Clear cases of this type of reforms are the popular election of mayors and governors who in previous constitutional periods were appointed, the creation of sub-national legislative assemblies, or constitutional reforms that strengthen the political autonomy of sub-national governments. However, in places such as Ghana, political autonomy at the local level has not been allowed to fully operate as no efforts have been made to enable the local people elect their own District, Municipal and Metropolitan Chief Executives. This is, indeed, an affront to the very intention of political decentralization.

Despite the above weakness inherent in political decentralization, Heller (2001) concedes that many scholars consider political decentralization as a crucial condition to institute decentralization extensively. These scholars, as Heller (2001) asserts, expect that political decentralization precedes administrative as

well as fiscal decentralization in order to grant local representatives input into formalizing the very embodiment of subsequent administrative and fiscal decentralization processes. Heller (2001) opines further that without political decentralization there can be no administrative or fiscal decentralization. The views expressed by Heller (2001) appear to have received some commendation by Falleti (2004, 2005). Blair (2000) refers to political decentralization as a meaningful authority devolved to local units of governance that are accessible and accountable to local citizenry, who enjoy full political rights and liberty. This form of decentralization is differentiated from the vast majority of earlier efforts at decentralization which were largely initiatives in public administration without any serious democratic component. Political decentralization usually transfers responsibilities for services to municipalities and districts that elect their own mayors and councils, raise their own revenues, and have independent authority to make investment decisions (Litvack et.al., 1998).

The virtues of political decentralization are that it can invigorate political participation and enhance accountability and transparency on the part of governing bodies by expanding information flows, regular interactions and supporting the control of corruption. For instance, empirical evidence from India, Bangladesh, Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana showed that political decentralization led to enhanced transparency and reduced incidence of corruption (Crook and Manor, 2000). Crook and Manor (2000) concluded from their study that decentralization reduces grand theft but increases petty corruption in the short run but in the long run, both may go down. Indeed, it has been found that political decentralization enables the citizens to curb the discretionary powers of elected officials because it comes with greater competition (Dafflon and Madies, 2009). This competition is in two forms: first the mobility of individuals and economic activities between local government units, and second, the possibility for voters to compare the performance of their elected officials with the performances of elected officials in neighboring local governments (yardstick competition). Although these specifications of political decentralization may be valid in both theoretical and legal perspectives, this is not what is observed in many developing countries. Even where most of these theoretical and legal conditions are met, central governments in most African countries for instance, have many ways, whether formal or informal to make local governments act consistently with national development policies. In Africa, often devolving responsibilities and functions to the local government is considered as shedding off responsibilities from the center often as a result of mounting demands from the public. Manor (1999) points out that many centralized regimes had to engage in some form of decentralization as a mere response to the public's loss of confidence in their governments. This for me exposes the level of commitment leaders pay to the concept.

2.1.2 Administrative Decentralization

Administrative decentralization is defined as “the transfer of responsibility of planning, management, and the raising and allocation of resources from the central government and its agencies to field units of government agencies, subordinate units or levels of government, semi-autonomous public authorities or public corporations, area wide, regional or functional authorities, or non-governmental, private or voluntary organizations” (Rondinelli and Nellis, 1986). Administrative decentralization is primarily concerned with the purposeful tasks of decentralization. It addresses the assignment of service delivery powers and functions across levels of government and clearly determining where responsibility is situated (Ahwoi, 2006; Ayee 1997; Stanton, 2009). Stanton (2009) explains further that the main focus of administrative decentralization is the transfer of central authority to local governments and centers on key management functions. For example, it can assign to local governments the authority to hire and fire local staff without the prior approval of central government. The amount of administrative decentralization ranges in a continuum across systems. It starts from those characterized by a low degree of autonomy, to those with a high degree of autonomy. According to Litvack et al. (1998), the main motivation behind administrative decentralization is how political institutions, once determined, turn policy decisions into allocative (and distributive) outcomes through fiscal and regulatory actions. Administrative decentralization has generally typified using three terms--deconcentration, delegation, and devolution (Bardhan, 2000; Rondinelli, 1990).

The apparent difficulty with the concept of administrative decentralization is that the local unit sometimes tends to be only accountable to the central government in so long as the central government can impose its will by threatening to withhold resources or responsibility from the local unit. The distinction among these categories of administrative decentralization is the relationship between the central government and the entity that receives power and resources. The current approach to decentralization sees these categories as nothing more than points along a continuum of administrative autonomy. Administration decentralization therefore underlines state control over territorial administration and seeks to encourage division of labor. In the Ghanaian context however, the administrative autonomy for local authorities to take charge of managing personnel at the local level is yet to become practically relevant since they remain employees of a central ministry, but are supposed to be accountable to locally elected government officials. This phenomenon in Ghana is very much frustrating and does not give a clear way out to sustain the ever increasing relevance of decentralization. In his study, Aye (1997) finds that local government officials generally are quite frustrated with their lack of effective authority over the civil service personnel employed centrally. This approach may be seen as an attempt to maintain the influence of the center over the periphery. However, the continuing holding on of power by the central authorities seem to be informed by the dangers of decentralization including a lack of local capacity causing macro instability (Prud'homme, 1995, Tanzi 1995). Others have traced the diversion of funds in decentralized settings (Reinikka and Svensson, 2004) while still others have warned of the dangers of capture by local elites (Bardhan and Mookherjee, 2000). Administratively, deconcentration involves the least amount of autonomy, delegation slightly more, and devolution the most. On the other hand, "delegation" transfers policy responsibility to local governments that are not controlled by the central government but remain accountable to it (Schneider, 2003). The main difference between deconcentration and delegation is that the central government exercises its control through a contractual relation that enforces accountability of local government. This entails a slightly higher level of administrative autonomy for local entities than under deconcentration (Ribot, 2002; Schneider, 2003). It should be pointed out that if revenues are transferred from the center to take care of the costs of the administration and delivery of social services, administrative decentralization is funded and coincides with a fiscal decentralization measure. On the other hand, if sub-national governments bear these costs with their own pre-existing revenues, administrative decentralization is not funded.

2.1.3 Fiscal Decentralization

Fiscal decentralization entails the financial aspects of devolution to regional and local governments. It allows lower levels of government to raise and/or spend an increasing share of the state budget. Theoretically, fiscal decentralization shows that democratic governments are the principal hope to preserve liberties and efficiency and value in governance in an efficient way (Faquet, 1997). Empirically, fiscal decentralization has been very useful in many countries. For instance, in Argentina, Habibi et al. (2003) found that fiscal decentralization had a significant impact on decreasing infant mortality. Robalino, Picazo, and Voetberg (2001) similarly found that countries where local governments manage a higher share of public expenditures tended to have lower mortality rates. It has also been observed by Khaleghian (2003) that expenditure decentralization was positively related to improved health outcomes in low- and middle-income countries. Garman, Haggard, and Willis (2001) and Manor (1999) identify two key issues of fiscal decentralization. The first is the division of spending responsibilities and revenue sources between levels of government. The second deals with the amount of discretion given to regional and local governments to determine their expenditures and revenues. It focuses on the amount of government activity that local governments undertake, and revenues focus on the quantity of resources that pass through them (Bazaanah, 2012; Schneider, 2003). The policies of fiscal decentralization are designed to increase the revenues or fiscal autonomy of sub-national governments. These policies can assume different institutional forms such as an increase of transfers from the central government, the creation of new sub-national taxes, or the delegation of tax authority that was previously national. Central to any system of public finance, these two components comprise the total amount of money that

governments put into or take out of an economy as well as where governments put the money and where they take it from (Ayee, 2000; Schneider, 2003). For me, these combined dimensions have a significant impact on the reality of decentralization in its broader political and administrative sense. I believe that the best indicator of fiscal decentralization is the share of subnational expenditures and revenues and their utility value within a clearly defined locality.

The criteria for deciding on financial responsibilities relate to the level of government best suited to deliver services using the subsidiarity principle. But the assignment of revenue sources is a decision on which level of government has comparative advantage in mobilizing the identified revenue source (Ahwoi, 2010; UNDP, 2002). Intergovernmental fiscal transfers then have to deal with any mismatch between expenditure assignments and tax assignments. These transfers are therefore a mechanism for the equalization of the imbalances between expenditure responsibilities and revenue source assignments (Boschmann, 2009; Tettey, 2006). A major difference between the nature and scale of decentralization is the diversity of local budget responsibility for the social sector in the context of financial self-sufficiency at the LGs. On their part, Faquet (2004) and Boschmann (2009) state that major social sector responsibilities depend on state grants or tax shares because of the limited capacity of revenues and the degree of geographical equality expected in accessing public goods and services. Atakora (2006) agrees with Faquet (2004) that in order to understand how revenues are used in providing goods and services for the local people there is the need for an examination of the theory of public finance. Strumpf et al. (1999) stated that local government health planners allocated declining proportions of their budgets to public service activities. Also in their study, Schwartz, Guilkey, and Racelis (2002) concluded that local public health expenditures increased after decentralization but, over time, local governments decreased the share of revenue allocated to public health.

The Nordic Consulting Group (NCG) and Dege Consult (2007) state that a successful fiscally decentralized system must ensure that all core stakeholders are informed, involved, have ownership and support for a common course. Ahwoi (2010) and Ayee (2000) argue that fiscal decentralization entails expansion of local revenues through property or sales, taxes, intergovernmental transfers from taxes collected by the central government to LGs for general or specific uses, and mobilization of either national or local government resources through loan guarantees. Manor (2008) and Stanton (2009) bemoan that devolving financial authority to lower levels of government shrinks central government's control over public expenditure as this involves the transfer of power to local authorities to make autonomous decisions about revenue collection strategies and expenditures decisions. Stanton (2009) submits that the justification for extensive fiscal autonomy is that local government services would become more efficient if they were paid for by local taxes and fees. However, Stanton (2009) concedes that in practice, such autonomy is atypical, especially in developing or transition countries where central governments tend to determine or control tax rates in the interests of macro-economic stability (Falleti, 2005).

Sharpe, as cited by Kessey (1995: 2), traces the local fiscal problem to the "tendency for central government to retain the bulk of the growth taxes that expand fastest when the economy grows and to the inability of local government to limit its range of responsibilities." Kessey (1995) adds that there is urgent need to encourage local governments to raise local revenues. This is because the advantage in financing local development from below would lie in giving the local actors the opportunity to participate in decision-making and press for accountability from managers of the resources. According to Mattinotti (1981), local fiscal problem could be addressed by allocating to local governments a larger share of the buoyant taxes to local governments, increasing the size of grants to local governments, and give localities greater chance to borrow to finance their activities. In the developing countries, some central governments have enacted laws that compel the state to transfer a sizeable share of the state's total annual revenue to local governments. A clear case in point in Africa, are the Local Authority Transfer Fund (LATF) in Kenya and the District Assemblies Common Fund (DACF) in Ghana. These funds are to enable local

governments to provide services to their citizens. In Ghana, through local revenue generation, local governments are able to raise funds to finance some of their development projects. Also, in places such as Porto Alegre, Brazil, Santos (2005) it has been noted that decentralized participatory budgeting by citizens led to increased access to water and sewage services. Evidence in the Republic of Korea, shows increases in efficiency in decentralized irrigation systems as opposed to inefficient centralized systems in India (Vazquez, 2011; Wade, 1998). Also, in Switzerland, greater subnational fiscal autonomy has led to faster economic growth, and that matching grants from the center reduced growth (Feld et al., 2004; Martínez-Vázquez, 2011).

2.1.4 Market Decentralization

Another dimension of decentralization is the market decentralization (Cohen and Peterson, 1997). This dimension of decentralization aims at reassigning service delivery authority from central government to other institutions (Cohen and Peterson, 1997; Fritzen and Lim, 2006). In the views of Stanton (2009), calls for market decentralization often emanate from international financial institutions including the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. Their calls, it is believed, are for downsizing government, denationalizing state assets and making more use of market-based approaches to service delivery. Thus, the focus of market decentralization is on the creation of conditions and circumstances that allow goods and services to be produced and provided by market mechanisms which are amenable and sensitive to the revealed preferences of individuals. This form has become even more widespread due to recent trends toward economic liberalization, privatization and the demise of command economies. This form of decentralization represents a growing tendency among governments to look beyond the public sector for service delivery. For me, market decentralization entails efforts to transfer substantive control over resource allocation to non-state actors. However, this does not mean that central government transfers its responsibility for service delivery elsewhere; nor does it represent a wholesale of authority delegation.

In terms of privatization, market decentralization may range from leaving the provision of goods and services entirely to the free operation of the market to "public-private partnerships" in which government and the private sector cooperate to provide services or infrastructure. It can also include: allowing private enterprises to perform functions that had previously been monopolized by government; and contracting out the provision or management of public services or facilities to commercial enterprises indeed, there is a wide range of possible ways in which function can be organized and many examples of within public sector and public-private institutional forms, particularly in infrastructure (World Bank, n.d.). Market decentralization in terms of privatization may also entail financing public sector programs through the capital market and allowing private organizations to participate; and transferring responsibility for providing services from the public to the private sector through the divestiture of state-owned enterprises (World Bank, n.d.). In market decentralization, government privatizes or deregulates private functions. A clear case in point is what occurred in places such as New Zealand forest sector. In terms of deregulation, market decentralization helps to reduce the legal constraints on private participation in service provision or allows competition among private suppliers for services that in the past had been provided by the government or by regulated monopolies.

Central government remains the final authority over critical national matters and has the power and, in fact, the responsibility to monitor and oversee decentralized functions. On the contrary, it involves considering how to provide public services where capacity and resources are missing (Cohen and Peterson, 1997; Bruggemans, 2003). A clear case in point is South Africa. In South Africa, there exist a number of examples where basic services are provided by private organizations through arrangements such as public-private partnerships (PPPs) or municipal service partnerships (MSPs). These may bear a resemblance to aspects of market decentralization *per se* - but such service delivery arrangements are largely a result of the changing macro-economic policy position of the ruling party, including its move away from the ANC's initial nationalization policies as reflected in the 1994 Reconstruction and

Development Program (RDP). This approach which favored centralized service delivery, to one which upholds local government self-sufficiency through cost recovery as embodied in the 1996 Growth, Employment and Redistribution Strategy (GEAR), as well as the Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative (ASGI). Notwithstanding the change in macro-economic policy, the national government directive remains that government must deliver as much as possible - and should only look for private sector involvement where and when necessary. Privatization especially is not a popular service delivery option in South Africa. National government has never regarded the delegation of service delivery responsibilities to the private sector as appropriate (Stanton, 2009). Stanton (2009) explains further that transferring ownership is not an option for core municipal services, particularly water, electricity and solid waste collection and disposal. Given the central role that these services play in meeting the material, social and economic needs of the citizenry, it is undesirable that ownership of associated infrastructure and assets is removed from the public sphere.

2.2 Forms of Decentralization

Decentralization takes many forms in terms of applicability and can be put into effect in many ways. Generally, authors list three types namely, deconcentration, delegation, and devolution. Each of these forms of decentralization presents a unique set of central-local relationships. Each dimension assumes a mix of three forms: deconcentration, delegation and devolution (Stanton, 2009).

2.2.1 Deconcentration

Deconcentration is the process whereby the central government disperses responsibilities for certain services to regional branches. It hardly involves the transfer of authority to lower levels of government. Deconcentration does not transform into autonomy or independence of government agencies. Rather it mostly consists of establishing and fielding offices of the central government to assist with providing public services. This takes place when central administrative structures allocate certain functions within specific policy sectors to field-level public servants. This type of transfer of power is to an official appointed by and accountable to central government but not to a local constituents (Stanton, 2009). In the view of Rondinelli (1981), deconcentration is the weakest form of decentralization and is mostly used in unitary states where there is redistribution of decision making authority and financial and management responsibilities among different levels of the central government. It can merely shift responsibilities from central government officials in the capital cities to those working in regions, provinces or districts, or it can create strong field administration or local administrative capacity under the supervision of central government ministries.

As a type of decentralization, the deficiency of deconcentration is further brought to bear on the grounds that it separates state administration from society thereby failing to provide any meaningful role for local actors in the decentralization reform process. What is more, in terms of accountability, the agents of deconcentration are only accountable to actors higher up the hierarchy of control. Given these difficulties, Litvack et al. (1998) argue that deconcentration is unlikely to lead to the potential benefits of decentralization. In a deconcentrated system of governance, field officers are charged with overseeing the implementation of national policies. According to Martinez-Vazquez (2011), deconcentration is only a related concept of decentralization. For instance, many observers believe that Bangladesh is a deconcentrated system, in which local governments are still subject to the control of central authorities, as opposed to a decentralized one, in which local governments have autonomy to set their own priorities and decide how best deliver public services (Martínez-Vázquez, 2011). In submit that deconcentration may exist alongside devolved decentralized units as part of ensuring central government compliance. As such, deconcentration may only constitute an indirect strategy to extend central control and closely supervise and monitor the implementation of national directives. In spite of the fact that deconcentration potentially leads to greater technical efficiency, it lacks the capacity as an intellectual tool aimed at local democratization or increasing public representation and accountability.

2.2.2 Delegation

Delegation refers to handing over of specific decision making authority, that is, the transfer of managerial responsibility for specifically defined functions to public organizations outside the usual bureaucratic structure of central government (e.g. local governments or parastatals). In essence, delegation of authority does not include the powers of decision making (Malo, 1995). It is concerned with the transfer of decision-making and administrative authority for clearly defined tasks from central government to sub-national units of government or semi-autonomous institutions. Compared to deconcentration, delegation allows for far more discretion in decision-making, but sub-national units of government remain first and foremost accountable to central government. Besides, any autonomy in administrative decision-making and policy implementation is limited to certain activities, and remains under central control. In some cases, this type of decentralization is used when central government shifts responsibility of providing goods and services that previously offered to parastatals or public corporations or to publicly regulated private enterprises. Under this type of decentralization, local governments commonly provide certain specific services that are delegated to them by the central government or the next-higher level of government. They therefore become the recipients of delegated powers and resources.

Delegation is another type of decentralization. Rondinelli (1981) sees delegation as a more extensive form of decentralization. It refers to assignment of specific decision making authority, that is, the transfer of managerial responsibility for specifically defined functions to public organizations outside the normal bureaucratic structure of central government (e.g. local governments or parastatals). In other words, delegation is the transfer of responsibility for decision-making and administration of public functions to semi-autonomous organizations not wholly controlled by the central government, but ultimately accountable to it. Usually these organizations have a great deal of discretion in decision-making (Heller, 2001). This implies that delegation of authority does not include the powers of decision making (Heller, 2001; Malo, 1995). The local governments operating under this type of decentralization generally provide certain specific services that are delegated to them by the central government or the next-higher level of government. Thus they become the recipients of delegated powers and resources. Cohen and Peterson (1997) consider deregulation as a type of delegation. It entails the removal of legal controls thereby opening up the opportunity for the private sector to provide goods and services formally held under state monopoly. Cohen and Peterson (1997) assert that “under conditions of reasonably free choice, the provision of some public goods is more economically efficient when a large number of providers offer citizens more options and choices.” The contention is that deregulation engenders competition amongst service providers, which in turn promotes efficiency since citizens have the option to choose their preferred service provider. Deregulation can end inefficient and ineffective states by downsizing bloated, costly and ineffective central public sectors. Competition “promotes administrative accountability through competition, which in turn can promote democratic processes to the extent that non-state institutions are involved in public service provision” (Cohen and Peterson, 1997).

2.2.3 Devolution

A third type of decentralization is known in the literature as devolution. Devolution of power is the spine of decentralization. It occurs in two spatial patterns. First, political authority is delegated when power is devolved through legislative enactment to an area government or allocated between national and area governments by political institutions that create constitutional meaning. Second, bureaucratic authority is a delegation of responsibilities from the headquarters of an organization to the elected representatives at the local levels of government (Smith, 1985). In order to ensure effective local level development, local authorities need to have sufficient and meaningful discretionary powers. Without discretionary power in the hands of local authorities, there is no representation and there is no local government (Heller, 2001; Ribot, 2011). Again, under “devolution,” the central government allows quasi-autonomous local units of government to exercise power and control over the transferred policy. Unlike the other two types of

administrative decentralization, devolution provides the greatest degree of autonomy for the local unit (Ahwoi, 2006; Schneider, 2003). It is a matter of logic that for decentralization to be effective in providing local level development there is the need for better policies and programs designed to empower local governance structures with appropriate autonomy to bring public administration closer to the people and also to ensure proper accountability to the electorates (Mensah and Kendie, 2008). This is a process that is prized to inspire free involvement and contributions of the members of local communities in development services that have beneficial impacts on the people. Under devolution, governments transfer functions and authority for decision-making, finance, and management to quasi-autonomous units of local government with corporate status. Devolution typically transfers responsibilities for services to municipalities that elect their own mayors and councils, generate their own revenues and have independent authority to make investment decisions. In devolved systems, local governments have clear and legally recognized geographical boundaries over which they exercise authority and within which they perform public functions. Ahwoi (2010) agrees with Turner and Hulme (1997) that devolution is often seen as the only true form of decentralization because of its inherent democratic value. The apparent difficulty in Turner and Hulme's (1997) position is their seeming over-concentration on electoral accountability in the whole essence of devolution.

3. CONCLUSIONS

The whole idea of decentralization hinges on key factors including people's participation, accountability, transparency, and fiscal transfers. These factors interconnect and their effects on development cannot simply be measured without an appreciation of their synergy. Decentralization has been criticized in many parts of the world due to its inability to yield the desired dividends. The validity of this critique is expressed especially in those regions of the world where poverty and a dysfunctional democracy are rampant for various reasons. A large part of literature talks about issues of quality of citizens' participation and broader questions of democratic control. The main mode of social organizations in the views of many scholars is not a vertical relationship of authority between selfish individuals and the supra state, but a series of horizontal associations involving groups of individuals who are capable of regulating and expressing themselves as members of a community, rather than as self-promoting and self-centered individuals. The effectiveness of decentralized governance may find expression in some parts of the world where there is enough conditions for activism, accountability, vigilance and participation of citizens. Such conditions will enable civil society groups to assume far greater functions in educating people and, ultimately, people themselves seeking greater accountability from elected members and officials in meeting their collective needs.

A core issue of effectiveness in decentralization is the level of education and awareness of the citizens. The level of education and awareness will generate a remarkable consensus regarding the role and importance of communities and local organizations in making decentralized governance effective. Decentralization can take many different forms and has to be adapted to specific local prevailing conditions, capacities, historical and political realities in practice. For instance, administrative decentralization deals with a set of policies that transfer the administration and delivery of social services such as education, health, social welfare, or housing to sub-national governments. Administrative decentralization may entail the devolution of decision-making authority over these policies, but this is not a necessary condition. The typology of decentralization also presents a better analysis of the relevance and applicability of decentralization to bring about development. For example, delegation is a more extensive form of decentralization which essentially seeks to assign specific decision making authority and defined functions to public organizations outside the normal bureaucratic structure of central government. In delegation, the transfer of responsibility for decision-making and administration of public functions to semi-autonomous organizations creates avenues for accountability but only to the central government. Thus, delegation of authority does not include the powers of decision making. In the views of many scholars, deconcentration involves a bureaucratic, hierarchical relationship; delegation involves a contractual relationship; and devolution involves an arm's-length relationship. The differences among

these relationships in terms of hierarchy, contract, or arm's length-constitute a disorder of factors. The best way to address this disorder is by paying attention to the degree of autonomy granted by the central government. Such an over-simplification though misses some of the conceptual richness of the different relationships, may appear adequate for measuring the continuum of especially administrative decentralization.

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