



Actors of decentralization

Conference paper by Ali Ghannam

Decentralization can be defined as a gradual process of transferring powers from a central government to the grassroots, through elected bodies, in given areas of competence. Decentralization, as a policy option aiming at the transfer of part of the central government to other decentralized entities, knows in several forms, as it concerns a public service, a public institution, a territory or a local authority. It is a political option that aims to unclog the centre of decision that is the central state, by transferring skills and competences to other entities closer to the people.

Since the late 1980ies, decentralization became a political priority displayed by many developing countries, because it is perceived as the best way to democracy and development, especially at the local level. In fact, it is an instrument for strengthening democracy and citizen participation in the management of local affairs. It is an instrument enabling the state to give up part of its functions, responsibilities, resources, budgets and powers to decentralized entities.

Finally, decentralization can generally appear as an instrument of reorganization of public action at the local level. It is a way to engage development on a local basis and not exclusively centralized. It can also be seen as an institutional strategy of population participation in economic, social and political governance of the country through the promotion of local development. Decentralization is therefore not an end but a means to implement actions to achieve development goals.

The actors of decentralization are numerous and diverse in terms of organization, missions, specialization and resources. But we can classify them into five types: the State and its decentralized services, local communities, populations, civil society organizations (NGOs, associations, etc.), and finally, the private sector.

Decentralization is both about the organization and the functioning of the local authorities, and the exercise of local power requirements with its proximity accountability, efficiency and effectiveness of development actions. With the emergence of more a growing number of actors (NGOs, donors, private developers, etc.) at the local level, it becomes crucial to establish a better coordination of action to maximize results. To do this, a good understanding of the mechanisms that govern relations between local stakeholders is necessary.

The relationship between development actors and the administrative organization must be governed by a clear legal framework and institutional structure. The state needs to define the broad guidelines of national policy in all areas, allocate financial and human resources and then monitor the actions, including those of local authorities. The state representatives shall ensure the management of public personnel in their administrative district and ensure the implementation of laws and regulations.

Actors such as the private sector and civil society should not intervene in local government territories without permission or informing the local authorities for a concerted and participatory management of projects and programs. They are assisting in the implementation of projects and programs identified by the local authorities. Populations are the real beneficiaries of development actions.

Finally, There should be a real dialogue between elected officials, government agencies, civil society organizations and the development partners, otherwise there would be a reduction of the impact of decentralization and it would affect the effectiveness of interventions on local development.

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