
Decentralization: As Option for Activating Local Development (underdeveloped states experiences)



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Abstract:

Decentralization to stimulate local development, which is the foundation of comprehensive national development. In this regard, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) has adopted this approach by preparing reports and drafting decentralization reform codes to support the experiences of developing and underdeveloped Complex states rely on a decentralized approach to governance and public management. Since national development is the primary concern of various countries, an international trend has emerged to encourage the move toward countries in this approach. Accordingly, these research papers aim to conceptualize the study's variables and determine the extent to which the relationship between decentralization and local development is theoretically realized. They then move to the analysis phase, drawing on some international experiences in this field. Keywords: State restructuring, decentralization, local development, developing-underdeveloped countries.

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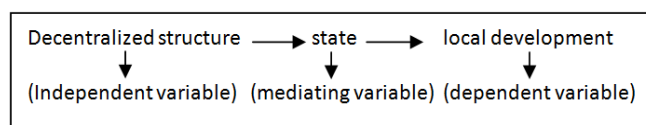
Introduction:

If the adoption by modern states of institutional forms and structures ranging from simplicity and uniformity to complexity and complexity does not constitute an end in itself, a state that has failed in its ultimate goals, including achieving comprehensive development and a prosperous life, will be obliged to review its institutional structure, its administrative structures and units, and its arsenal of laws that regulate methods of governance and public management and distribute tasks and powers among its governmental bodies, whether centralized or decentralized, i.e., the regions under its jurisdiction. It is noteworthy that most developing and underdeveloped countries, former colonies, have adopted a centralized approach to governance and public management in building their fledgling nation-states. This was accompanied by severe economic difficulties and a sharp slowdown in development, prompting many researchers to link the centralization of decision-making and development policymaking—planning, implementation, evaluation, and assessment—to this failure. Numerous studies and research, such as reports by the United Nations Development Programme, urge these countries to implement decentralized reform as a necessary step toward comprehensive national development, one that takes the local dimension (i.e., local development) as its cornerstone..

However, international experiences regarding the results of reforms proposed from abroad, whether by international bodies, research centers, or even specific countries, have not always been effective, positive, or consistent with goals and aspirations. Rather, they have had dire negative outcomes and repercussions, including the structural and financial reform prescriptions of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. This prompts us to question the validity of this approach, based on the following problem:

Does adopting decentralization in underdeveloped states always lead to successful local development?

By adopting the structural-functional analysis approach, which allows us to link the form of the state structure to its impact on its developmental function, and by using the institutional approach, which helps us understand the institutional structure of the decentralized state, we will attempt to answer the research problem by transforming the central concepts into empirical variables within the following assumption framework:



1- The Conceptual Framework of the Study:

In this section, we will attempt to address the most important concepts upon which the study is based, particularly the concept of decentralization and its applied models in countries that adopt this approach (federalism, local government, etc.), in addition to the concept of local development as a variable empirically influenced by the patterns and methods of implementing decentralization within the state.

1.2 The Concept of Decentralization:

Decentralization can be defined as granting citizens or their elected representatives (local councils) the authority to make public decisions in areas related to their daily lives. This stems from the belief that decisions based on broad community participation (local) are more relevant and reflective of their interests than those made by the central government. Political decentralization therefore refers to the distribution of powers, responsibilities, and roles between the national level or the central government and its subordinate governmental bodies at the regional level. (Al-Abidi, 2018, p. 52)

Decentralization generally expands the concept of democracy, whereby the final authority to decide on many issues is transferred to elected local bodies that reflect citizens' participation in decision-making and self-governance. Decentralization, therefore, refers to decision-making at the local level, beginning with legislation and progressing to implementation, and even judicial prosecution of any violations during the performance of local management duties. This implies that the local government and the judiciary are "courts with local jurisdiction. (Al-Azzizi 2009, p. 213)

According to the UNDP, decentralisation or decentralising governance means: The restructuring or reorganisation of authority so that there are a system of co-responsibility between institutions of governance at the central, regional and local levels according to the principle of subsidiarity, thus increasing the overall quality and effectiveness of the system of governance while increasing the authority and capacities of sub-national levels. Decentralisation could also be expected to contribute to key elements of good governance, such as increasing people's opportunities for participation in economic, social, and political decisions; assisting in developing people's capacities; and enhancing government responsiveness, transparency, and accountability (UNDP 2004, p.12)

Decentralization, then, is the transfer of political power from the central to the local level. This requires elected local governments. The electoral mechanism is the fundamental criterion for the political dimension of decentralization. This results in local officials having no authority independent of that granted to them by their constituents. They must adhere to the interests of those who appointed them to their positions, unlike appointed officials, who must act in accordance with the interests of the central national government that appointed them. They are thus agents of the national government, which represents the central system. (Center for Democracy and governance 2000, p.6)

The phenomenon of decentralization is the product of a major historical development. Therefore, adopting it and transitioning from a centralized political system requires embarking on a long and difficult process. This requires significant motivation to adopt and consolidate it, as it concerns the transfer of power, which no individual or institution can easily stop. Therefore, we are witnessing a transformational process in the form of the state, requiring preliminary phased processes such as reforming the electoral system, party reform, expanding participatory processes, and other reforms at the administrative and institutional levels. (UNDP 2004, p.13)

b. The concept of local development :

Definitions of this concept have varied depending on each researcher's perspective, but they agree on a set of constants, such as goals, actors, and spatial or geographical scope. local development is the process that unites the efforts of local people and those of government authorities to improve the economic and social conditions of local communities and achieve the integration of these communities within the framework of the nation. so local development is based on two fundamental factors:

- The contribution of citizens (locals) themselves to efforts to improve their standard of living.
- The provision of necessary services, equipment, and personnel by local authorities.

local development is a modern concept for the method of social and economic action in specific areas, based on the foundations and rules of social and economic science curricula. This method is based on bringing about a cultural change in the way of thinking, working, and living by raising the awareness of members of the local environment. This awareness is based on the participation in thinking, preparation, and implementation by all members of the local environment at all practical and administrative levels.(Sekuła 2002, p. 60)

As an operational definition of local development, it can be said that it is "the process aimed at developing and improving the lives of citizens in their local environment in all administrative, economic, social, cultural, environmental, and recreational fields... This process is primarily undertaken by local government bodies, but its complexity requires cooperation with local non-governmental bodies and actors, such as representatives of local civil society and the local private sector..., through a comprehensive and integrated development plan with a specific timeframe". .(Sekuła 2002, p. 61)

2. The most important approaches of decentralization in the state :

2.1 The federalism approach :

Federalism is derived from the Latin word "foedus," meaning treaty or agreement. Jurisprudence has differed in determining its meaning. Some believe that

federalism is a form of contractual arrangement, meaning agreement, derived from fides or trust, and includes a freely and mutually accepted agreement.

Meanwhile, the jurists Granstein and Balsbey argued that the Latin word "foedus," according to Lewis's Latin Dictionary, means a league or agreement between two or more parties, a compact pact, an alliance, or a contract. The origin of the word "foedus" is shared by the word fides, meaning trust, and the English word bind, meaning connection. It is clear that the word "foedus" refers to a type of agreement based on mutual trust between the parties or a trusting promise. Regarding international politics, the parties to the agreement are governments, and the agreement between them is federal. (Anderson 2008, p. 6)

federalism or federal union refers to the institutional aspect and refers to the establishment and implementation of a federal system. Some call it the federal state, central union, federal state, federal union, constitutional union, treaty state, or united states. The jurist Weber describes federalism as "a method of distributing powers between the central authority and regional authorities such that the central government and regional governments are both independent of and cooperative with one another." (Al-Kubaisi 2010, pp. 20-21)

2.2 The Local Governance Approach :

In reality, participatory governance and local governance are two sides of the same coin, represented by the sincere will of the political system to consolidate its relationship with the people and make them the primary reference for all decisions, as well as an active partner in the implementation of policies. This, in turn, preserves the principle of popular sovereignty, which has nearly eroded due to the imbalances in the representative system, as we saw above. (Abdel-Wahab 2015, p. 26)

Local governance not only aims to attract citizens politically, but also extends to the economic and social advancement of the local area. This is reflected in the definition provided by the United Nations Development Programme UNDP: "Local governance consists of a set of institutions, mechanisms, and processes that enable citizens and their groups to articulate their interests and needs, resolve their differences, and fulfil their rights and duties at the local level. This requires empowering local governments to manage available resources and building their capacities so that they become capable of operating as participatory institutions that are responsive and accountable to all citizens' concerns and needs. At the same time, they are concerned with strengthening popular democracy by empowering citizens, communities, and their organizations, such as community-based organizations and non-governmental organizations, to participate in local governance and the local development process as equal partners." (Adegami & Egbewole 2022, pp. 143-144).

3. The impact of decentralization on the local development process:

3.1 Achieving partnership in local development management:

Decentralization, as a geographic distribution of power, contributes to helping regions formulate development plans and take appropriate measures during the implementation and evaluation phases. This innately engages people, as they are concerned daily with their economic and developmental problems, as well as with everything dictated by the nature of their regions and their own resources. This empowers them to participate in determining their own destiny. It is well known that one of the most important influences on the rate of political participation among people is their commitment to personal and partial interests rather than the general interest. (Braillon & Taddei 2002, p.97)

In fact, The diffusion of political power and its regional redistribution from the country's regional center (the capital) to the peripheries (states, regions) leads to an improvement in the political performance of local communities, as the space becomes more conducive to popular participation in shaping local government bodies, thus ensuring the loyalty of these bodies to the will and interests of the local community, thus achieving the desired local development. .(Oxhorn 2001, p. 01)

For his part, Treisman believes that political decentralization includes administrative decentralization, which creates horizontal relationships at the local level and mitigates the complex structure of administrative stratification in the central state. Statistical studies covering a group of 154 countries found that most countries with multiple levels of governance tend to have high levels of corruption and perform poorly in development performance and the management of public affairs, including preventive services and public health. (Treisman 2000, p.01)

3.2 Ensuring the optimal utilization of local resources:

Under the decentralized approach, local governments are able to rationally and effectively utilize resources through the following:

- Providing goods and services that meet the actual local needs of citizens at their true cost, such as water distribution, sanitation, electricity, education, and health. Thus, the proximity of local units to citizens enables them to accurately identify their needs and prioritize them according to their responsiveness. (UNDP 2004, p.16)
- Linking revenues to expenditures. Decentralization allows for the identification of high-cost goods and services with limited consumption. This enables the identification of beneficiaries and the imposition of consumption fees to support the state treasury, from the wealthy to ordinary citizens, based on the type of individual consumption. Citizens' payment of taxes and fees also enhances local authorities' sense of responsibility and their control over the quality and quantity of services provided. (UNDP 1997, pp. 10-12)
- Identifying available investment opportunities. The broad decentralized powers granted to local authorities in the field of development work enable them to launch planning projects that are tailored to the region's capabilities and the needs of its

residents, while encouraging investors to participate in their implementation. (UNDP 2004, p.17)

4. International Experiences in Local Development Under the Decentralized Approaches:

After a theoretical analysis of the impact of state restructuring along the decentralization path on the reality of local development, in this section, we attempt to cite and draw on some international experiences in this field. All of these relate to underdeveloped countries where decentralization has either contributed to their underdevelopment or helped them transform into developing countries with increasing rates of economic growth and social welfare.

4.1 The Malaysian Federalism Experience:

a. The Path of The Malaysian Experience:

Malaysia is set up as a constitutional federalism, and when it was formed already had federal elements incorporated into its legal and constitutional framework. This spirit of federalism was indeed embedded in the country's history and infused into the Federation of Malaya Agreement 1948, when the disparate states came together, in which although it was agreed there would be established "a strong central government", it was also agreed that "the individuality of each of the Malay States and of the Settlements should be clearly expressed and maintained" (Yeoh 2019, p.03). There was also meant to be machinery for consultation between the central government and the States and Settlements on certain financial matters⁵. This was a direct recognition of the individuality of the states.

Starting in 1976, Malaysian structural and administrative reform began, moving the state toward decentralization and supporting local units. After the country suffered from weak local development performance and its impact on national development in general, Local Government Law No. 172 allowed local units to be transformed into development agents with the authority to plan, implement, and self-finance. (Al-Sayed 2007, p. 153).

Local government in Malaysia occupies the third and lowest level after federal and state governments. Under the Malaysian federal constitution, local government is the responsibility of the states, but the federal government also exercises considerable power and influence over local government, especially in peninsular Malaysia. The dynamic of the Malaysian federal system is such that it has shifted the balance of power to the centre. (Nooi 2008, p. 126)

Malaysian decentralization has caused several imbalances such as a High fiscal deficits and debt levels in Malaysian states, Income and wealth disparities between states and local governments and an inequality in the economic and social conditions of States. (Zafarullah 2008, pp. 108-111)¹. For all of the above, state and local

governments in Malaysia now operate within a framework of being politically, financially and economically subordinate to the federal government. Whilst previous moves for reform, such as the 1976 Royal Commission of Enquiry to Investigate into the Workings of Local Authorities in West Malaysia, have proposed redistributing responsibilities between tiers of government and greater community participation, local government remains tightly controlled from the centre with limited revenues and only a minor role. (Nooi 2008, p. 128)

a. Evaluation of the Malaysian Experience:

In light of the data and information, as well as the political, economic, and social indicators, it can be said that Malaysia has been largely successful in adopting decentralization in its institutional structure and government bureaucracy, leading to significant success in local development. In addition to achieving social integration due to the narrowing of ethnic differences between the Malay (indigenous Malaysians) and the Chinese and Indians, the country's political cohesion has been achieved, thus eliminating separatist fears within the Malaysian regions and states.

4.2 The Nigerian Federalism Experience:

a. The Path of The Nigerian Experience:

Although Nigeria is one of the first developing countries to adopt decentralization, especially after the Biafra War of 1967, its implementation was partial. The regions were granted legislative powers in non-developmental areas, such as personal status and the judiciary, taking into account ethnic diversity (the Hausa and Fulani tribes in the north, and the Yoruba and Igbo tribes in the south) and religious diversity (Muslims, Christians, and animists). Meanwhile, the military-dominated federal government retained all developmental powers, such as urban planning, the establishment of factories and infrastructure, and funding sources, particularly oil revenues and taxes, etc. (Abbas 1999, p. 309)

Nigeria currently consists of 774 local government areas. The establishment of local government will undoubtedly give citizens the opportunity to participate in political activities at the local level and, at the same time, help build their political competence in managing local government affairs. This will, in turn, reduce the importance of ethnicity and lead to the social and political development of the local political system. (Cotties, T., & Aminur, A. 2012. p.14)

With widespread corruption in the central government and other decentralized bodies, decentralization in the regions became meaningless. Instead, they were left with meager funding, facing enormous burdens for a population of over 170 million people. Tensions increased due to the poor distribution of wealth and development projects, which developed into armed separatist tendencies, especially in the regions. The Muslim north, despite its poor development, constitutes the majority of the population, compared to a Christian minority that controls the government, the

army, and the oil companies in the south around the Gulf of Ghana. (Umaroho 2006, p.78).

b. Evaluating the Nigerian Experience:

Objectively, the Nigerian situation represents one of the worst experiences of decentralization at the political-security and economic-development levels.

On the political and security levels, the Nigerian state's decentralized orientations have reinforced secessionist demands, particularly in the central and northern regions, which have a Muslim majority, against the central government controlled by the Christian minority. The eastern regions have also witnessed secessionist demands with Cameroonian support, given their French-speaking and Francophone African culture, in contrast to the Anglophone African culture prevalent in Nigeria. This situation has caused security disturbances that have weakened the state's presence, favoring armed organizations and militias such as Boko Haram.

On the development front, the pace of local development was hampered because decentralization forced the regions to rely on their own resources, which is difficult for the central and northern regions due to their reliance on low-yielding agricultural and pastoral subsistence activities and their lack of oil revenues concentrated in the southern coastal regions on the Atlantic Ocean. This reinforced the feeling of deprivation and injustice in the distribution of national wealth, and consequently led to a hostile stance towards the central authorities and the army in Nigeria. (Mukoro & Afonughe 2025, pp. 43-44)

4.3 The Indonesian Local Government Experience:

a. The path of The Nigerian Experience:

After gaining independence from the Netherlands in 1949, Indonesia suffered for decades from the repercussions of the military rule of Ahmed Sukarno (1949) and then General Suharto (1967). This rule was characterized by extreme centralization, despite the country's official title, "The Federated States of the Republic of Indonesia." By 1990, signs of a decentralization movement began, albeit with some restraint. However, with the fall of Suharto's rule in 1998, decentralization was strongly present in the government of President Abdurrahman Wahid, who created a new ministry responsible for decentralization, called the Ministry of State for Regional Autonomy. With the assistance of the German development agency GTZ and the United States Agency for International Development, a decentralized system was established through Local Autonomy Laws Nos. 22 and 25 of 1999.

Indonesia today is comprised of 34 autonomous provinces that contain districts and municipalities. District, located in rural areas, and municipalities, outside of rural areas, are the same level of government. The provinces have a governor who serves as the central government's representative and a representative parliament.

The provinces and local governments are sub-national governments. (Tjiptoherijanto 2000, p. 140). The population of Indonesia is diverse and geographically scattered among many islands with their own traditions and languages. Indonesia has more than 13,000 islands, over 300 languages and over 20 cultural groups. If the President continues to promote the "One Indonesia" policy of his predecessor, the policy is likely to have little more effect than past attempts because of Indonesia's large geography, multiple languages, and cultures. The various populations may view regional autonomy with indifference or suspicion. (Tjiptoherijanto 2000, p. 141).

The legal framework was then reinforced by Law No. 32/2004 on Local Autonomy, which even included placing political decision-making in the hands of local citizens. Under this law, even the governors of the twelve (12) regions are popularly elected, in addition to the mayors of the 240 municipalities. This has had an impact on local development, which has witnessed an acceleration with the expansion of sectors subject to local government, including public works, health, agriculture, communications, industry and trade, investments and the environment, ... While the emergence of Law No. 33/2004 granted the authority to manage funds and thus the possibility of financing the previous sectors. Despite natural disasters such as earthquakes, volcanoes, floods and sea storms (2004 tsunami), local development is witnessing a great boom, which has been reflected in the country's economy and made it the seventeenth power in the world. (Efriandi 2021, pp. 64-65)

b. Evaluating the Indonesian Experience:

It can be said that Indonesia's demographic, geographical, and geopolitical characteristics played a major role in adopting a cautious decentralization approach. From a demographic perspective, Indonesian politicians fear the lack of control over the security and stability of more than 280 million citizens (280 million), especially given the Indonesian elite, including employees and students, who are accustomed to leading demonstrations and street protests against the government. This has often led to the downfall of Indonesian regimes and governments. Furthermore, some of the hostile policies of some regional countries, such as Australia's support for the secession of the Indonesian province of East Timor, have reinforced Indonesian politicians' fears regarding the adoption of decentralization.

This is not to mention the difficulty of extending the state's influence and the interconnectedness of its regions due to the island nature of Indonesia, a maritime archipelago located between two oceans (the Indian and the Pacific) and comprising more than three thousand (3,000) islands. However, the Indonesian government agreed to grant the Aceh province, north of Sumatra, self-rule and apply Islamic law in its judicial system, especially after it was severely damaged by the 2004 tsunami and the belief of the people of Aceh in religious interpretations of that disaster. Therefore, Indonesian local development is good and on the rise, but it remains less than its

Malaysian counterpart, despite the size of the Indonesian economy, for the reasons mentioned above. (Chenki 2023, p. 116)

5. General Conclusions:

- Comprehensive local development, which is the most important factor in attracting citizens to participate in the political process, requires reducing the bloated bureaucracy, which slows the implementation of decisions from the central-national level to the decentralized-local level, while increasing costs and rampant financial corruption in the disbursement of sectoral budgets due to the lack of transparency in management.
- There is no realistic justification for some countries' fear of increasing decentralization and participatory management at the local level, as long as the population is generally characterized by social homogeneity, which makes it immune to the dangers of disintegration and separatist tendencies. Therefore, the choice of decentralization, accompanied by participatory politics, benefits the success of the development process, which, as mentioned, is a key determinant in increasing political participation and enhancing the electoral performance of local citizens.
- Adopting a policy of development decentralization in planning and financing, by upgrading local management to local governance that enjoys the right to economic and financial legislation and development planning. While ensuring independence in preparing budgets commensurate with and meeting the needs of the region and its development projects, political centralization is maintained, particularly in sectors that guarantee state unity and social cohesion in heterogeneous societies, such as foreign policy and defense.
- Restructuring the organization of local units (provinces) by creating a regional governance body (district) comprising a group of provinces, coordinating between them, and simultaneously acting as a mediator between these provinces and the central authority in the capital, instead of fragmenting the fragmented. The central authority will be easier to deal with five or six provinces than with dozens of decentralized units, especially in a vast country. This division has proven its developmental effectiveness even in countries with a long tradition of political centralization, such as France (region/département/chief-lieu).
- Establishing a culture of participatory governance among citizens, particularly at the local level, which is considered the most appropriate level for acquiring experience and skills in this regard before advancing to national participation.

Conclusion:

From all of the above, we arrive at the conclusion that the inevitable relationship between decentralization and local development is not certain. The state's decentralized option may help activate and facilitate the local development process,

but it can sometimes lead to developmental failure and even to pitfalls that threaten the state's very existence. Therefore, this can be applied to the study's variables, which interact and shift depending on experiences, circumstances, and environments, according to the following two scenarios:

- Decentralization: Independent variable - State: Mediating variable - Local development: Dependent variable. This occurs if the state is strong, cohesive, and capable of absorbing the inputs of the decentralized process.

- Decentralization: Independent variable - State: Dependent variable (disintegration path...). This occurs if the state is fragile and unable to absorb the inputs of the decentralized process. The dependent variable (local development) is not realized and is eliminated, replaced by the state as the dependent variable, whose existence and existence are directly affected by its reception of decentralized inputs.

Thus, the relationship is realized in the first scenario by adopting centralization and applying it to the developing state to achieve local development of varying degrees of success. Meanwhile, the relationship between decentralization and local development is negated by the absence of local development and the entry of the fragile developing state into a bet that is fundamentally related to its existence.

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