



Decentralization - Why and How?

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From the perspective of ordinary citizens, the central government is often too far away from the experiences of their life to meet the needs and problems the citizen faces every day.

Instead, it is the local level of government that really matters for individuals and their families. They send their children to state-run schools in their village or town, use public roads and transportation, register important family events such as birth and death with the authorities, and get water and often electricity from the municipality.

In many countries with centralized systems, however, the pursuit of good governance has neglected the local level of government. Despite numerous reforms and spent resources, many central governments have failed to provide local services with the quality and consistency required to significantly improve the standard of living of the majority of the population. This failure is often not

so much due to a lack of money as it is to the inefficient use of available resources and the inherent difficulties posed by governing from a geographic and psychological distance from most of the citizens.

The geographic distance of central governments, for instance, very often leads to a lack of information about local needs and local problems. Even if the individual government employee within the central government is interested in helping the local level, he or she generally lacks information about the specific requirements of the community needing assistance. As Kendall rightly stresses:

“Officials who work for centralized governments do not have the necessary knowledge of local conditions to provide efficient government services because this knowledge is dispersed among the millions of people who comprise society, and cannot be transmitted to a central planning board”.¹

In a similar vein, a member of the Planning Commission in Nepal once asked me: “How should we know whether a village whose name we never heard and whose location we hardly know really needs a new bridge?” Even the best organized central administration is unable to really determine whether, in a specific rural village, expanding the school or improving irrigation is more important at a particular moment. Only local authorities can make such determinations.

The psychological distance of central government officials from the people they govern is another reason for the failure of central governments to provide services at the local level. Too often, the central government’s activities at the local level are not driven by demand from the local citizens, but rather are imposed on them by agencies that have developed ideologies within the context of the interests of the central government. The people at the local

level do not feel any ownership of the activities and may even reject the “gifts” imposed on them. Such lack of responsiveness by the population may come less from the activity itself and more from the way it is imposed.

The failure of centralized governments to perform properly at the local level affects the entire local population, including the poor, women and children. At the same time, a central government’s failures are also highly detrimental to the government in power and, even worse, to the state as such. When governments cannot solve the problem of leaking pipes or teachers absent from the local school, citizens will not trust the government to address the larger problems affecting modern nations. In this way, central governmental failure causes the basis of governance to be weakened, and the legitimacy of the whole state is undermined.

A further, more practical problem with central government failure is that often, because of the poor performance at the local level, everyone who can afford it avoids governmental services. Instead of going to the public school, public hospital, or public bank, citizens begin to look for private schools, private hospitals, and even private security firms. This not only weakens the role of the state but, as a high official in Jordan once summarized his experience to me, it leaves the government with the weakest and most needy part of the population which increases the burdens on governmental services and often affects quality adversely.



Reasons for strengthening local governments

In response to the many failings of centralized government, decentralization has become a world-wide trend. Towns and other local governments in rural areas are being strengthened in a growing number of countries in all continents. Among the most

important reasons for the movement to give more authority to lower levels of government are: the greater efficiency and accountability of local governments; the positive effect such authority-shifts have on local development; the enhancement of democracy and protection of liberty that local governance has on the citizens; and the greater ability to protect the rights and values of minority populations.

One of the most significant effects of the interaction of the various advantages local governments have over central governments is that the state as a whole gains *legitimacy*. When the citizens trust in their officials and are more actively involved in the betterment of their community, their relationship to the state as a whole is also improved. Thus, while the authority of the central government may be diminished by decentralization, the legitimacy of the state as a whole is enhanced. Decentralization-led changes must therefore be seen as not only a “local versus central” government phenomenon, but rather as a way to mutually benefit both levels of government and the citizens simultaneously.

1. Efficient and accountable administration

The desire for a more efficient administration has motivated many of the recent constitutional and legislative changes in countries all over the world. However, experience has shown that central governments are often unable to successfully implement efficiency-building policies and programs.

Local governments have the potential to perform better. This is based on any of several reasons, listed below. One must remember, however, that better administration is not an automatic result of decentralization. Still, if local governments are properly equipped to fulfill their tasks², the chances for achieving “better government” through decentralization increase.

- A decentralized body “in comparison to national governments, ... is more accessible, more sympathetic and quicker to respond to local needs”.³ On a local level, programs and services can be more easily adapted to particular local circumstances and needs. This is so because local authorities are obviously more knowledgeable about a local situation than are authorities who are far away from realities at the grass-root level.⁴ As a result, the necessary information to plan such programs and services is more readily available and the chances of success are consequently higher.
- The close relationship between citizens and government at the local level fosters accountability. It has been pointed out that decision-making close to the people is an excellent instrument to prevent governments from abusing their powers.⁵ This is so for at least two related reasons. First, it is more difficult to hide corruption among those in authority when the citizens know the officials than in situations where “the Government” is far away and inaccessible. Thus, persons in authority in the local government are generally less likely to have the opportunity to hide their corruption than are persons in authority in central government. Second, it is easier to hold local officials and elected office-bearers accountable for their actions than it is to impose accountability on politicians at higher levels of government, as members of local governments are often less protected politically than the corresponding official in the central government.⁶
- Both the availability of information necessary for taking proper actions and the potentially higher degree of accountability will lead to a better use of available resources. This will allow doing more with limited resources. As one author recently stressed:

“Decentralizing spending responsibilities can bring substantial welfare gains. Government resources can be allocated most efficiently if responsibility for each type of public expen-

diture is given to the level of government that most closely represents the beneficiaries of these outlays".⁷

- Finally, decentralization helps to reduce costs. In Nepal, for example, villagers who proudly present their self-built, small-scale projects to the foreign visitor will never fail to stress how much cheaper they were than projects carried out by government agencies. The Human Development Report 1993 has stated this same idea in more general terms:
"[If] local people feel that it is their money being spent, they are likely to keep a tighter lid on expenditures and to use resources more efficiently. ... Local development also opens up the opportunity for people to add voluntary contributions to amplify a programme or projects impact".⁸

2. Better local development

In many countries, one of the primary motives for decentralization is the prospect of improving local development. Development is possible without decentralization, but the advantages of strong local governments for a more efficient administration just outlined above also help to improve local development projects.

- Decentralization removes institutional and legal obstacles to self-help and it encourages innovative forms of solutions for local problems. Thus, empowering local governments "allows diverse solutions to emerge in response to general problems".⁹
- Local resources for social and economic development can be more easily mobilized if such projects are decided by and implemented on the local level. Development activities undertaken with the participation of those involved allows for tailoring the activities to the specific needs of the local population. Experience has shown that people are ready to contribute to

local development projects if they can participate in the decision-making and feel that the particular project improves their situation. By letting the local people determine how a particular program should be designed, involvement of the local government enhances the sense of ownership and responsibility for the project. It also gives the citizens a personal stake in the program's success. The citizens are therefore more likely to invest their time and resources into furthering the project's goals. This in turn helps to produce better results than if the development activities were decided upon from the distance of the central government.

- Local government may make development activities more sustainable by involving the people affected more directly in the implementation of projects. Beneficiaries who "own" a project will be more likely to assume the responsibility for the project's maintenance. The ability to help in the early planning phases of a development project in turn also encourages the local population to carefully monitor and protect the results of the planning. Psychological self-interest mixes with financial self-interest to encourage the citizens to actively promote the project's successful implementation. In Nepal, for instance, forests are much better preserved since they have been handed over to village-based "user groups".

3. Democracy and protection of liberty

The notion of democracy is not restricted to participation in national elections. Although the right to elect leaders of national government is certainly a part of the democratic principle, democracy also includes the ability to influence the decisions that directly affect a person's life and the ability to live in freedom and liberty. Local governments are able to provide these aspects of democracy in a way that central governments often cannot.

As stated above, local level administrations can be more accessible for the average person – and thus more “human” – than a very distant and mighty central administration can be.¹⁰ This gives democracy a clearly local dimension.

Although a state’s respect for democracy and individual freedom does not depend on decentralization, such form of government may further these two fundamental values. The idea that local self-government promotes democracy and individual liberties is deeply rooted in many decentralized countries. The right of citizens to participate in decision-making procedures on a local level furthers true democracy.

“[Decentralization] builds a sense of community and permits more meaningful participation in self-government. In many countries, the autonomy granted to local units is designed to assure self-determination and the rights of minorities and their members against abuse by national majorities”.¹¹

This, however, implies that local entities are organized in a way allowing for real participation and that national authorities do not tolerate the creation of autocratic and authoritarian forms of government on the local level.

Distribution of power to different levels of government and the competition between these levels allows for a system of checks and balances that is likely to set limits on the central government if it attempts to overstep or abuse its powers. Thus, decentralized government also constitutes a specific and extended expression of the basic constitutional principle of the separation of powers.¹²

Moreover, decentralization allows, to a certain extent, for a specific kind of political power-sharing which in turn contributes to political stability. For example, if a government is ousted from

power by a rival political party, the original government's political party may still control some local governments. This is compatible with the role of opposition on the national level but mitigates the harsh principle of "the winner takes all" at the local level. Thus, it adds to political stability. Such a stabilizing effect is shown in Nepal, where frequent changes of government at the national level during the past few years have little affected the activities of local authorities who were able to conclude their terms of office without interruption. On the other hand, where the central government is very strong and even small local expenditures must be approved by the competent minister in the central government, political instability at the center directly affects the local level.

4. Protection of minorities

A further traditional argument for decentralized government is that it has the potential to protect ethnic and other traditional minorities.¹³ If minorities inhabit an area with a certain degree of self-government, decentralization essentially grants them the right to be free as a collective.¹⁴ Thus, decentralization offers

"... the possibility of combining democratic ideals with guarantees for minorities ... (and thus) ... can provide a means of accommodating problems arising from ethnic diversity ... By guaranteeing local autonomy, especially to questions considered important to ethnic identity, the potential for conflict within the national political arena is reduced".¹⁵



Problems of local governance

Most countries have local authorities and some kind of decentralization does exist, at least on paper. Nevertheless, local governments are too often unable to perform even the very limited tasks they have been delegated. An analysis of such situations usually reveals many peculiarities stemming from the particular political, historical, legal, and socio-economic traditions of a specific country. Nevertheless, it is possible to list some common problems:

- *Lack of resources.* This is a common problem in many countries. Local governments have some powers to levy local taxes and fees but these monies are difficult to collect, and if collected are often insufficient to fulfill the tasks assigned to them. Access to central funds may be limited and difficult. In addition, local authorities often lack qualified and well-trained staff and therefore are unable to perform properly even if money is available. Lack of resources takes on dramatic forms if local governments are granted large powers that have been shifted from the center. In these areas, governmental activities may stop entirely and the center will be able to blame the local levels for such failure.
- *Lack of or overlapping powers.* Sometimes the powers of local governments are too limited to respond to the expectations of the population. More often, however, local governments possess broad powers, but central government offices are also competent to carry out such activities at the regional or local level. This leads to an unclear delimitation of powers and overlapping of activities. The result is that problems do not get solved at either level, and the people lose faith in both their local authorities and the central government.
- *Lack of democratically elected local authorities.* In some countries, local authorities are not elected by the citizens, but are instead appointed by the central government leadership.

In other countries, elected bodies have been dissolved or local elections have not taken place for a long time. In these cases, government-appointed administrators have taken over the daily business of governing. In any of these cases, the local population may perceive the local officials as merely agents of the central government, and therefore rejects their authority as representatives of the community's interests.

- *Lack of transparency and accountability.* Corruption at the local level is a problem in some countries. It is more likely to take place where there is a lack of transparency and accountability. This is due to the fact that corruption is difficult to prove when government accounts are not accessible to the population and/or when there is no legislation that clarifies the powers and duties of the different bodies involved in local governance issues. If local officials are accountable to several authorities, this will create confusion and insecurity at the lower level and thus hamper efficient administration even more. In addition, accountability is lessened when local office-bearers are appointed rather than elected, because there is then little chance that even proven instances of corruption will be remedied.
- *Excessive control.* A typical problem in many countries is that the higher levels of government (provincial or central) must approve the budget before the local government can spend anything. The approval is often delayed and the process is often used to impose many conditions on the proposal's acceptance. The same is true for the required approval of contracts. In some countries, planning procedures are very complicated and slow, leaving local authorities no opportunity to decide where to set priorities. Often, local governments must get prior approval for all expenditures above a certain (usually minimal) level. Finally, a very effective control can be exercised through threats to dismiss the local body for not performing "properly" (i.e., according to the wishes of the

center). Such control mechanisms ensure that local authorities are constantly supervised by the central government officials. This not only slows the progress of local activities, it cripples local initiative.



Conditions for successful decentralization

How can the goal of empowering local governments to act as efficient providers of services and as agents of local development be achieved? Practical experience as well as scholarly studies indicate several conditions necessary for successful decentralization.

1. Secure existence

A first necessary condition for strong local government is security of existence. Clearly, local governments cannot perform properly if their existence is in jeopardy by the ability of authorities on higher levels of government to dissolve them easily or to change their territories (e.g., merge them with neighboring areas). Secure existence requires that members of local bodies only be dismissed for specific, predetermined reasons and under formal procedures that require the dismissing authority to show that the dismissed person has violated the law. Clear criteria and procedures are also needed in cases of dissolution of communes and municipalities or for the alteration of their territories.

2. Resources and autonomy

The success of decentralization efforts depends to a very large extent on the availability of sufficient resources and the possibility of using these resources autonomously. This requires, *inter alia*,

- the right of local governments to collect local taxes and fees and to get funds from the central government necessary for the execution of tasks transferred to them;
- the right to spend this money without excessive prior control by higher levels of government;
- the right to take decisions on local activities including local development projects without undue interference by national planning authorities and line ministries;
- a sufficient and well-qualified local staff and the right to appoint and dismiss such staff; and
- technical support and advice from the center.

3. Accountability and transparency

In every administrative organization it is of paramount importance to introduce a clear concept of accountability. Such accountability has two dimensions:

- Making local governments and their members *accountable to the people* means that the citizens can elect those who rule them and have the possibility to assess their performance at the time of reelection. This requires transparency of governmental actions and the possibility to have access to relevant information such as budgets, accounts, plans, etc. Citizens must also know that office-bearers who have violated the law will be punished in all cases.
- Local governments are also *accountable to the higher levels of government*. Accountability to several authorities might create confusion and insecurity at lower levels that would be detrimental to the idea of efficient administration. Only well-defined responsibilities provide for the degree of transparency and security needed by authorities at lower levels who have to make certain decisions on their own. Therefore, a high degree of transparency in the relations between local

governments and the supervising authorities is necessary. For example, local bodies must know in advance what criteria will be applied when approving decisions or denying approval. There is also a need for transparency regarding all financial matters. Supervising authorities should exercise a tight control but such control should have a retrospective (*ex post*) character and those who have violated the law should be punished.

4. Political will and partnership

Experience has shown that the success of decentralization efforts depends, to a large extent, on a clear vision regarding the position and function of local governments and on a strong political will to implement that vision. It also depends on the willingness of both the central and the local level to see each other as partners in an ongoing process.

Such a partnership implies a willingness by the central government and its regional representatives to exercise self-restraint in supervising local governments. Laws and directives should be framed and applied in ways that encourage initiative and that do not curtail local self-government. It also requires a readiness to consult local governments on all matters regarding them and to take their opinion into account when making decisions.

For their part, actors on the local level must be ready to assume responsibility for their activities and to take initiatives on their own to foster development, instead of waiting for the central government to act or seeking approval where not needed. Local interest groups and the local population as a whole must support the process of shifting powers and responsibilities from the center to the local level.

Finally, structures should be created which will facilitate a dialogue between the different levels of government. In many coun-

tries, there have been good experiences demonstrating that associations of mayors and other heads of local governments can become reliable partners with the central government on policy questions if efforts are made to encourage local-central discussions and exchanges of ideas.

5. Strong legal framework

Another aspect of successful decentralization is the need for a *strong legal framework* setting out the powers, rights and duties of local governments clearly. Without such a framework, it is often impossible to know who is responsible for what. This allows central authorities to interfere easily with local affairs and leaves the local authorities with no possibility of stopping such interference.

Legal norms must, however, be adapted to local needs and to the circumstances of the local area. Norms that are imposed from somewhere else may not be used in practice or may be unsuitable and, therefore, may lose much of their impact.



Lessons from Europe

It is sometimes feared that strong local governments will abuse their powers and use their position to gain more power rather than to foster local development. Comparative studies carried out in Europe are of interest in this context because they reveal a strong relationship between the degree of autonomy and resources of a municipality and the attitudes and behavior of its mayor.

1. Different roles of local governments

In some parts of Europe, the prevailing view of the role of local government is that it should primarily be the providers of services and agents of development at the local level. Local leaders should focus on responding to the needs of the population concerning practical matters such as maintaining local roads, collecting solid waste, or taking care of the sewage system.

One author¹⁶ recently stated that in Switzerland, especially in smaller municipalities, political parties play a rather unimportant role in local politics. The mayor has to run an administration providing services in areas such as education, water, sanitation, local roads, and public assistance to the poor and unemployed. The mayor will be reelected if these services are well provided without overspending. If the mayor succeeds in presenting a budget that allows for lowering the local taxes without reducing any services, reelection is guaranteed. Thus, the ideal Swiss mayor is more like a manager running a business than a typical politician: service- (and thus development-) oriented. A study by Edward C. Page has shown that Scandinavian and British mayors and their municipalities are as service- and development-oriented as their Swiss colleagues.¹⁷

In other parts of Europe, local governments are seen as supporters of the central government. Many mayors in countries such as Italy, Spain, or France undertake fewer initiatives for their municipalities as service-providers. These mayors primarily see themselves as politicians, and act accordingly. The party politics from the central government extends to the local levels and affect the lives of the citizens much more directly than in Switzerland or Scandinavia. Success is not "evaluated primarily in terms of the use and allocation of local resources" but rather in terms of the official's "ability to bring in benefits from the outside."¹⁸ As described by one author, these mayors are

primarily 'policy-brokers', i.e., persons "negotiating, bargaining or otherwise attracting scarce resources".¹⁹ A mayor's ability to succeed thus depends on developing personal connections to politicians at the national level and on being able to offer benefits to the central officers in return for receiving their resources.

The benefits the local government official can offer the central government, put very simply, are votes for the party in national elections. Thus, the local mayor is the representative of the party at the local level who must make sure that the majority of the citizens in the municipality will vote for the party. To make sure that this will happen, the mayor can offer local supporters favors (for example, jobs or benefits from projects). This type of mayor is a key actor in an intricate web of personal relationships both going up to the national politicians as well as going down to his citizens at the municipal level.

In some parts of Italy, e.g., these relationships are straightforwardly clientelistic.²⁰ Those in power can grant favors even outside the law and they can withhold rights granted by the law. According to a study in the Southern Italian city of Palermo,

"ordinary citizens, and in particular the poor, disadvantaged by their illiteracy and lack of experiences in dealing with bureaucratic institutions are constrained to seek assistance from a higher status 'patron' who can intervene directly on their behalf".²¹

Thus, in that city, the individual politicians and the political parties play a "critical intermediary role ... in every transaction between the citizen and the state".²²

2. The reason for the differences in roles of local government

Why do these differences between mayors exist in different parts of Europe? A possible explanation rests on the different religious and cultural traditions of the areas. The Northern European countries are mainly officially Protestant, while the Southern European countries subscribe to Roman Catholic traditions. The cultures are also very different. However, neither the religious nor the cultural argument is very convincing, as the service-orientation of local governments can also be observed in those parts of Switzerland that religiously and culturally belong to Italy and France, or in the autonomous regions of Spain.

Instead, it appears that the differences between the two types of heads of local governments can be attributed to the very different position of local governments in these countries:

- As mentioned, many mayors in countries like Great Britain, Norway, Denmark, Sweden and Switzerland are service-oriented. These countries share the common characteristic of local governments with a high degree of independence from the central government. Moreover, the local governments are provided with the resources to allow this autonomy to work. In Switzerland, the position of local governments is very strong: their share of total public expenditures is 30 percent; they also raise approximately 30 percent of all public revenue and thus, at least theoretically, are able to finance themselves. The Swiss local governments can decide how much to tax their citizens and collect the taxes themselves. They are allowed to carry out their activities²³ and projects with very little prior administrative control. The same is true for the Scandinavian countries and Great Britain. Local governments in these areas spend from 25 to even 50 percent (as is the case in Denmark) of total government expenditures and employ 40 percent and more of all employees in the public sector.

Even more important is the fact that control by the central government over the activities of the local governments tends to be limited to an examination of the legality of the behavior of municipalities. Thus, the central government does not deal with all the details of the activities carried out by the local government and does not approve or disapprove projects in advance.

- In contrast, the municipal governments in many parts of Southern Europe are dependent upon the central party-led politics. These local governments spend less than 12 percent of public expenditures and the percentage of employees in the public sector is likewise below this level.²⁴ Central government (with its agencies) deals with many aspects of everyday administrative life on the local level, as 90 percent of all persons employed in the public sector work for the central, rather than the local, government. In addition, local governments are supervised by the regional offices of the central government. This supervision is very intrusive to the activities of the local officials, because many actions must be approved before being undertaken by the municipality.²⁵ Under such circumstances, there is not much left for the mayor in the area of providing services effectively and running the communal administration smoothly. Due to this dependence on the central government, it makes sense for local leaders to concentrate on the relationship between municipality and center and to try to get as much as possible from the central level rather than to attempt to provide the local citizens services directly.
- In his book, Page emphasizes another important difference between Northern and Southern Europe. In contrast to Southern Europe, mayors in Northern Europe have to share their decision-making powers much more with other members of their council. As a result, they are bound into a system of internal checks and balances.²⁶

It can be concluded that the degree of autonomy and resources given to local governments is one of the most important factors for shaping the attitudes and roles of their organs. A low degree of administrative control is also a significant factor. The more autonomy a particular local government has and the more resourceful it is, the more service- and development-oriented it will be.



The role of donors

Decentralization is a specific form of government affecting many aspects of political life, and the role of donors in the process can help governments reach their good governance goals. However, there is no single model of decentralization that is optimal for all societies. Each country has to find and develop constitutional and legal arrangements that best suit its own historical, social, cultural, and economic conditions. As a consequence, it is only a subsidiary role that donors can play in assisting governments that have decided to strengthen local governments.

1. How donors can assist in decentralization efforts

Within this limited role, activities that assist in the securing of human and financial resources can be among the most meaningful. The following are examples:

- Decentralization cannot be successful without intensive training of the members of local governments and their staff. Donors can *assist in the training* with advice and financial support, depending on the magnitude of the training needs.
- Decentralization is a process that requires the central government to give up power. This is likely to meet with some degree of resistance. If resistance occurs or is expected,

non-governmental organizations and research institutes in the countries concerned can *play the role of lobbyists* for the cause of decentralization. They will need some outside support.

- In many countries, associations of mayors and similar organizations have played a key role in the decentralization process. Donors may *assist in the creation of such associations* and support their activities.
- During a transition phase, funds may be needed. Donors can play an important role by *contributing financial resources* when it becomes apparent that the original projections of needed funds are insufficient to complete the transition.

2. Donor emphasis on process

Decentralization is not achievable by a single act of government delegation or decision to reform. Rather, decentralization is a process. As a process, decentralization requires sustained efforts to make changes in nearly all aspects of governance, from the development of local competence to the central government's acceptance of a local community's right to retain a portion of its financial resources to the development of a culture of honesty and answerability among politicians.

While other countries' experiences might be useful for governments determined to strengthen their local governments, the main role of donors should not be to work for the implementation of a specific model of decentralization. Instead, one of the most important roles for donors in such a process is to maintain the country's awareness of the importance of each part of the process of decentralization and to facilitate the process of decentralizing the governmental structures of the country.

In practice, donors should stress the importance of a holistic approach to decentralization: Reforms must be comprehensive, not just addressing one element of strong local governance or

the other. A local government with a secure status, a high degree of autonomy, and a qualified staff will still fail if resources are lacking, just as a resourceful local body with weak institutions or too much control from above will fail. Donors should also continue to stress that the benefits of the changes may not be immediately apparent. Maintaining enthusiasm for the process is thus another area where donors can play a valuable role.

¹ Francis Kendall, *The Heart of the Nation: Regional and Community Government in the New South Africa*, Norwood 1991, p. 15.

² UNDP, *Human Development Report 1993*, p. 75. The conditions necessary for making local governments service-oriented will be discussed below, Part III.

³ Ronan Paddison, *The Fragmented State*, Oxford 1985, p. 143.

⁴ See also Thomas Fleiner-Gerster, *Problèmes de la souveraineté intérieure et extérieure*, in: *Federalism and Decentralization*, vol. 2, Fribourg 1987, p. 66.

⁵ Kendall, p. 10.

⁶ See Kendall, p. 14.

⁷ Teresa Ter-Minassian, *Decentralizing Government, Finance & Development*, September 1997, p. 36.

⁸ UNDP, p. 75.

⁹ Kendall, p. 125. Kendall mentions the following example: "Instead of central government attempting to solve the housing shortage with one programme which it imposes on the entire country, various regions and communities act as laboratories for testing numerous ideas, the best of which are then imitated elsewhere." *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Fleiner-Gerster, p. 67.

¹¹ Louis Henkin, *Federalism, Decentralization and Human Rights*, in: *Federalism and Decentralization*, vol. 2, Fribourg 1987, p. 392.

¹² See Yoichi Higuchi, *La décision de la décentralisation*, in: *Federalism and Decentralization*, p. 25, and Fleiner-Gerster, *The Relationship between Federalism and Rights*, in: *ibid.*, pp. 409-10.

¹³ See, e.g., Ivo D. Duchacek, *Federalist Responses to Ethnic Demands: An Overview*, in: Daniel J. Elazar (ed.), *Federalism and Political Integration*, Ramat

Gan 1979, pp. 65-70, and Vincent Ostrom, *Federal Principles of Organization and Ethnic Communities*, in: *ibid.*, p. 77-81.

It has to be acknowledged that the advantages of decentralization for minorities may be ambiguous. Although it has the potential to provide autonomy for traditional religious, political, or linguistic minorities, the empowerment of local governments does not ensure the protection of minority rights. For minorities inside a given minority (minority sub-groups), for instance, local autonomy may cause problems of its own, such as oppression by the local majority. Louis Henkin and Albert Rosenthal, (eds.), *Constitutionalism and Rights, The Influence of the US Constitution Abroad*, New York/Oxford, 1990, p. 31.

¹⁴ Duchacek, p. 69.

¹⁵ Paddison, p. 127. In Switzerland, e.g., the federalist system has allowed for the survival of minority languages and local cultural traditions. Decentralization is one of the main reasons for its rich cultural, economic, and political diversity. Swiss federalism has also helped to overcome century-old tensions between different religious and language groups which in the past have repeatedly caused unrest and even civil wars in that country.

¹⁶ Wolf Linder, *Swiss Democracy: Possible Solutions to Conflict in Multicultural Societies*, New York 1994, p. 53.

¹⁷ See Edward C. Page, *Localism and Centralism in Europe*, Oxford 1991.

¹⁸ Page, p. 70.

¹⁹ Page, p. 71 (regarding French mayors).

²⁰ Page, p. 87.

²¹ Page, p. 88.

²² Page, p. 88.

²³ These activities comprise notably the following areas: a) local roads; b) local transportation (in urban municipalities); c) water and electricity supply; d) garbage collection and sanitation; e) running of primary and secondary schools, including construction of buildings and employment of teachers; f) planning of land use and, in larger municipalities, issuing of construction permits; g) public assistance to poor people; h) local police (in urban areas); and i) local taxes.

²⁴ Page, p. 15-16.

²⁵ Page, p. 38-9. Italian municipalities, e.g., in many areas "do not have sole competence for the delivery of many of their major services. ... A prime example

can be found in education. ... central and local government both have an important role to play in the day-to-day running of schools. The local role is distinctly a junior one ... Central government ... is responsible for planning schools, curriculums, training teachers, and paying teachers. This gives the center the ability to direct, or at least to have the dominant say Such a directive capacity on the part of the central government extends to most of the obligatory functions of local government."

²⁶ Page, p. 72.