



***Decentralisation in West Africa: between politics and development*, Marc Totté, Tarik Dahou and René Billaz, Karthala 2003 (in French)**

In recent years there has been considerable excitement about the process of decentralisation in West Africa and the growth of local democracies counterbalancing the dominance of central governments. Former centralised state structures have been dismantled and a variety of local structures – local government bodies, private services and community organisations – have emerged. Ten years after most of these changes occurred, it is time to take stock and examine their real impact, beyond the official rhetoric. What precisely has happened? Is decentralisation a process driven by grass-roots communities in response to local demand, or is it in fact a new way of promoting the old model of development?

Decentralisation in West Africa: between politics and development addresses these questions in an accessible way. It describes the process of decentralisation at community level, including local experiences of confrontation and arbitration, and outlines the opportunities and constraints, both technical and organisational, facing devel-



opment in the future. The result is a coherent picture of the connection between development and decentralisation.

This book is primarily aimed at development practitioners and managers, public authority officials and elected representatives, and at researchers from the disciplines involved. It has therefore an educational angle, evident in the attempts to clarify concepts and models. More generally, it is also aimed at those who question current development processes and modes of governance, whether in the South or in Europe.

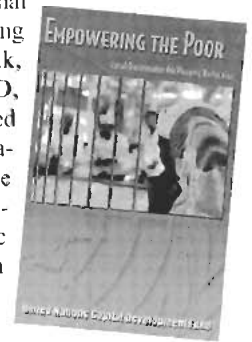
Obtain copies from www.karthala.com or Karthala, 22-24 blyd Arago -75013, Paris, France.

***Empowering the Poor: Local Governance for Poverty Reduction* Angelo Bonfiglioli, United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF) New York, 2003**

In recent years, poverty reduction has become one of the highest priorities of international development, as evidenced by the Millennium Development Goals. *Empowering the Poor: Local Governance for Poverty Reduction* explores the links between poverty reduction and decen-

tralised governance. The first section of the book focuses on an analysis of poverty, poverty reduction strategies, and how poverty reduction may be facilitated by decentralisation linked to good governance. The second section describes UNCDF's work in supporting improved governance through decentralisation.

In the first section, evolving definitions and an analysis of cross-cutting issues related to poverty offer a useful reference guide for those involved in poverty alleviation work for the first time, or others who are rather overwhelmed by the plethora of poverty reduction initiatives. It describes some of the approaches being developed by different international institutions (including the World Bank, UNDP, UNCTAD, IFAD and selected bilateral organisations). While recognising the limits of democratic local governance¹ in achieving poverty reduction, the book



¹ Good governance is defined as 'a set of organisations and a set of mechanisms/procedures intended to manage local public affairs'



argues that decentralisation is an essential precondition.

The second part of the book outlines the work of UNCDF, its strategic results framework, its focus on local government and good governance and its operational experience through its Local Development Programmes (LDP), in particular the efforts made to target the poor better. As such it provides a useful summary of UNCDF's operational approach. It also includes a very accessible summary of the 'poverty and environment' nexus, which should perhaps be mandatory reading for all development and environmental professionals.

The book's analysis of local governance for poverty reduction leads to four key conclusions:

- There is no linear relationship between democratic decentralisation, local governance and poverty reduction
- In order for decentralisation to occur there must be political will to relinquish power, authority and resources to local government
- Democratic decentralisation and governance are not necessarily pro-poor
- Complete decentralisation cannot be accomplished and is not even desirable – the most successful pro-poor experiments have involved commitment from

central government, particularly with regard to challenging the resistance of local elites.

The book contains case studies of projects from around the world illustrating UNCDF's approach to supporting local governance. The book represents an extremely useful resource for many development professionals with an interest in looking outside their sectoral box.

Obtain copies from www.uncdf.org or UNCDF, Two UN Plaza, 26 Floor, New York, NY 10017, USA.

Institutionalising participation in community land management: the case of Thiès, Senegal Serigne Mansour Tall and Bara Guèye (in French)

Institutionalisation of participation series, edited by Michel Pimbert

Towards the end of the 1980s, participatory approaches developed and expanded rapidly in francophone West Africa. At that time, the 'Gestion des Terroirs' (GT)¹ approach was the main methodology for

natural resource management, and presented a positive opportunity for the development of participatory tools and techniques.

In this case study, IIED's Drylands Programme and its partners describe a programme to institutionalise participation in GT programmes in Senegal. The programme's implementation strategy, based on the creation of learning groups, was based on the hypothesis that the capacity of grassroots organisations to learn and adapt to changes in policy and practice is a key element for sustainable rural development. After an analysis of the learning process and its context, the authors present methodological, practical and institutional lessons drawn from this participatory approach.

In particular, the authors emphasise that local forums now provide an efficient mechanism for stimulating reflection and dialogue on policies and programmes at the grassroots level. Moreover, in spite of high levels of mobility among administrative personnel, some technical government structures are developing ways of integrating participatory processes into their everyday activities.

Obtain copies from www.iied.org or IIED, 3 Endsleigh St., London WC1H 0DD, UK.



¹ Village land-use planning