Spreading Wealth and Power at Regional and Local Level of Government for Decentralised Services: A Contemporary African Experience

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Abstract: A typical pattern of wealth redistribution seems to prevail, in some African countries between rich and poor based on regional groups. A contract-theoretic model is presented for shedding some light on this phenomenon. The government promises a transfer to its potential opponent in return for not engaging in a civil war. The latter may break out because of the imperfect credibility of the government’s commitment to decentralized powers to the regions. This increases the cost of the required transfer of wealth and may make it unfeasible. The model determines whether a military regime or a redistributive state prevails in a peaceful equilibrium. Politics is a vast interactive process of power applications, which nearly always has consequences for others. From the ideology learned as a child to the present process of defining a “problem” and perhaps acting on it we are participants in the process or at least in its effects.

Key words: Wealth, Capacity, Participation, Power, Poverty, Politics, Government, Corruption, Decentralisation, Struggle for Political Power

1. Introduction
The struggle for political power and resources in general frames any major institutional reform, anywhere. As a result, there are many of what we call here political problems confronting the development of democratic decentralisation and local self-governance in a contemporary Africa. Basil Davidson (1992) argued that the attempt by Africans to imitate the European nation-state project is responsible for much of the continent’s problems in relating creatively to its past and the failure of its social-reform agenda.

1.2. Background to the research paper
The historical idea of the European nation-state has several key elements that are particularly difficult to implement in Africa. These include the idea of a homogenous nation-state as the only viable state and its imposition of cultural hegemony over conquered groups, and a central government that has firm control over the national political and economic space.

Barber (1995) argue that African political leaders and intellectuals preferred the centralised nation-state model, perhaps because it assured them a permanent hold of monopoly power while this project was being implemented. Besides the intellectual model and tradition of European state, there are institutional patterns and power relations that have survived since the colonial era. Indeed, the continuity between the colonial and postcolonial states is striking. With a political and administrative inclusive history of Namibia being a country that underwent apartheid colonialism by the South African government, before independence in 1990, most of the administration was conducted at the head offices in Windhoek. Thereafter, after independence in 1990, some public service governance policies from the old dispensation still continued to be enforced in many government sectors in the country.

Barber (1989) states that “the public administration systems inherited by newly independent African states had been designed for political dominion and economic exploitation” and that is why the Namibian government began changing policies to suit the new environment and to protect the Namibian citizens who were not well catered for in the earlier government policies. During the early 1990’s, the Government of the Republic of Namibia created functioning institutions of governance at all levels through its Policy of Decentralization.

Ball (2002) states that the most important elements of the colonial states are: Political direction and control of a subject society by a foreign power, whether a board of directors, Bureaucratic elitism and authoritarian from the beginning of the twentieth century, where army, police, and civilian departments were organized in large bureaucracies characterised in principle at least by hierarchy,
continuity, impersonality and expertise. These were emphasised to the exclusion of the subject population, as key administrative positions were reserved for a small group of political administrators primarily on the basis of race. The use of traditional or customary authority figures in colonial society, not accountable to local dwellers but to colonial administrators, which often allowed petty despotisms to develop. The free use of force, first by the military and later by the police, which protected only those in power and the propertied classes while oppressing the ordinary people.

1.2 Statement of the problem
It is a well-known fact that compared to all other countries of the world, Africa has the weakest formal local government structures, judged by size of expenditures and employees. Yet, decentralisation is not new to the region. Since the colonial period, diverse attempts have been made to decentralise state structures. The economic crisis of the 1970s which was followed by structural adjustment and political reforms in the 1980s led to new initiatives in decentralisation designed to improve state systems that were widely regarded to have failed. By the end of the 1990s, it was possible to classify African countries in terms of those with progressive policies on decentralisation and those that stuck with the old forms of deconcentration (Brynard 2010). At regional and Local Government levels there is lack of coordination of delegated functions in terms of planning and managing of central government seconded staff personnel files. Planning of delegated functions are done separately from the regional council’s activities in most African states.

2. Literature Review
Van As (2000) defines a literature review as a critical summary and assessment of the range of existing literature in a given field. Literature review can be restricted to books and papers in one discipline or sub discipline or may be ranging in approach. The main purpose is to situate the research to form its context or background and to provide insight into previous work. According to Dele Olowu,(2004) devolution is viewed as a zero-sum power game in which local actors gain at the expense of the centre rather than a positive sum power game in which all players both local and centre gain over time. A second political dilemma is the problem of local elite capture. Burns (1996) argue that devolutionary decentralisation confronts two major political problems. The first is the unwillingness of political and administrative leaders to share monopoly power-inherited from the colonial period. This is in part due to fears that devolution might undermine national cohesion and fan the embers of secession in societies in which ethnic and community loyalties are quite strong. There is also the fear that devolution might compromise the integrity of nationally delivered services. In many instances these rational fears are often a cloak for the fear on the part of ruling elites at the center of losing their grip on political power.

In many instances, it is local elites rather than most vulnerable that capture decentralized power which is then utilized to repress local minorities including women and other marginalized groups. This leads to a politics that emphasizes electing whoever is best able to promote local community interests rather than contributing to the nation’s interests as a whole (Dele Olowu,2004). Dillinger (1993) defines deconcentration as the transfer of power to local administrative offices of central government. The World Bank Group (2003: 4) characterizes it as the weakest form of decentralization that used most frequently in unitary states to redistribute the decision making authority, financial and management responsibilities among different levels of the central government to the local government at the regional level.

The World Bank Group (2001) defines delegation as the transfer of certain responsibility for decision-making and administration of public functions to the local government. It characterises it as a more extensive form of decentralisation because the central government gives the authority to take over certain functions as semi-autonomous. Furthermore, in this case the central government does not wholly control on the activities of these institutions but the institutions remain accountable to the central government. There is also fear that devolution might compromise the integrity of ostensibly nationally delivered services. Central governments often misused their wide powers of control over local governments, using them instead to settle political scores or victimise councils controlled by opposing parties. These two political dilemmas must be overcome before any country can have effective and institutionalised local governance systems. Local governments in Africa have rarely been based on subjective communities that the community of persons to which the average citizen feels the greatest ties and where he she belongs. Elected councilors are expected to represent the interests of their local communities once elected to the council. In particular, local assemblies are expected to provide oversight over the executive (Du Toit, D. F. P. & Van der Waldt, G, 2013).
More importantly, responsibilities of local governments often required the details with which central government have preferred to deal with big project and companies, which even when they perform successfully, are not well suited to local development. In addition, central immobility and, at times, actual incompetence have delayed and disrupted local government activities. In many instances, central government departments charged with oversight over local governments have not possessed the skills or had incentives to scrutinise the range of matters or the detailed information necessary to fulfill their responsibilities. For instance, central governments frequently fail to approve local government budgets by the deadlines set those central governments (Du Toit, D. F. P. & Van der Waldt, G, 2013).

Harvey (2005) revealed that high levels of statism, in a way that was rarely known elsewhere, to ensure that colonizers profited maximally from the colonial enterprise. In particular, the state created monopoly control over the purchase and export of goods. This continued after independence to the benefit of those who wielded central power. An ideology explaining the colonial masters’ benevolence and invincibility, which led to patterns of dependency first by the colonized peoples, and between the local elites as a dominant group and the African masses.

Elections should promote citizens’ voice in three ways. They constitute a major form of participation, as indicated by the voter turn-out figures. They have the potential to enhance accountability and provide information on policy intentions and outcomes to electors. The problem is that money, violence, and corruption dominate local election as they do national elections in many Africa countries. Some countries have therefore sought to supplement elections into local councils with other mechanisms such as recall by constituents.

A recurring problem that impedes effective local voice via elections is the tendency of local participation to fragment into personalist, religious kin-focused or patronage-oriented factions. Further complicating the incentive for local popular organization are situations where a proportion of local council membership is appointed by the central government (Lijphart, 2015).

### 2.1 Inequalities in power

According to Andeweg (2000) Inequality and politics also interact, often in negative ways. “Inequalities in income and human capabilities often reflect inequalities in political power,” observes the UNDP report. Poor people, women, rural populations and marginalised ethnic groups are disadvantaged in part because they usually are badly organised, have a weak political voice and in many countries are excluded from major areas of decision-making especially those involving the distribution of economic and social resources. Unequal political power, adds the World Bank, “leads to the formation of institutions that perpetuate inequalities in power, status and wealth.”

Apartheid South Africa was a prime example. That country’s white supremacist political system denied the most basic rights to the African majority, who were disenfranchised, uprooted from their lands and confined to menial, low-paying jobs. Until the apartheid system was dismantled in the 1990s, race and income levels overlapped almost completely. The country is still struggling to overcome that legacy.

Milanovic, in his study of inequality in Africa, finds that ethnic divisions elsewhere in Africa also tend to reinforce economic and social inequalities to some extent. Ethnic “fragmentation,” he says, can contribute to inequality “by leading to a political fight over the spoils between the different ethnic groups.” Those groups with greater political power have an advantage over their competitors.

Findings by Clapham (1998) revealed that inequality, in turn, can help fuel political instability. According to data compiled by the UN University, based on comprehensive household surveys in 25 African countries, Sierra Leone had the highest level of inequality in 1989, just before the outbreak of its decade-long civil war. The richest 20 per cent of the population accounted for more than 63 per cent of all expenditures, while the bottom 40 per cent had the resources to spend just a meagre 3.1 per cent. After that war ended, surveys of former combatants found that many young people in Sierra Leone felt a sense of hopelessness, worsened by visible signs of elite wealth and power, which had contributed to their decision to take up arms (Berkeley, 1991).

### 2.2 Bringing back the state

The poorest and most marginalized lack the resources or political voice to influence the distribution of goods and services. Markets most benefit those with the greatest wealth and power. Rothchild (2005) argues that the main means for overcoming inequity lie with state institutions that operate in the interests of the general public. The state is also more effective in addressing risk, vulnerability, social exclusion, destitution and many other issues not amenable to microeconomic calculus.”
In conclusion, strengthening local accountability mechanisms is a step needed to resolve these problems. Effective local accountability requires community activism and organization, and institutions open and effective in responding to the issues raised by the citizens. Strong and broadly based patterns of accountability can counteract elite dominance and challenge local patrimonial capture of resources. By implication, strengthened democratic local governance institutions may help sustain national democracy through this difficulty moment.

3. Research Method

Leedy, 1989 as cited in Melville & Goddard (1996) argues that research is a systematic quest for undiscovered knowledge. In order to establish an appropriate methodology for the research paper, the study considered certain variables for the issue under investigation. The research paper further use various research methods and techniques to acquire knowledge.

3.1 Research Design

This research paper adopted qualitative research design as the research methods to be used in investigating the spread of wealth and power at regional and local government levels for better service delivery in the African context. Royce & Bruce (1993) argue that qualitative research design gives the researcher an opportunity to interact with individuals or groups whose experiences the researcher wants to understand.

The research design will focus on fostering a relationship of trust and empathy between the researcher and the research subjects. The data will be collected by means of interviews, observations and documentary analysis as well as questionnaires. These will be planned and conducted in a way that will encourage research participants to feel that they can speak freely. De Vos & Schulze (2002: 176) argue that in a qualitative approach, procedures are not formalised. The researcher opted for qualitative approach to answer the research question which will be a meaningful contribution for policymakers.

3.2 Research population

Melville & Goddard (1996: 29) state that a population is any group who is the subject of research interest or want to study. It further says that it not practical or possible to study an entire population therefore the researcher has to determine the average.

3.3 Sampling procedures

This research paper used a purposive non-probability sampling. The research paper targeted 30 respondents who were purposefully selected from some African countries.

3.4 Research instruments

This paper used the qualitative research method. The researchers employ multiple instruments and techniques within the qualitative approach of data collection. In the context of the study, the following research instruments were used: semi-structured interviews, observations and documentary analysis.

The paper used the in-depth individual interviews to collect data and to get a deeper understanding of the individual’s perception and experience of the phenomenon. According to Patton, cited by Merriam, argues that we cannot observe feelings, thoughts and intentions. We cannot observe behaviours that took place in a previous point in time. We cannot observe situations that preclude the presence of an observer. The purpose of interviewing is to allow us to enter into the other person’s perspective (Merriam, 2001:72).

Observations were used to obtain the richest data which supplement the interviews. In addition, the researcher collected official documents such as the decentralization policy, Act, Rules and Regulations and other related documents. For Lincoln and Guba (1985), document analysis is important because it gives the researcher a general background on the subject that is being studied. Since official records are Vital sources of data, it is necessary to include the documents to enhance the interviews.

3.5. Data collection procedures

Both primary and secondary data were employed to collect information from the respondents. Informed consent was obtained from the ministries and the selected respondents before personal interviews were conducted. A personal interview was used as the data-collection method and a face-to-face setting took place between the interviewer and the interviewee. The researcher used semi-structured interviews and the responses were recorded on a tape-recorder and then transcribed.

3.6 Data analysis

Thorne (1997) defines analysis of data as an explicit step in theoretically interpreting data collected by using specific strategies to transform the raw data into a process form of data. For Bogdan and Biklein (1982) “analysis of data involves working with data, organising it, breaking it down, synthesising it, searching for patterns, discovering what is important and what is to be
learned and deciding what a researcher will tell others” (1982:145).

The researcher classified the similar responses to emerge into themes and categories. As McMillan & Schumacher (1993) stress that qualitative data analysis is an inductive process of organising the data into categories and identifying patterns among the categories. Furthermore, the categories and patterns emerge from the data rather than being imposed on the data, prior to data collection. In other words, after data was collected the interview records were edited, based on the categories of the various offices. This helped the researcher to examine the interview transcripts and documentary notes before identifying the patterns and organizing the data into categories.

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