

**THE POLITICS OF DECENTRALIZATION IN AFRICA**  
**A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS**

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## I: INTRODUCTION

Alongside the familiar economic and democratic-electoral reforms that have occurred in African countries since 1980, and especially after 1990, another significant reform, if less visible and less celebrated, has been the progressive decentralization of the state. While analysts and practitioners have long noted the extreme centralization of the state in Africa since independence, the situation today is decidedly different. Whether arising from dramatic political reforms, donor pressure and programs, or as part of evolutionary administrative change, recent local governance revival has been one of the most significant facets of state restructuring in Africa since independence.

In a recent World Bank study, thirteen of 30 countries surveyed showed high or moderate levels of decentralization as measured by a composite index of political, administrative, and fiscal devolution indicators.<sup>1</sup> Another thirteen showed at least some degree of decentralization, with several in the process of change. Although not all countries have fully revived local governance, the study also indicated no country in Africa today propounds a preference for the centralized state. Indeed, nearly all countries claim in one way or another to be decentralizing power, resources, and accountability to local levels. Yet, as present evidence indicates, the process of reform and results of recent decentralization are widely varied and the underlying processes not fully understood.

The purpose of this paper is to contribute to our understanding of the different pathways to decentralization, via a focus on the political dynamics of the process. To be sure, the technical challenges associated with a move to decentralization are daunting. They include the creation of new political tiers of government, the introduction of intergovernmental fiscal systems, and the realignment of administrative systems. Correspondingly, there is a rich technical literature on the options within each of the administrative, fiscal, and political dimensions, as well as on the strengths and weaknesses of alternative sequencing options among the dimensions.

The technical literature, however, tends to neglect the political underpinnings of decentralization, even though state transformation to shift resources and authority closer to the civic front-line is a profoundly political process. This paper aims to help redress the imbalance between technical and political analysis. The intent is not to imply that technical analysis has no place, or that there are no 'degrees of freedom' available to policymakers. Rather, the implication is that the room for maneuver is constrained, that options arise within the context of specific political realities prevailing in individual countries. Only if technical analysis is grounded in these realities can it be useful in identifying and evaluating alternative feasible options.

The paper proceeds as follows. The next section of the paper lays out a simple framework for assessing comparatively the politics of decentralization within individual countries. Sections Three and Four apply the framework to three countries – Uganda, Senegal and Malawi. The cases were deliberately selected to capture a wide range of reform efforts and outcomes in the region.<sup>2</sup> Thus, Senegal exemplifies an enduring democracy with a long-running effort to decentralize but with an ultimately stalled

process. Uganda exemplifies radical and early decentralization following a revolutionary take-over and one that is past the stage of installing structural reforms and now contends with consolidation. The political drivers of the very different Ugandan and Senegalese dynamics are explored in Section Three.

Section Four turns to Malawi as an intermediate case. Malawi's experience with decentralization is less long-lived than the other two; its current progress appears midway between that of Uganda and Senegal; and it evinces an ebb and flow in its decentralization reform often threatened by broader issues of an ongoing political transition. Additionally, the Malawian case raises some interesting questions as to the interaction between decentralization and grass-roots participation, and whether the latter can actively be nurtured in support of decentralized governance.

The paper's final section draws from the cases some suggested lessons for a politically-sensitive approach to decentralization reform.

## **II: ASSESSING THE POLITICS OF DECENTRALIZATION: A FRAMEWORK**

This section lays out a framework for assessing the politics underlying different pathways to decentralization. While our point of departure is the familiar distinction between 'big bang' and incremental reforms, the framework goes beyond this simple duality.

Traditionally, analysts identify 'big bang' reforms as those in which local political authority is created or revived, center-local fiscal governance systems deployed, and personnel transferred from the center to localities in a massive program rolled out across all sectors and regions, and within a short period.<sup>3</sup> Most recently typified by the decentralizations in Indonesia and Pakistan, this mode of reform tends to be driven by intensely political imperatives, usually linked to a drive to recover or reinvent political legitimacy. Among the most prominent African examples are Uganda, South Africa and, in an ongoing case, Ethiopia.

The vast majority of African countries that have explored decentralization have done so incrementally, with changes ranging from the barely perceptible to more dramatic but sequential reforms over time. The list includes Senegal, Malawi, Tanzania, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Cote d'Ivoire, and Ghana, with several of them tracing their evolutionary devolution (or intentions) to the 1980s especially. However, most subordinated that aim to the centralization that attended various shades of authoritarian rule. In addition, in the more recent phase of decentralization revival few countries have encountered the significant break with the established model of politics that would allow for a more energized pursuit of devolution given its implications for political control.

The narrow pre-occupation with 'big bang' versus incrementalist reform has at least two shortcomings. First, the universe of cases in the latter category is so broad, and so varied, as to render 'incrementalist decentralization' a meaningless 'catch-all', especially since the incremental mode typifies the large majority of decentralizing

countries, and hence deserves closer attention and differentiation based on the context that reform confronts.

Second, while much of the analytical literature and the internal Bank discussion on the choice between “big bang” and incremental decentralization focuses on the technical strengths and weaknesses of each option, declarations of the pace of reform as causal, desirable, or critical to success may overstate its relevance compared to the state-society structure confronted by a reforming (or non-reforming) regime. Rather, the pace and substance of reform may be linked (as dependent variables) to the status quo ante as defined by the incentives, constraints and opportunities confronted by the principal stakeholders vis a vis any move towards decentralization.

Figure 1 lays out a two dimensional framework for assessing the dynamics of decentralization in individual country settings. The first dimension distinguishes among three key sets of stakeholders, vis a vis decentralization:

- *political elites*, comprising in particular the political leadership (which may be unified, or may be a coalition) which controls the levers of governmental authority;
- *bureaucrats* within central government, at all levels of authority; and
- *communities*, both local elites, and ‘grassroots’ stakeholders (the term ‘community’ is preferred over ‘civil society’ because it better captures the essentially ‘local’ dimension of civic activism that is especially relevant for an analysis of decentralization).

While external actors, especially development aid organizations, have significantly shaped decentralization policies in several countries, we do not analyze them separately for two reasons. First, we focus on internal constituencies, which, while influenced by external actors, respond principally and in the long run to internal dynamics. Second, the actions and interests exhibited by internal stakeholders presumably already reflect compromises with or reactions to the influence exerted by external actors.

Arrayed along the other dimension are three distinct (though potentially overlapping<sup>4</sup>) phases of decentralization:

- *Engaging decentralization*, the initial phase when fundamental decisions as to state structure – specifically to what extent, and how, to shift resources and responsibilities ‘downwards’ to communities (including the establishment of elected local governments) – are on the national agenda;
- *Detailing decentralization*, the phase in which the specific fiscal and administrative mechanisms needed to give life to local empowerment are clarified and rolled out in an initial phase of implementation; and

- *Sustaining decentralization*, an ongoing phase of learning-by-doing in which the institutional arrangements of the intergovernmental system are continually fine-tuned

Figure 1 poses a series of questions vis a vis the role and influence of each stakeholder at each phase of the process. As the figure suggests, these roles vary both across stakeholders and, for a given stakeholder, across different phases of the decentralization process. Further, some questions are highlighted, signaling that the roles of different stakeholders may be more or less crucial at different phases of the process.

**Figure 1**

	<b>Political elite stakeholders</b>	<b>Bureaucratic stakeholders</b>	<b>Community stakeholders</b>
<b>Engaging decentralization</b>	<i>How strong is the elite political consensus in favor of decentralization?</i>	To what extent is the decentralization discourse underpinned by technical and comparative analysis?	How strong is bottom-up pressure for local empowerment?
<b>Detailing decentralization</b>	How engaged is the political elite in ensuring that the details of decentralization are consistent with the political intent?	<i>How co-operative is the bureaucracy in developing and implementing new decentralized systems of governance?</i>	How involved are civil society organizations in defining their entry points and their level of involvement in contemplated technical details
<b>Sustaining decentralization</b>	To what extent do elite political and bureaucratic stakeholders seek to reassert central control over authority and resources?		<i>How capable are communities of enforcing downward accountability on local elites?</i>

Consider, for example, the (highlighted) role of political elites during the initial phase of engaging decentralization. Arguably, ‘big bang’ reforms are only possible and desirable when political consensus for reform is high and local grassroots organization is high. Where reform is attempted while the political consensus is low and the level of grassroots organization is low, decentralization is likely to stall or achieve only moderate and easily reversible gains. Thus, in those settings where decentralization reforms appear stillborn, with grand-sounding rhetoric and detailed planning never

translating into changes on the ground, reformers might have paid excessive attention in the *engaging decentralization* phase to technical questions of sequencing and capacity, and neglected the political dimension. Yet, at the initial stage, the extent to which a broad consensus is reached and champions are empowered to both push the agenda and survive backlashes determines the extent to which the process goes forward.

Now consider the (highlighted) role of the bureaucracy during the detailing phase. In some settings, decentralization reforms appear to move forward rapidly, only to disappoint down the road. *Prima facie*, the cause of this disappointment might be viewed as technical, with perception of failure interpreted as a consequence of the complexity of what is being attempted, and the difficulty of aligning the many facets of decentralization. But, even at this stage, sequencing and pace are not simply technical issues. They are continually conditioned by the enduring political consensus and commitment since at each stage new negotiations must be undertaken as old institutions and networks are unraveled, and as new communities of interest are affected. Central bureaucrats in particular may find themselves in an especially ambiguous position, given that only they have the detailed knowledge of administrative systems needed to make decentralization work. Whether they embrace the reforms, or resist them as potentially threatening, may thus be key to the technical coherence, and thus effectiveness, of implementation.

Finally, consider the (highlighted) role of community stakeholders vis a vis the ongoing sustainability of decentralization. Where the reform consensus is high but the level of grassroots organization is low then the path to reform may be a short-lived 'big bang' with a longer period of struggle to make installed components effective – especially if installed components require an active and empowered citizenry at the local level. In cases where grassroots organization is strong but political consensus for reform is weak or non-existent, explosive social tensions may arise. Indeed, in such instances, the problem, typically strictly political, is much larger than centralization.

### **III: COMMITMENT AND CONTRADICTION: UGANDA AND SENEGAL COMPARED**

In both Uganda and Senegal, decentralization has long been central to the development discourse. Uganda's National Resistance Movement (NRM) pursued 'popular rule' immediately upon acceding to power in 1986, and worked to give concrete substance to this decentralized vision throughout the 1990s. Senegal has been experimenting since the early 1960s with initiatives to counteract its Francophone legacy of strong centralization; high profile public sector reforms to deepen decentralization were initiated in 1972, 1984, 1990, and 1996. Yet, notwithstanding Senegal's long track record, as the next subsection will show, there has been much more progress in actually transforming the state in a decentralized manner in Uganda than in Senegal. Why this is the case will be explored in the subsections that follow, using the framework delineated in Section II.

### *Progress in Decentralization*

Uganda and Senegal are among the more decentralized countries in sub-Saharan Africa, ranking (in a comparison by one of the present authors) 2<sup>nd</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> most decentralized of a group of 30 countries.<sup>5</sup> However, this aggregate ranking conceals sharp differences between the countries in decentralization performance: On a 0-4 scale, Uganda is rated at least 3 for each of political, administrative, and fiscal decentralization. By contrast, Senegal achieves a score of 3 only for political decentralization, and scores only 1.2 (20<sup>th</sup> in the 30 country sample) for administrative decentralization.

*Political decentralization:* Both Uganda and Senegal have in place local authorities embedded in a comprehensive, well-defined framework of territorial governance. In both countries, the lowest tier of government is directly elected; turnout is reasonably good, and the elections are perceived to be fair.

Under the 1995 constitution, Uganda established the district as the most significant local government unit, with a directly elected district chairperson and council. There are at present 48 districts, a steep rise from the 39 initially established in the early phase of decentralization. In the initial phase of its decentralization in the late 1980s, Uganda had in place a five tier governance structure: Each village elected a nine-member Resistance Council, which in turn constituted an electoral college that elected a member to the next level resistance council at the parish and it in turn elected a representative to the sub-county, county, and district, and ultimately the National Resistance Council (NRC), effectively the parliament.<sup>6</sup>

Senegal's 1996 reform put in place an institutional and territorial landscape comprising 434 local governments: 11 regions, 103 communes (60 ordinary legal communes and 43 district communes) and 320 rural communes. The communes are elected bodies and have elected executives while the regional authorities are elected but their executive appointed by the president. Both the communes and regions have enjoyed legal personality and financial autonomy dating back to 1972.

*Fiscal decentralization, and formal assignment of responsibilities:* Without responsibilities – and without fiscal resources to follow through on formally assigned responsibilities – the creation of an elected local tier of government becomes an empty gesture. While both Uganda and Senegal have assigned far-reaching responsibilities to local government, only Uganda backs this up with the provision of adequate fiscal resources.

Uganda's 1993 Local Governments Statute assigned a wide array of responsibilities to district-level local authorities. The competencies devolved to district councils included several duties previously overseen by ministries in charge of trade and industry; agriculture; lands and housing; education and sports; health; information; labor and welfare; internal affairs; women and youth; and tourism, as well as several functions of the ministry of local government.

The assignment of a broad range of responsibilities was undergirded by the provision of fiscal resources. As Figure 1 shows, between 1995 and 1998, transfers to local governments increased 148% from US\$ 118 billion in 1995-96 to US\$ 291 billion

in 1998-99. The share of Uganda's consolidated national expenditures for which grants were made to local governments, already 11% in 1996, rose to 20% by 1999.<sup>7</sup>

**Table 1: Transfers to Local Governments, 1995/6-1998/9 (Ushs millions)**

<b>Description</b>	<b>1995/96</b>	<b>1996/97</b>	<b>1997/98</b>	<b>1998/99</b>
Unconditional grants	40575	48718	51783	64388
Conditional grants	17935	37200	51150	83461
Conditional salaries	59244	90597	101484	143646
Unconditional as share of transfers	34%	28%	25%	22%
Total	117755	176514	204417	291495
As % of total expenditures	11.1%	15.8%	16.8%	19.9%

*Source: Background to the Budget, 1998*

Note, though, that as the share of total expenditure transferred to local governments increased from 11.1% in 1995-96 to 19.9% in 1998-9, the degree of expenditure autonomy (share of transfers that were unearmarked) decreased – from 34% to 22%. This resulted from an increase between 1995 and 2000 in the number of conditional grants to fifteen. The proliferation of conditional grants in Uganda is illustrative of a strategy on the part of sectoral ministries to use the intergovernmental fiscal system in ways that “protect” expenditures in priority areas (often at the expense of expenditure autonomy). As Uganda illustrates, intergovernmental fiscal transfers on a large-scale do not automatically guarantee expenditure autonomy for local government tiers.

While the Ugandan fiscal system is something of a ‘half-way’ compromise between centralization and devolution – i.e. provide money, but with strings attached – the Senegalese system goes nowhere near even that far. To be sure, in terms of the administrative allocation of responsibilities, Senegal’s 1996 decentralization reforms appear initially almost as far-reaching as Uganda’s. The 1996 law formally transferred to communes nine areas of responsibilities – planning, land planning, public land administration, urbanization, health, education, environment, youth and sports/culture. Finance did not, however, follow function.

The 1996 law also made provision for the establishment of two funds to provide budget support to enable local governments to take on these expanded responsibilities – a Decentralization Fund (the *fond de dotation a la decentralisation, FDD*) to finance current expenditures, and a fund to finance local investment (the *fond d’equipement des collectivites locales*). In practice, however, the transfer of fiscal resources has been way below a level commensurate with the expanded scale of responsibilities. Unofficial Senegalese government estimates were that 80 to 100 billion CFAs (about 25 percent of consolidated public expenditures for the year 2000) were required to finance the expanded responsibilities. In practice, the total combined amount budgeted in 2000 for the two funds was only 9 billion CFAs (under 3 percent of consolidated expenditures) –

with commune-specific data suggesting that the actual amounts transferred were below the allocated amount, and indeed had declined after 1997.

*Administrative decentralization:* Administrative reform is needed to give effect on the ground to the reassignment of responsibilities, and associated fiscal decentralization. It has multiple dimensions, potentially including:

- Reassignment of staff from being employees of central government to local government employees (or, at a minimum, taking direction from elected local authorities);
- Loosening control over the terms and conditions of employment at local government level, potentially to the point of allowing them to be set by individual local governments themselves; and
- Realigning central ministries to take on strategic, regulatory, standard-setting and monitoring functions, not (now decentralized) direct service delivery.

Note that deconcentration – the shifting of resources and personnel within central government from the capital city to outlying offices – is not decentralization, but can facilitate it. Whether or not it does so depends in important part on whether deconcentrated staff help build the capacity of local governments, and their bureaucracies, with a view to eventually working themselves out of a job. Or whether they compete with local authorities and work to assert central government control at the deconcentrated level. In the context of this paper therefore, we view decentralization as having at its core a devolution of a full complement of power, resources, and responsibilities to local entities – what others have called democratic decentralization.

As with the fiscal dimension, Uganda’s approach to administrative decentralization has been simultaneously bold and constraining. It has been bold both in its willingness to reassign staff from central to local government, and in its readiness to realign central ministries to reflect these transformed realities. Thus, the 1993 Local Government Act transferred administrative power from a deconcentrated district administrator to the chair of the ‘downwardly accountable’ district council government and mandated the transfer of civil servants in the decentralized ministries to the district councils. In part as a consequence of these changes, between 1992 and 1997 total employment in Uganda’s central government fell from 320,000 to 147,000.

Yet alongside these bold, decentralizing actions, the new Ugandan institutional order also built in a variety of mechanisms to ensure that the center retained the capacity for discretionary intervention at the local level. Under the 1993 legislation, budgetary control of deconcentrated ministries remained in the hands of District Executive Secretaries, who reported to the center, not district councils. Moreover, the post of chief Central Government Representative (CGR) was created. Appointed by the president and charged with overseeing all central government activities and supervising political mobilization and security matters locally, though formally politically neutral, the CGR

position bore a close resemblance to that of the former District Commissioner.<sup>8</sup> The central government also retained the power to suspend or dissolve district councils and to change the parameters of prerogatives ceded to local authorities by action of the Minister in charge without recourse to parliament. Finally, while District Service Commissions (DSCs) were created to take responsibility for setting and overseeing the terms and conditions of employment of subnational public employees, norms and membership in the DSC had to be vetted by the national Public Service Commission. The DSCs thus lack key aspects of the authority needed to autonomously carry out their role.

If the Ugandan approach to implementing administrative decentralization combines boldness with residual control, in Senegal, by contrast, no boldness whatsoever is evident. Consistent with Francophone practice, there is virtually no (even semi-) independent bureaucracy recruited by, and accountable to local authorities. Rather, the intent of Senegal's 1996 decentralization law (and the earlier reforms) was to institute a multi-level, deconcentrated structure for central government, with line ministries represented at the central, regional and district levels, plus multi-purpose technical service centers intended to provide support for local governments at the district level. The deconcentrated offices of central government would act on behalf of elected local governments.

This has not worked as formulated. As a recent study has shown<sup>9</sup>, the deconcentrated realm remains small, weak in implementation, and accountable upwards to principals at the central government level. Constraints inhibiting effective operation at the deconcentrated level include the following:

- Staffing at the deconcentrated level remains insufficient;
- Personnel recruitment and management continues to be centralized;
- Inadequate resources are provided to operate at the deconcentrated level, and where resources are provided the disbursement process remains centrally controlled and cumbersome;
- Investment decisions continue to be centralized;
- Friction is pervasive between the staff of deconcentrated services and locally elected officials.

*Progress in decentralization, an overview:* In sum, while both Senegal and Uganda have in place the political architecture needed for decentralization, only in Uganda has this been complemented with fiscal and administrative systems capable of giving life to the formal structures. As the next subsections will show, these variations in performance can be explained by differences in the political and bureaucratic incentives which shaped the ways in which each country engaged and detailed decentralization, and in which civil society participated in the process as a whole.

### ***Engaging Decentralization – with, and without, an embrace***

This section contrasts the extent to which political elites in Uganda and Senegal embraced decentralization during the initial, 'engaging' phase identified in the

framework laid out in Section II. Prima facie, for political elites at the center of power to embrace decentralization is something of an unnatural act: it seemingly involves the surrender of power on the part of politicians who are likely to have devoted their lives to its accumulation. Understanding the extent to which political elites embrace an agenda of decentralization thus requires careful attention to the underlying incentives and constraints governing their behavior. As will become evident, these were radically different in the Ugandan and Senegalese settings.

*Uganda's embrace of a decentralization 'window of opportunity':* Decentralization in Uganda was intensely political and very much tied to the National Resistance Movement's (NRM) pursuit of legitimacy after capturing power in January 1986. Conditions that Uganda confronted in 1986 provided three factors that were important to the success of the decentralization program. First, the collapse of a brutal central state made possible a critique (and for the incoming regime already a praxis) that made decentralization desirable; second, the significant collapse of the state provided institutional fluidity that made decentralization less resistible by vested interests. And third, the NRM proved itself to be a regime both strong and astute enough to insist on decentralization and to author friction-neutralizing compromises to further its purposes.

The context in which the NRM came to power and the nature of the state it found explain much of why decentralization was central to its political agenda. The NRM under President Yoweri Museveni was the revolutionary descendant of a political party defeated in Uganda's problematic 1980 elections. Following widespread complaints that the election had been rigged, the NRM formed and begun a guerilla war that eventually overthrew the second of short-lived military regimes that had intervened in the interim. Once it took power, the NRM pursued its Ten-Point Program of national reconstruction.<sup>10</sup> Significantly, the very first goal of the program was to restore power to the people starting with holding elections at the village level. Indeed, instituting village-level elections and creating so-called Resistance Councils was a tactic that the NRM had adopted in its insurgency as it progressively conquered villages in its march to the center.

The introduction of this level of democratic decentralization emanated from a critique of the decline of the 'democratic' state, especially at the local level, since independence. While the most graphic and memorable decline was under Idi Amin's military dictatorship (1971-1979), the decline of local government (and governance in general) had begun under Uganda's first president, Milton Obote. A brief review of this history helps understand the verve with which the NRM pursued and Ugandans embraced decentralization in the late 1980s. After independence and until 1986, centralization proceeded in tandem with the rise of authoritarianism in Uganda and was marked by a series of events that indicated the decline of constitutional rule. The years following independence in 1962 were characterized by a tension between the kingdoms and the central state. In 1966, President Obote suspended the independence constitution that had provided for a quasi-federal arrangement between the central state and the precedent traditional kingdoms, the most important of which was Buganda.<sup>11</sup>

The abrogation of the independence constitution and the enactment of the 1967 constitution (essentially via extreme duress over parliament) underscored the extreme centralization of power under Obote. Under the 1967 Local Administration Act, local councils became largely appointed bodies. According to one analyst, since independence and especially after 1967, local governments “became not only instruments of central and party control but also sources of patronage and personal enrichment, trends for the most part reinforced under Amin and Obote II regimes”.<sup>12</sup> As Tukahebwa summarizes:

The UPC government in the 1960s centralized power while the military regime in the 1970s accentuated centralization and militarized local administration up to the lowest level. Local administrations were thus avenues through which military directives could filter from the top to the lowest levels in the villages.<sup>13</sup>

It was in reaction to this lack of local representation and the excessive brutality of the central state under all the successor regimes following Obote’s (1962-1971), that the NRM pursued a preference for local power as a foundation for its own regime’s legitimacy. The institutional fluidity that confronted the NRM once it assumed power was also an important opportunity for it to re-write the rules of state power. Thus, as Nelson Kasfir notes, when the NRM assumed power it proclaimed the 1967 constitution – the last workable legal framework – but circumvented its deeply centralizing notions by “suspending portions that granted executive and legislative powers to the president and parliament”.<sup>14</sup> Instead, the NRM re-designed the legislative organs around the five tier, village-anchored, electoral college structure described earlier.

*Senegal – engaging decentralization without consummating:* Upon independence, Senegal inherited the radically centralized state that was the legacy of colonialism across Africa, and especially Francophone Africa. As with most newly independent African countries, the Senegalese restlessly experimented with a variety of options for restructuring the state bequeathed by colonialism; *engagement* with options for decentralization was an important part of that exploration.

Yet for all of its experimentation, in practice Senegal has been among the most stable countries in independent Africa. Unlike Uganda, where the 1986 NRM regime marked a profound break with the colonial legacy (which had itself decayed terminally over the previous fifteen plus years), Senegal is in many ways a model of continuity, and gradual change. This stability has yielded some important benefits: a progressively more pluralistic polity; slow, but relatively steady (and certainly better than the African average) economic gains. But it has not been an environment conducive to substantial state restructuring – not only vis a vis decentralization, but more broadly. In the view of some official assessments, after 42 years of independence, “the administration is still excessively centralized”, “its performance is low” and “it costs too much”.<sup>15</sup>

Reflection on the disconnect between the imperatives of decentralization on the one hand, and Senegal’s institutional legacy on the other helps account for this modest progress. In Senegal, as in other post-colonial African states, the character of the state

has been shaped by two critical conditions which prevailed at the dawn of independence, and which gave rise to intense intervention in society and economy, for which centralization of decision-making was viewed as necessary. The first of these was an agenda of transforming and developing society, which it embraced as its overriding project even as it confronted scarce resources. The second was the shallow legitimacy of the state, which arose from the brevity of its historical existence and which created an imperative for the Senegalese state to entrench itself in fairly short order after independence.

Not unlike its French colonial precursor, the post-independence Senegalese state's intervention in society was founded on the need to tightly control the interior and in particular arrest the potential centrifugal tendencies that across the continent threatened the very existence of the state. As a result, the central state relied heavily on a top-down system that *administered* the interior rather than allow autonomous local governance structures, which it saw as potential independent sources and arenas of power likely to challenge the weak center. Projecting state presence, securing its supremacy and, when possible, imposing its prerogative for taxation, became critical goals for the state. In this context, public order often underscored by concurrence and convergence among elites possible only within centralized decision-making leads to the dominance of the executive, which then becomes the principal and often the only mover of state action.

The state's quest for dominance over and legitimacy in society can further be seen in the longstanding relations it has had with the Islamic brotherhoods, which have been central to politics in Senegal since before independence in particular in mediating state presence at the local level.<sup>16</sup> Although a secular state, it has had to secure support and compliance from the Muslim *sufi* orders to which an estimated 90% of the population belongs and which hold significant influence in individual and community relations with the state. For instance, in electoral politics, edicts (*ndigal*) from religious leaders historically played an important role in maintaining support for the *Parti Socialiste* (PS) and, in critical elections, the withholding of such support often turned the fortunes of politicians. At the local level, the *sufi* brotherhoods are even more significant interlocutors of state power and resources, with religious leaders often being the principal local notables through whom the state must negotiate legitimate entry into communities. That the Christian president Senghor was able to remove his Muslim PM in a showdown shortly after independence was largely due to the former's willingness to recognize (and thus empower) the *sufi* orders as critical anchors of state legitimacy in society. That the current president made a very public pilgrimage to consult his *marabout* (religious teacher) in one of his first public acts as president-elect is telling of the influence of the orders in Senegalese politics. Given that their power is most significant at the local level, the *sufi* orders are likely to influence decentralization as it will necessarily change the nature of the *marabout*-state relationship. The reasons why this relationship is likely to have been a disincentive to a transfer of authority from the center to democratically elected local authorities are explored later.

More recently, the reduction of the legitimate purview of state action through adjustment has made politicians and (as will be explored further below) bureaucrats particularly sensitive to preserving the remaining areas – especially those critical to imperatives of statehood such as revenue raising, expenditure, and projecting control (exercise of power).<sup>17</sup> The further constraints on central power implied by decentralization therefore invites blockage rather than support from state elites. Further, resistance to shedding further power or prerogatives to local authorities is likely to have been exacerbated by the transition associated with the regime change which took place in 2000.

In sum, attention to the incentives of Senegal's political elites suggests that what is remarkable is not so much the lack of progress (relative to Uganda) in effecting decentralization, but the fact that (at least by comparison with other African countries) there has been any progress at all.

***Detailing Decentralization: harnessing the bureaucracy to a new order***

*Detailing decentralization* is defined in this paper to comprise both the technical work of designing the fiscal and administrative 'nuts and bolts' of the intergovernmental system, and implementing these designs. The role of the central bureaucracy is key in both technical design and implementation; however, its incentives are mixed – especially when it comes to implementation. Indeed, in the phase of detailing decentralization the crucial difference between Uganda and Senegal is not so much in attention to the technical dimensions of the challenge (with which Senegal has engaged over a period spanning forty years) as it is in beginning to implement workably one or other variant of the technical models. This subsection explores why the process of harnessing the central (and deconcentrated) bureaucracy to the task of workably implementing decentralization was able to proceed further in Uganda than in Senegal.

*Uganda's bureaucrats and their political principals:* The terms of the relationship between Uganda's political leadership and its central bureaucracy were defined by the accession to power of the NRM in 1986, and the means via which it occurred. That process left no room for doubt that the new political leadership was in the driver's seat, though the process through which this assertion of political authority was effected took some years to complete, and ultimately the new leadership itself proved willing to embrace genuine decentralization only up to a point.

When it came to power the NRM initially accommodated many of the remnants of central state authority, especially the district administration, which tended to be the portion of the bureaucracy that survived several regimes as it acted (albeit powerfully) at the margins of the state: heads of government departments and chiefs were ex-officio members of Resistance Councils, and councils could be suspended by the central government for certain offences. A District Administrator who was a presidential appointee headed the district administration, while former District Commissioners were placed as District Executive Secretaries overseeing deconcentrated government ministries.

The integration of this vestigial officialdom was largely shaped by the NRM's inexperience in governing, the fact that it did not have enough people to ensure total dominance of the system, and an enduring propensity to compromise in the interest of a broad-based government. According to Kasfir, the "NRM leaders viewed this principle as an NRM reform intended to reverse political disorder by inviting opponents of the government to share power, instead of following the previous practice of monopolizing power in the hands of the victors".<sup>18</sup> Thus, for example, the NRM invited several of its opponents to join the cabinet when it came to power. It is in these compromises that the regime's early drive for legitimacy and fundamental concern to retain power is clearest.

Set against this initial retention of the deconcentrated structure was the NRM's commitment to the establishment of village level Resistance Councils to govern at the local level. While in "no other respect during its first four years did the NRM government achieve as much progress in implementing the political program," by 1990 the RC system seemed to reach its limits as an effective system of decentralized government.<sup>19</sup> In the absence of fiscal and administrative levers, in practice, local councils were limited to the mundane such as the distribution of commodities in times of shortage.<sup>20</sup> Inevitably, tensions emerged between RCs and deconcentrated civil servants, schooled as the latter were in longstanding authoritarian and centralizing practices. And, inevitably, given the new realities of power in Uganda, the political leadership moved to restructure the relationship between its newly-created five-tier political structure and the deconcentrated authorities.

The 1993 Local Governments (Resistance Councils) statute marked the launch of the detailing phase of decentralization – structuring, legislating, and implementing the specific political, fiscal and administrative arrangements described earlier. It moved the decentralization agenda beyond dispersing political power (albeit with continued central tutelage) and worked to concretize decentralization through "localized control over policy making, implementation and financial management".<sup>21</sup> The focus shifted from preoccupation with creating village level councils (LC I) to technically facilitating the districts (LC V) and providing them with substantive power to make decisions.

Yet, for all that, power had shifted decisively to the NRM – and for all the NRM's commitment to decentralized participation – there proved to be limits to how far Uganda's political leadership was ready to let go over central bureaucratic control over the decentralized realm. In part, these limits reflected a residual legacy of the past. For example, although a Commission of Inquiry to review decentralization and recommend further measures to deepen it had been appointed in 1987, it was not until 1993 that the formal changes were adopted. This delay reflected bureaucratic resistance, opposition from politicians especially of the old order, the lack of precedent and of champions outside the political establishment.<sup>22</sup>

But, as outlined earlier, the 1993 legislation also signaled a continued commitment on the part of the new leadership to maintain, through the (presumably now loyalist) central bureaucracy, discretionary influence at the decentralized level – evidenced by the continuing roles at the district level of the deconcentrated District Executive Secretary (DES), and of the Central Government Representative, as well as the

continuing right of central government to suspend, dissolve or alter the prerogatives of local authorities. Given these measures, it would be inaccurate to assert that Uganda's decentralized realm has decisively freed itself (even within its formally mandated sphere of authority) from the threat of veto from central political and bureaucratic leadership. Uganda's state, though certainly reconstituted radically since 1986, remains one where strong residual controls continue to radiate from the center.

*Senegal's elitist bureaucracy:* Bureaucrats everywhere are likely to find fault with reforms that erode their power and privilege. In Uganda, as we have seen, this conservative bureaucratic instinct was trumped by the country's radical political transformation. Senegal, by contrast, occupies the opposite end of the African spectrum in terms of the stability and stature of the bureaucracy. In such a setting, overcoming natural bureaucratic resistance to decentralization calls for a deliberate program to transform the skills and attitudes of bureaucrats in order for them to find relevance, influence, and prestige in the new decentralized state. With no such program forthcoming, it is hardly surprising that the Senegalese bureaucracy presumed that the cumulative effect of decentralization of authority, resources and personnel from the center to lower jurisdictions would be a permanent loss of their prerogatives – and, judging by the fiscal shortfalls and administrative bottlenecks described earlier – proceeded accordingly.

It would be a mistake, however, to assume that bureaucratic bottlenecks to decentralization in Senegal arose solely from devious machinations of a disgruntled civil service. Whether genuine or deployed simply as a protective ideology, the elitist attitudes bureaucrats hold toward Senegalese society (especially the rural masses) place severe constraints on their acceptance of decentralization as a good idea. Although not peculiar to the Senegalese case, the sense of superiority to society and of a special responsibility to transform society is pronounced among civil servants, especially those trained in the *Ecole Nationale d'Administration et Magistrature* (ENAM), the elite administration and management school.<sup>23</sup> ENAM-trained bureaucrats do not see the local authorities as venues for self-motivated progress, much like the colonial state administrators viewed the interior. Full decentralization would of necessity shift not only the arena of decision-making and implementation to the local level but would also challenge the development discourse that has for long underscored the prerogative of the technically advanced center bureaucrats to develop the 'backward interior subjects' of the state.<sup>24</sup>

Perhaps determined efforts to enhance the skills of bureaucrats so that they could provide the kind of support local governments will need if they have to carry out their new mandates under decentralization – combined with attrition at central levels, and options for redeployment of staff (to deconcentrated, and local government levels) – could overcome vested and ideological bureaucratic inertia.<sup>25</sup> Significantly, Senegal's 1996 decentralization plan does not empower localities to hire their own staff, nor does it provide for the deployment of staff to deconcentrated levels. Instead, the current decentralization law creates new layers of relationships and organizations for service

delivery, which at times adds to the existing number of institutions. The lack of clarity in some of the provisions has allowed central state functionaries to subvert the spirit of decentralization.

In the health sector, for example, local level committees on health are supposed to be created to coordinate budgetary allocations and service delivery. However, as the law does not provide for who should create these committees, they have not been set up in most areas. Therefore, decisions continue to be made by Ministry of Health functionaries who have no platform obligating them to share information and decision-making with local authorities.<sup>26</sup> Similarly, although funds allocated to localities are transmitted through the bureaucracy (principally through the regional *sous préfets* and *préfets*) the information is not automatically transmitted to the relevant regional council presidents or commune mayors who are charged with expending it. Mayors and council presidents are thus obliged to refer to such (supposedly subordinate) bureaucrats for this information although legally they are supposed to be in charge of the funds allocated to each locality.<sup>27</sup> Thus, in the complex web of authority that arises given new institutions created by the new decentralization law and the parallel layers of administration from before, decentralization is easily derailed by the inertia inherent in such complexity and ambiguity.

### ***Grassroots Participation and the Sustainability of Decentralization: Senegal & Uganda***

Figure 1 in Section II highlighted two distinct roles for grassroots participation as a country transits to decentralization. At the initial phase, when the question remains open whether or not to restructure state institutions along decentralized lines, a politically activated grassroots can be an important spur in the direction of shifting resources and authority downwards, closer to communities. And at the mature phase, when the challenge becomes one of sustaining an inclusive system, community activism can help immunize decentralized governments against the risk of local capture, ensuring that the decentralized system remains inclusive.

*Uganda – from an ephemeral to institutionalized grassroots:* When the NRM swept to power in January 1986, local organizations in Uganda were basically timid, powerless and marginalized, having suffered through systematic subjugation under the first post independence regime of Obote, virtual elimination through brutal public governance under Idi Amin, and subordination to political parties and proto-parties in the unstable democratic years after the fall of Amin's regime. Few independent civic organizations were active, mostly small commercial (e.g. coffee growers associations) and professional interest groups, and small-scale village or women's organizations. The vast majority of the rural based organizations had been forced to retreat from engagement with the state and unable to act in support community life as the state retreated from active governance. As a result when the NRM secured dominance, it confronted a dual reality in state-society relations: a civil society that, due to state brutality, was deeply suspicious of the state and that, due to state collapse, had managed to survive and retain relevance and abilities to pursue local governance imperatives in the absence or in spite of the state but not with it.

As such, the NRM's pursuit of local level participation found ready embrace in this environment, especially as citizens in the rural areas discovered its lower tolerance for brutality against civilians. In this context, the NRM instituted a countrywide resistance council system that provided for a five-layered representational structure paralleling a similar administrative structure. This structure – which represented both a fundamental overhaul of the state but also important compromises with existing local institutions and patterns of power – established several sub-national levels of participation and shared power but also maintained the center's fundamental hold on politics at all levels, underscoring the guarded devolution underway.

From very early on, Uganda's decentralization was therefore met with a strong local embrace by communities across the country. This was a result of both the structural change in operating conditions for civic activity at the fall of the repressive regime and the direct action taken by the new NRM regime to activate local civic activity. These actions were integral to the NRM's pursuit of capturing the state and rebuilding it anew as reflected in its ideological platform, the Ten-Point Programme, which was focused on community ownership of the revolution through extensive participation in governance. In power, the NRM's effort to decentralize was thus a direct result of this commitment to local participation in governance. In the absence of formal governmental organizations, when it captured power and before elaborating a functional local government system, the NRM used the resistance councils, organizing villagers and neighborhoods into cells that built upwards to the national assembly. In its initial efforts to reconstruct the state, the NRM used these cells to accomplish basic state functions such as local security, local adjudication, and food distribution in times of drought and crisis response.

The response by the previously disempowered civilians was an intense embrace. As one commentator stated, "as soon as the RCs (resistance councils) were introduced by legal instruments, the ordinary population began to gain confidence in the locally based institutions and to undertake local initiatives."<sup>28</sup> The activation of civil society was important because it also produced a new political class for local councils that had been schooled in the local accountability imposed by the resistance councils. Although in general local district councils were more representative and citizens participated actively in elections, their participation was limited in other facets that required more intense involvement or greater knowledge of administrative details (e.g. financial oversight).

*Senegalese social conservatism:* As noted earlier, a major buttress of Senegal's longstanding stability has been the alliance forged between putatively modernizing politicians and bureaucrats on the one hand and the *marabout*-led Muslim *sufi* orders (to which over 90 percent of the population belong) on the other. While this has provided an important degree of civil society check and balance on the exercise of state power, the check and balance turns out not be of a kind that is supportive of decentralization. Indeed, the Muslim brotherhoods do not seem engaged in the policy discourse on decentralization,<sup>29</sup> even though they have traditionally held sway in several local elections and in some areas practically nominate the list of candidates running for local authority assemblies.<sup>30</sup> Rather, the orders seek to maintain both autonomy and access to

state resources and only rarely challenge state elites. As leading analysts have noted, in return for access to resources, the *marabouts* help secure legitimacy for the state, and smooth pathways for bureaucratic practice for the civil service.<sup>31</sup> To the extent that this relationship works, even sub-optimally – and is what the Senegalese have known since before independence – all actors are likely to seek to retain it. At a minimum, any decentralization scheme would have to address how to engage this relationship between state and society at the local level.

Other than the religious orders, civil society organizations while active in other realms (e.g. culture) remain particularly weak in their engagement with governance issues, a consequence of both the historical dominance of the state over society and the privilege given to Muslim brotherhoods as mediators of collective interests. Civil society is thus not strong nor developed enough to seek interventions that forcefully articulate the need for decentralized governance. As a result, decentralization in Senegal remains very much a central government initiative rather than one that is pushed by civil society.

More pointedly, as one respondent suggests, what is weak in Senegal is *civilisme* – a sense of active citizenship among the people that prods them to engage the state at all levels not as supplicants, but as empowered citizens.<sup>32</sup> Given its legacy of openness and stability, in the 1990s Senegal experienced a different kind of transition to democracy than other African countries where a wholesale overturn of authoritarian regimes was often sought and therefore provided opportunity to revise notions of citizen engagement. In Senegal, the demands for a greater democratic opening were predominantly stated in the language of *alternance* (alternation) captured by the popular clarion call *sopi* (Wolof for ‘change’). While it is clear that the masses embraced and the politicians encouraged the understanding that *sopi* would not only bring change but would fundamentally reform the state (by then viewed as steeped in clientalism, patronage, and corruption) the reality is that *sopi* did not envision a change of how citizens relate to the state. In its most radical expression, *sopi* signified changes in the state to be undertaken by the new ruling party; but the most widely understood end was an alternation of parties in power. Thus, the momentum for change – now long dissipated with the achievement of *alternance* – helped little to propel efforts to remake the state through decentralization via a civic awakening in local government.

#### **IV: AT THE THRESHOLD: THE POLITICS OF MALAWIAN DECENTRALIZATION**

This section analyzes the politics surrounding a third decentralization process, that of Malawi. We add this third country for three reasons. First, it is a further means of gauging the analytical utility of the framework presented in Section Two. Second, as will become evident, in terms of elite momentum for decentralization, Malawi occupies an intermediate position, between Senegal and Uganda. Including it thus enriches our understanding of the political dynamics surrounding decentralization. Third, Malawi has engaged in a far-reaching initiative (the Malawi Social Action Fund, MASAF), complementary to the institutional process of decentralization, to foster bottom-up participation in local public action. Social funds of this kind have been initiated in close

to a dozen other African countries (as well as in Latin America and elsewhere). Understanding the opportunities and challenges for decentralization posed by this parallel bottom-up initiative helps enrich the utility of the comparative analysis for other countries.

### *Progress so far*

As with the previous two cases, a description of changes in Malawi in the direction of decentralization provides the necessary backdrop for the subsequent analysis.

A democratically elected government came to power in 1993, drawing a close to thirty years of one-party rule under President Hastings Banda; the new government sought to revamp the machinery of government and in particular to restart poverty alleviation programs. Although decentralization and local governments were not mentioned explicitly in its Poverty Alleviation Policy Framework (1994), the plan placed a great deal of emphasis on activating area and village development committees to propel development henceforth and also enshrined the principles that eventually propelled the MASAF.<sup>33</sup>

In July 1994, the government initiated studies of the District Focus for Rural Development and other decentralization initiatives and ultimately approved a Draft National Decentralization Policy in January 1996. Following this, it established a Cabinet Committee on Decentralization to oversee the policy development and, later on, legislation. In 1998, the formal policy was adopted and a Local Government Act (1998) passed giving effect to the policy.<sup>34</sup> Subsequent changes can usefully be grouped into three distinct categories – concrete changes which have affected the reality ‘on the ground’, steps to strengthen the institutional platform for the progressive implementation of a democratic state, and the preparation of detailed plans for rolling out fiscal and administrative decentralization.

On the ground, two key actions have been taken, one on the political front, and one on the administrative side:

- Politically, the territorial structure of a decentralized Malawi was clarified, and elections were held for all the 39 District Assemblies, in November 2000; the assemblies are democratically elected and functional.
- Administratively, the position of District Commissioner, formerly the local representative of the central state overseeing de-concentrated ministries and public administration, has been merged with that of the Clerk of Council to create a Chief Executive Officer responsible to the Assembly and hired by the Local Authorities Service Commission.

To strengthen the institutional platform, the following initiatives have been undertaken:

- the Local Government Finance Committee, an independent body to oversee intergovernmental fiscal issues and in particular financial probity in assemblies has been established and is functional. The LGFC was fully operational in the last

two quarters of the last financial year (FY 2001/02) and worked closely with assemblies on 2002/03 budget submissions. It is expected to serve as a conduit for all central ministry funds that are allocated to the district assemblies. It is charged with the responsibility of both transmitting these funds, setting the distribution formulae, and auditing the expenditures of local assemblies.

- An accounting and financial management system has been developed, reflecting the priority given to financial probity issues. All District Assemblies had received a computer for financial uses and an Integrated Financial Management Information System has been deployed and training effected for a majority of assemblies. Indeed, the Inter-Ministerial Technical Committee on decentralization has recommended the expansion of the central level IFMIS to include local assemblies.<sup>35</sup>
- The Local Authorities Service Commission (LASCOM) has been established and has already begun recruiting staff. All the district chief executive officers already serve under terms issued by LASCOM; recruitment for other senior officers (e.g. directors of finance, health, etc.) was to be complete by July 2002. (It was however delayed.) LASCOM's most immediate task is to manage the conversion of central government employees at the district level to LASCOM employees responsible to the local district assemblies.
- The Malawi Local Government Association (MALGA) is operational, replacing the old ALGA, which was the association of the former councils. Although only a few years old, MALGA has found its tracking as a mouth-piece for district assembly issues. It is also a member of the inter-ministerial technical taskforce on decentralization. Among MALGA's most recent achievements on behalf of local assemblies is securing an agreement in principle by the government to provide monthly ward allowances for councilors who at present work without pay.<sup>36</sup>

The Malawians also have made substantial progress in planning how administrative and fiscal decentralization will be implemented:

- All 27 District Assemblies (excluding the city, town and municipal assemblies) have written their three-year development plans in which they lay out their operational and development program and indicative budgets.<sup>37</sup>
- Seven of ten ministries slated for devolution in the first phase have submitted their devolution plans, which have been reviewed and approved by an inter-ministerial taskforce on decentralization and Cabinet.<sup>38</sup> The plans indicate a considerable spread of activities. For example, the Ministry of Education has devolved management and administration of schools and deployment (though not employment) of teachers; the Ministry of Agriculture has devolved district level planning, budgeting, and inspection and extension services.

- The current budget (FY 2002/03) submitted to and approved by Parliament includes indicative figures for each decentralizing ministry on how much of their budget for operations and for investment is to be spent at the locality. It is expected that these funds will be transferred directly from the Ministry of Finance to the Local Government Finance Committee, which will then disburse them to localities. For instance, the Ministry of Education has allocated 40% of its budget to devolved activities; Water Development 58%, Natural Resources 47%, Commerce and Industry 15%.<sup>39</sup>
- A number of revenue bases have been transferred to local authorities (e.g. business licensing) while others (e.g. fuel levy) have been ceded to localities through a yet to be determined transfer mechanism after collection at the center. These new revenue sources have had significant effect on the revenues of assemblies; for example, revenues shot up by 15% in Dedza and 25% in Zomba.<sup>40</sup> In addition, the District Development Fund has been expanded from the initial 6 pilot districts to 27 and the Ministry of Finance has allocated 5% of the national revenue base to assemblies for their General Resource Fund.
- Several bridging actions and policies are proposed to initiate or maintain functionality while permanent policies are worked out or while transitions are made from one mode to another or from low capacity toward high capacity. For example, on staff, the assemblies are mandated to employ their own staff, but as a transition, the central government will second district level staff for twelve months as they are converted to employees of the Local Authorities Service Commission (LASCOS). Another example is with regard to fiscal decentralization – always difficult even under the best of circumstances – where the central government employs a formula adopted under the UNDP-inspired DDF while a formal policy of intergovernmental transfers makes its way through approval channels (the technical committee, the cabinet committee, and parliament).<sup>41</sup>

The question naturally arises as to whether these elaborate plans will be implemented. Both the framework presented in Section Two, and the contrasting experiences of Uganda and Senegal laid out in Section Three suggest that the answer to this question lies in a careful look at the extent to which progress thus far is rooted in robust domestic political momentum. It is to this issue to which we now turn.

***Engaging Decentralization: technocratic entrepreneurs in a time of political fluidity***  
 Decentralization in Malawi has both internal and external origins. The initial impetus for its adoption came clearly from outside Malawi (i.e. donors). But the government embraced the agenda gradually yet increasingly strongly, especially after the transition to a democratically elected regime in 1993.

Decentralization dates back to the late 1980s when Malawi adopted its second ten-year national development program, *DevPol II* (1987-96), which sought to provide for local-controlled development to combat endemic poverty.<sup>42</sup> Following a poverty assessment in 1988/89, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) recommended that decentralization be adopted as a policy framework. Prior to this, local governance had been emaciated by the absorption of most of the functions of local authorities by District Development Committees existing parallel to elected (albeit in a single party context) councils and accountable only to the center. It was not until 1993 that the government adopted a policy of District Focus for Rural Development program with UNDP and UN Capital Development Fund (UNCDF) support. Under this policy, a District Development Fund was established and district level planning and local participation was to be encouraged. However, the implementation of the DFRD program was stalled as the broader context of an authoritarian and overly centralized government remained inimical to real local-driven development. In any case, the program floundered as the 30 year-old authoritarian regime faced massive challenge echoing the continent-wide transition to competitive politics.

Decentralization took on a new verve with the change of regime in 1993 as the new democratically elected government sought to revamp the machinery of government and in particular to re-start poverty alleviation programs. The new government's focus on poverty alleviation and its quick embrace of decentralization meshed well with the thrust of the nascent UNDP program which saw decentralization as the antidote to the anti-poor policies of the former centralized regime (whose institutional structures were yet to be dismantled). Under its Fifth Country Program, the UNDP in 1992 had proposed to launch a DFRD pilot program in six districts to showcase the possibilities of truly decentralized development. With the change in government, this was accelerated and three districts were selected in the southern region (the most populous area), two in the central region, and one in the north.<sup>43</sup> These districts were provided with direct development project financing, training to build administrative and policy skills, and targeted technical studies on various aspects necessary to further devolution. By 1997, the UNDP/UNCDF program had blossomed into a \$23 million program covering all (then 26) districts<sup>44</sup> providing demonstration of the likelihood of success for decentralization and providing especially important policy and demonstrative thrust to the evolving decentralization new policy.<sup>45</sup>

Yet these pilot initiatives, useful as they have been as pilots, will remain 'parallel' until the full set of plans listed earlier for administrative and fiscal reforms are actually implemented. Just as decentralization never arose under the previous regime for very specific reasons, it is also not neutrally pursued in the current context. It is ultimately propelled by events, priorities, and individuals within the political realm making very deliberate calculations, and emboldened by the institutional flux in a post transition context.

The fact that the decentralization program is explicitly tied to the democratic transition in policy documents, legislation and in public pronouncements by politicians underscores its deeply political nature in Malawi. Malawi is one of a handful of

countries that have consistently made the claim of decentralization being part and parcel of democratization. The heavy tie-in between decentralization and democratization provides a positive force as is evident from its broad based support. However, it also presents a number of perils that arise from what we know of democratic transitions in Africa over the last decade, from some of the late indications of trouble in the Malawi transition, and, related, from the vestiges of the ancien regime.

One of the vestiges is the personal dominance of the president and of the center in most major policy issues. Thus, the decentralization experiment is rolled out with the particular stamp of the presidency and remains centrally directed. For example, the Decentralization Secretariat and the Department of Local Government (once an independent ministry) are structurally situated within the presidency.<sup>46</sup> The location of the secretariat in the executive is often viewed as a positive indication of the regime's support for decentralization (as in Uganda). However, this cannot be assumed as location in the presidency does not necessarily insulate the program from reversals within the presidency. Indeed, in Malawi the decentralization program is imperiled by some of the reversals witnessed in the democratic transition; in particular, where the regime and its supporters have conflated the survival of the democratic experiment with the perpetuation of the United Democratic Front (UDF) government and, previously, of the Muluzi presidency beyond the constitutional limit of two terms.

Even for the most committed decentralizing countries, the state that chooses to decentralize must confront the patterns established by the status quo or the status quo ante. In the Malawi case, the heritage of a centralized bureaucracy, a civil society and citizenry conditioned by that heritage (in spite of the new language of people empowerment), and the heritage of a very weak local government structure, which must now be revived and transformed, all present significant challenges. Within the political economy of Malawi, decentralization ought to be judged not only based on the installation of institutions for devolving power (and how well insulated from central power they are) but also on the discourse of development and a sustained shift from the heritage of anti-poor policies associated with the previous regime.

In our estimation, the discourse has not changed substantially by virtue of decentralization, although the formal decentralization program may provide the seed for its evolution. Among public officials, local politicians and community members the expectation remains limited to decentralization bringing an appreciable substantive difference to their immediate *infrastructure* needs rather than as an institutional buffer against bad governance or as a tool for participative development. These enduring attitudes and the lack of genuinely decisive reforms still left many observers, even in early 2003, to doubt the credibility of Malawi's commitment to decentralization

The decentralization policy framework was slow to emerge in part for three reasons. First, decentralization became intertwined with the logic of deepening democratization closely associated with the successor regime. This twinning meant that decentralization would be pursued in tandem with (and therefore necessarily subordinated to) the logic of retaining control and power and extending it without undermining the center and especially the ruling party.<sup>47</sup> The new regime saw

decentralization as critical to its expansion of legitimacy as a signifier of the end of centralized authoritarianism and also as a pathway to deal with the deep and broad agenda for development, which had been suppressed after three decades of an elitist centralized autocracy. Second, since neither the local assemblies (which were dissolved in 1994) nor civil society organizations (undeveloped due to the three decades of authoritarian rule) were able champions of decentralization, the policy and process remained insulated from institutional pressure from below for faster movement. Third, and related, the rapid pace and evident success of MASAF – the implementation of which bypassed both the central ministries and the defunct local councils – deflected pressure for rapid decentralization, which might otherwise have resulted from the dire need for immediate poverty alleviation. At the same time, MASAF also helped empower communities in their relationships vis a vis central government. Whether the net impact of these two MASAF effects on decentralization is a plus is the subject of the next subsection.

### ***MASAF and Decentralization: Regenerating Participatory Communities?***

For all of Malawi's engagement with the details of transforming a centralized state into a decentralized one, on the ground the most significant and far-reaching change in the discourse and practice of development in Malawi has been the introduction of the Malawi Social Action Fund (MASAF). MASAF has activities in every district and a development expenditure that dwarfs that of all district assemblies combined. The success of decentralization is thus bound to be affected by how the fully operational MASAF and the fledgling decentralized structures interact with each other. This section will highlight some of the political opportunities and challenges for decentralization which emerge from this interaction. As a prelude, though, it is necessary to provide some detail on MASAF's role on the ground.

Following goals set out in its post-election Poverty Alleviation Policy Framework, the Government of Malawi established MASAF in 1995 as a vehicle to directly fund community-level projects to address poverty across the country. As the primary instrument of re-inventing government following the democratic transition, the PAP (like the decentralization program arising from it later) was integral to the new government's efforts at securing legitimacy and putting its own distinct stamp on public processes. Under MASAF, development projects were to respond to self-articulated needs by communities rather than to a master plan at the national level.<sup>48</sup> As such, it was a fundamental departure from the previous development planning practice that was centered on national development plans designed by Ministries, re-articulated in national budgets with no public input, and often imposed on local communities through the supposedly deliberative District Development Committees.

Approved by the World Bank in 1995, with funding to the tune of US\$56 million, plus a contribution of US\$2.9 million from the GOM and in-kind contributions from communities estimated at US\$8.3 million, MASAF commenced operations in 1996 and completed its first phase in 2001. In 1998, a replenishment of \$66 million was effected through MASAF II, which is still operational; another replenishment of \$67 million

under MASAF III is in preparation. With an operating base of 14.5% or US\$6,765,480, it has a reasonable overhead and is touted across the country and within the Bank as a very well run program making a visible impact.<sup>49</sup>

Over the first five years, the project allocated \$46 million to 1,864 community projects and a safety-net employment program tied to public works. By all accounts, MASAF has made an appreciable impact on communities across the country through new or upgraded social infrastructure such as clinics, schools, and boreholes, and provided incomes to the most vulnerable. Indeed, MASAF activity is ubiquitous; even a short-term visitor to Malawi is bound to hear of MASAF on radio, see its activities on TV, and encounter the standout school blocks or boreholes that dot the countryside. Besides the physical infrastructure, MASAF has also re-generated community institutions for self-help, expanded management and participation capacity in local villages and opened up significant roles for women, who, for example, make up 46% of the trained project management committee members.<sup>50</sup>

What is the impact of MASAF on the momentum for decentralization in Malawi? On the plus side, MASAF's performance and its practices provide powerful and possibly enduring patterns that are beneficial to sustaining decentralized governance and development interventions that directly impact the poor. In its operations over the last five years, MASAF has successfully demonstrated the notion that local communities can be the drivers of their own development, and have the capacity and willingness to devise, supervise, and sustain their own development projects in an efficient and transparent manner. As such, the success of MASAF has not only activated community self-help spirit but it has also promoted new relations between communities and local governments enshrining an empowered, participative spirit and community ownership of public assets. This ethic of development backed by the unquestionable success of MASAF has minimized the claims that central government ministries tend to make about the lack of capacity, probity, and sustainability at the local level. Indeed, this may partly explain the relative lack of bureaucratic resistance that has characterized the decentralization program so far.

Yet for all of these potential benefits, MASAF is not a natural part of the landscape of sustainable decentralized institutions. MASAF arose within and in response to a vacuum in local government and in local-level, poverty-focused development after the collapse of the centralized authoritarian regime. Upon its establishment, MASAF worked with the institutional structure of the deconcentrated ministries represented by the District Executive Committee and the District Commissioner overseeing the rump district councils. At the same time, it was explicitly set up in a way that did not leave it beholden to the deconcentrated structures (or, for that matter, the recently revived district assemblies). Structurally, MASAF remains a central government instrument – operating directly out of the Office of the President, and mandated to bypass the dense network of ministerial institutions and interests and work directly with communities.

The revival of functional local governments via the decentralization program presents a challenge to MASAF's original *raison d'être*. The conditions that necessitated

an intervention like MASAF, as a temporary injection of funds by-passing a weak central state steeped in authoritarianism and center-dominated development, have substantially changed. The re-emergence of local governments has eliminated the institutional vacuum that existed at the local level; district assemblies, validated by democratic elections and a new policy framework, now stand poised to reclaim their role as legitimate actors in development administration at the local level. At best, MASAF could help energize local democracy – helping nurture relations of accountability between communities and local authorities, and thereby serving as a bulwark against local capture. At worst, MASAF could become an obstacle to the sustainable deepening of democracy, offering the illusion of ‘bottom-up’ empowerment, even as it helps perpetuate top-down centralized control. Clarifying what role MASAF will play in Malawi’s evolving landscape of state decentralization remains a ‘work in progress’.

### *Malawi at the Threshold*

A simplistic conclusion from the comparison of decentralization in Uganda and Senegal might be that the centralized status quo of African states is sufficiently robust that it cannot be broken decisively (and, even then, only incompletely) only with sustained, and not necessarily, peaceful bottom-up pressure. Malawi emerges as a setting capable of rebutting this conclusion, and pointing the way towards a more constructively incremental path. Over the past decade, virtually all of the building blocks for a successful transition to decentralization are in place:

- The 1993 transition to democracy resulted in the election of a government with a strong apparent ideological commitment to popular participation;
- The process of setting up an elected, political tier of local government has been successfully completed;
- detailed plans for administrative and fiscal decentralization have been drawn up, with the full participation, and seeming co-operation, of a rich array of central government actors;
- the ground for bottom-up empowerment has been thoroughly plowed by MASAF.

Yet, the fact remains that, for all of the thoroughness of the preparatory process, none of the above actions have yet shifted authority and resources from the hands of the central apparatus to the decentralized tier of government. The next 18-24 months will be decisive in signaling for Malawi (and thus, potentially, for many other African countries seeming to contemplate a pro-active, uncoerced state transformation in favor of decentralization) whether the political will to cross the threshold of state transformation indeed is present.

## V: CONCLUSION – NAVIGATING THE REAL WORLD OF DECENTRALIZATION

Even as decentralization has moved towards the top of the discourse on state institutional reform in Africa, and elsewhere, debate has remained rather remote from the evolving realities on the ground. There has been some heated discussion of the merits of a decentralized state relative to (notwithstanding the dismal realities of the past thirty years) a putatively well-functioning centralized alternative. And there has been much technical exposition as to how a well-functioning decentralized state should function administratively and fiscally. But there has been relatively little effort among advocates of decentralization to learn from actual country-specific pathways to decentralization. This study has sought to help fill that gap. Building on the analyses of Uganda, Senegal and Malawi, we conclude by highlighting five propositions as to how the process can best be nurtured in directions that are both feasible, and likely to sustain continuing forward momentum. The first of these propositions addresses the enabling environment for decentralization; the second and third relate to the design of decentralization; and the last two focus on the dynamics of decentralization and empowerment.

### *The enabling environment for decentralization*

Taken together, the three country experiences illustrate vividly the vast gap between rhetorical advocacy for decentralization (evident in all three countries) on the one hand, and a genuine readiness on the part of central governments to devolve or delegate authority and resources to local governments (evident thus far only in Uganda, and even there subject to important constraints). Indeed, the country experiences suggest that a country is likely to make a rapid and sustained transition from a centralized to a decentralized state structure only if all of the following three enabling political conditions are in place:

- there is sufficient fluidity in the macro-political discourse to enable basic issues of state structure to find their way onto the political agenda;
- there exists a powerful political coalition with both the incentive and the authority to push through policies of decentralization; and
- there exist stakeholders at the community level who are sufficiently engaged to be supportive of, and/or responsive to, initiatives by political elites to shift resources and accountability downwards.

Only in rare circumstances – as in Uganda subsequent to the NRM's and Museveni's accession to power – will these three enabling political conditions be in place. As a first conclusion, *it follows that in most settings, most of the time, (i.e. as in Senegal, and perhaps also Malawi) movement towards decentralization will, at most, be incremental.* The remaining four conclusions developed below are intended to guide engagement in those

many settings where the way forward on decentralization is likely to be an incremental one.

### *The design of decentralization*

The three country experiences offer important insights into the balance between political and technical influences in shaping the design of decentralization. In Uganda, political momentum led, with technocratic fine-tuning catching up with the momentum of change. By contrast, in both Malawi and Senegal, there has been a pre-occupation with the technical dimensions of the process, with at best modest attention to the political dynamics, and little to show for the efforts (so far) by way of changes on the ground. Taken together, these experiences suggest that the drivers of decentralization are primarily political, and only secondarily (at most) technocratic. As a second conclusion, *it follows that efforts to support movement towards decentralization should focus at least as much on the process of building coalitions of support, as on the details of technical design.*

The implications for design of this second conclusion go beyond simply timing investment in technical work to ensure that it does not get too far ahead of the change process itself. The country experiences suggest that in any given setting, movement towards decentralization emerges as the result of the give-and-take among political elites; this give-and-take engages diverse interests, diverse visions of where the process might be going, and diverse strategies for taking advantage of 'windows of opportunity'. As a third conclusion, *it follows that the process invariably will be a messy one, with uneven movement across different dimensions of decentralization, and an uneven, stop-start rhythm.*

This is not intended as a prescription that 'anything goes'. Rather, the intent is to caution for patience, and generosity, in judging whether some specific country's decentralization process is on track: Only after a longer period (typically in excess of a decade) of evolving experimentation and practice will the observed configurations of institutional arrangements for political, administrative and fiscal decentralization likely to be entirely consistent with one another, and aligned well with theoretical notions of 'best practice'. (Or, alternatively, be consistently contradictory over and above the contradictions inherent in institutional transitions to be judged clear failures.)

### *The dynamics of decentralization and empowerment*

The above three conclusions highlight the importance of not becoming preoccupied with advocacy of some preconceived notion of 'best-practice decentralization'. Rather, what is key is to step back and focus more broadly both on the larger developmental purpose, and on the time path of change, viewed from the perspectives of both shorter-run feasibility, and long-run sustainability.

Viewed from a broader developmental perspective, it is apparent that decentralization via systematic reforms of intergovernmental political, fiscal and administrative systems is one way – albeit an especially far-reaching one – of strengthening the downward accountability of a state to its citizens, beyond what is achievable via representative national democracy. Other possibilities for strengthening

downward accountability include parallel social-fund-like mechanisms (as in Malawi's MASAF), participatory deconcentrated service delivery (of which an especially celebrated example is Uganda's empowerment of parents committees of schools) and projectized support for local governments (as in Senegal, which has had an effective, and expanding pilot program, to build the capacity of selected urban municipalities). Given their short-term focus, such arrangements must be properly calibrated not to undermine the long-term institutional development of local governance.

Countries embarking on a process of deepening democracy are likely to vary in terms of the relative feasibility and efficacy of these alternatives. As a fourth conclusion, *it follows that reformers should not presume that decentralization always is the preferred alternative for effecting change in the short- and medium-term, but should consider the desirability and feasibility of a broad range of alternative strategies for strengthening downward accountability.*

Yet, even as there indeed are multiple options for strengthening downward accountability in the short- and medium-term, they vary in their institutional sustainability. By virtue of both its institutional coherence, and the way in which it 'locks-in' a transformation of how power and resources flow through the polity, decentralization via intergovernmental systems reform has special advantages for sustainability. Finally, *it follows that reformers committed to strengthening downward accountability should work to ensure that a vision of a democratically decentralized polity comprises the long-run backdrop – the guiding 'north star'-- to which more pragmatic and diverse strategies adopted in the short- and medium-term, are intended to converge over the longer-term.* Put differently, for both tactical and strategic reasons a purist approach to decentralization can often be counterproductive in the shorter-run. At the same time, heterodox, more-short-term initiatives (such as MASAF) need to be designed in ways which keep in mind the longer-run, building in mechanisms which facilitate – rather than hinder – their eventual incorporation into a holistic and coherent intergovernmental political, fiscal and administrative system.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Stephen Ndegwa, *Decentralization in Africa: A Stocktaking Survey*. Africa Working Paper Series. The World Bank, November 2002

<sup>2</sup> Besides these case studies, the analytical framework and the broader discussion is informed by a review of existing case studies covering several other countries, including South Africa, Mozambique, Tanzania, Namibia, and Zimbabwe.

<sup>3</sup> Although there is no firm definition, how quickly a reform program moves from the first to the second stage and how broad the spectrum of decision and action is seem to distinguish ‘big bang’ from incremental reform.

<sup>4</sup> As one example of overlap, the move to engage decentralization could involve from the outset intensive technical discussions as to the details of the proposed system. As another example, the process of progressively refining the details of decentralization can continue indefinitely – well into an era when the system has irreversibly been consolidated.

<sup>5</sup> See Ndegwa 2002.

<sup>6</sup> For the constitutional layout of Uganda local government, see: <http://www.government.go.ug/constitution/detail.php?myId=11>

<sup>7</sup> For more details on the progress of Uganda’s decentralization reforms and especially the trend in the devolution of responsibilities and fiscal resources as well as the role of World Bank support, see Navin Girishankar, Implementation Completion Report: Institutional Capacity Building Project (Uganda). World Bank, June 2002. The analysis reported in this section draws substantially from this review of World Bank support to the Uganda decentralization effort.

<sup>8</sup> Susan Dicklitch, The Elusive Promise of NGOs in Africa. New York, NY: St. Martin’s Press, Inc. 1998, pp. 82 and 165-7

<sup>9</sup> World Bank, *Senegal: Decentralization and the Challenges of intergovernmental relations reform for better service delivery*, Report No: 24384-SEN, draft January 2003.

<sup>10</sup> Yoweri Museveni, What is Africa’s Problem. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2000.

<sup>11</sup> Geoffrey B. Tukahebwa, “Political and Administrative Relations in Decentralization,” in Apolo Nsibambi, ed. Decentralization and Civil Society in Uganda: The Quest for Good Governance. Kampala: Fountain Publishers, 1998, pp. 12-30.

<sup>12</sup> Holger Bernt Hansen and Michael Twaddle (eds). Developing Uganda. London: James Currey, 1998, p. 162.

<sup>13</sup> Tukahebwa 1998, p. 14.

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- <sup>14</sup> Nelson Kasfir, "Government and Politics," in Rita M. Byrnes (ed). Uganda. Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1992, p. 154.
- <sup>15</sup> See in particular "Programme Intrégré de Réforme du Secteur Public (PIRSP), vol. "Composante: Amélioration des Performances de l'Administration", 2001, published by the *Présidence de la République, Délégation au Management Public*, that provides an excellent overview of administration reforms and their impact from 1960 to date (pp. 27-35). See also: John Nellis et al. "An Assessment of the Senegalese Administrative System", World Bank, 1986; and "Programme National de Bonne Gouvernance" 2002 (National Governance Program) that provides an overview of all these reforms.
- <sup>16</sup> For a detailed discussion of the role of Islamic society in state elaboration in Senegal, see Leonardo Villalón, Islamic Society and State Power in Senegal. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995.
- <sup>17</sup> See also Economist Intelligence Unit, *Country Profile 2001* and *Country Report March 2002*.
- <sup>18</sup> Kasfir 1992, p. 156.
- <sup>19</sup> Kasfir 1992, p. 162.
- <sup>20</sup> Dicklitch 1998.
- <sup>21</sup> Brett, 1995, p. 69 cited in Dicklitch 1998.
- <sup>22</sup> Hansen and Twaddle 1998, p. 166.
- <sup>23</sup> The classic model which most of francophone Africa has followed is the *Ecole Nationale d'Administration* in France. See also, for example, Ezzeddine Moudoud, *Modernization, the state and regional disparity in developing countries*, (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1989) on Tunisia for similar attitudes among elite bureaucrats seeking to transform society through state action, including promoting decentralization through central planning.
- <sup>24</sup> While there are no focused writings/discussions of these attitudes that glue the *esprit de corps* evident among the state bureaucrats given their training and career revolutions, it is a broadly accepted perception (see Villalón 1995, pp. 84-86).
- <sup>25</sup> So far programs to support decentralization (e.g. the USAID sponsored DGL Felo program run by ARD, Inc.) focuses on the demand side by training local leaders to learn more and respond appropriately to the opportunities created by the 1996 decentralization law. Although they recognize training central bureaucrats to adjust to new roles is as important, this has not been pursued. Interviews with Ms. Awa Diouf, Mr. Abdoulaye Barro, and Mr. Abderhamane Djirrie.
- <sup>26</sup> Interview with Ms. Awa Diouf.
- <sup>27</sup> Interview with Mr. Abderhamane Djirrie.
- <sup>28</sup> Sabati Makara, "Linking Good Governance, Decentralization Policy and Civil Society in Uganda," found at: [http://www.afrst.uiuc.edu/Makerere/Vol\\_2/chapter\\_five.html](http://www.afrst.uiuc.edu/Makerere/Vol_2/chapter_five.html)
- <sup>29</sup> See especially Villalón (1995).
- <sup>30</sup> Some analysts view the *marabout*-state relationship as signifying a form of de facto devolution of state power. While this may be true in holy cities (headquarters of certain orders, e.g. Touba) it is not universally true and the state retains dominance.

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- <sup>31</sup> See especially Villalón (1995).
- <sup>32</sup> Interview with Ms. Penda Mbow.
- <sup>33</sup> See GOM. *Policy Framework for Poverty Alleviation Programme*. October 1995.
- <sup>34</sup> See GOM. *Decentralization Policy (1998)*, Republic of Malawi. *Local Government Act, 1998*; UNDP/UNCDF, “Project Document on Decentralized Governance” (2001); Republic of Malawi. *Decentralisation Process in Malawi* (September 2000).
- <sup>35</sup> See, for example, *Draft Report of IMTC meeting April 27-28*, p. 8.
- <sup>36</sup> “Councilors to get new perks.” *The Nation*, September 13, 2002. (Web edition).
- <sup>37</sup> Although the Local Government Act (1998) recognizes cities, towns and municipalities as “districts in their own right”, they have generally been excluded in certain things (e.g. the DDF and donors look at them separately). However, they are also in many respects part and parcel of the process.
- <sup>38</sup> Republic of Malawi. *Sector Devolution Plans*, 2002. The seven ministries are: Natural Resources; Water Development; Commerce and Industry; Gender, Youth and Community Service; Agriculture and Irrigation; Education; and Housing. Health, Lands, and Transport Ministries have stalled in producing their sector devolution plans.
- <sup>39</sup> GOM. *Sector Devolution Plans (Summary Report)*, p. 19.
- <sup>40</sup> Interviews with financial officers of Dedza and Zomba District Assemblies.
- <sup>41</sup> In late 2002, this had already been approved by the Inter-Ministerial Technical Committee on Decentralization and by the Cabinet and now awaits legislative sanction by Parliament. The development funds are separate from the General Resource Fund, which is expected to cover administrative costs. The policy (but not the Act) provides for an allocation equal to 5% of the national revenue for this. In FY 2001, this amounted to 250 Million Kwacha. However, less than half of it was actually disbursed.
- <sup>42</sup> *DevPol*, short for Statement of Development Policies was the Government of Malawi ten-year development plan that appeared twice between independence in 1964 and 1987. Given the lack of presidential interest – Banda reportedly showed no interest in any of the three attempts at the *DevPol II* in contrast to his very direct influence in *DevPol I*– the local-level proclivities in *DevPol II* fizzled out for lack of implementation. See Pryor 1990, p. 61.
- <sup>43</sup> The pilot districts were Dedza, Mangochi, Mchinji, Nkata Bay, Nsanje, and Thyolo.
- <sup>44</sup> Districts did not include cities, towns, and municipalities, which were only later recognized as districts in their own right for the purposes of decentralization.
- <sup>45</sup> For more details on the two UNDP/UNCDF programs, see United Nations, “UNDP country Cooperation Frameworks” (1997-2001); UNDP/UNCDF, “Project Document on Decentralized Governance”; UNDP, “Malawi Information Kit”; UNCDF-Malawi-Local Governance website, full access details in bibliography.
- <sup>46</sup> For that matter, oversight for MASAF – the flagship local development actor – including the appointment of its board, is similarly located in the presidency.
- <sup>47</sup> See for example, See GOM, *Decentralization Policy 1998*, pp. 2-5. Also, various other documents reiterate the main historical and philosophical bases for decentralization.

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<sup>48</sup> See MASAF July 1999; *MASAF Background Material for MASAF III Preparation*; MASAF 2002.

<sup>49</sup> MASAF 2002. See p. 15 and Balance Sheet, p. 59.

<sup>50</sup> MASAF 2002. See its summary reproduction in *Malawi First*, vol. 3, no. 1 (2002), a business magazine, for instance.