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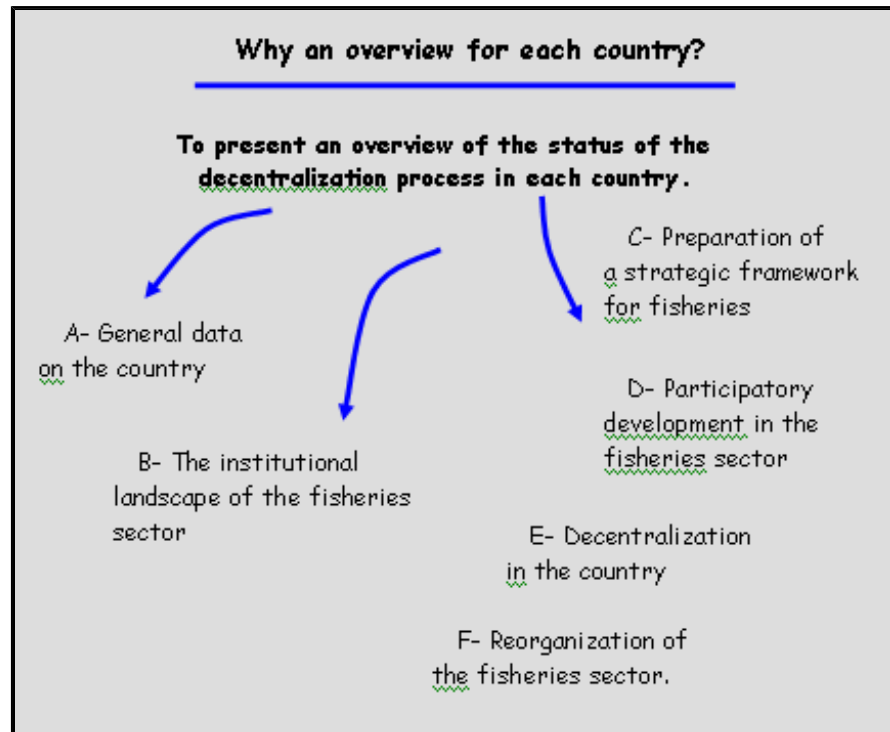
Publication

West and Central Africa Opportunities and risks of decentralization for fisheries communities

The ongoing decentralization process being embarked upon by many West and Central African countries offer fisheries communities the opportunity to participate in local development. Decentralization is however a long and complex process involving risks that must be well managed if fisheries communities are to get the best out of it. The RAD-ITO1 model used in the analysis of decentralization and the assessment of the situation in five countries of the region (Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Cape-Verde, Niger and Senegal) makes it possible to highlight the opportunities that exist for fishing communities, to participate better in the ongoing process.

Jean Bonnal*, Massimo Rossi** and Pascal Zantou***

The concentration of power in the hands of the State has become outdated in democratic regimes. The modern State evidently continues to play its role as overall administrator and orchestrator of national development, but it is shoving to decentralize more and more; in other words the State is increasingly sharing its powers, skills, responsibilities and resources with locally elected bodies, which are legal entities in themselves, and enjoy financial autonomy. This obvious fact was highlighted during a workshop on fisheries and decentralization jointly organized by the Rural Institutions and Participation Service (SDAR) of FAO and the Sustainable Fisheries Livelihoods Programme (SFLP) in Dakar, from the 12th to the 15th of September 2005.



Based on a synthesis on the case studies conducted in Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Niger and Senegal, the deliberations of the workshop showed that decentralization seems to be better adapted today because of the gradual depletion of State budgets and public aid which forces them to work towards establishing linkages with civil society. Decentralization actually facilitates the participation of civil society in public life. Such participation helps to ensure better mobilization and cohesion at the different levels of decision-making – local, regional and national.

Furthermore, the fact that development challenges are becoming more and more complex means that solutions put forward to reduce poverty, unemployment and social exclusion are being tailored to fit the context of each community. Experience has shown over and over again that the effective mobilization of local stakeholders around common objectives helps to resolve crisis situations, especially conflicts.

Fisheries communities and decentralization

The case studies referred to above made it possible to obtain a general overview of the involvement of fisheries communities in the decentralization process of their respective countries.

The information provided by the five case studies made it possible to obtain a general overview of the extent to which fisheries communities have been involved in the planning and management of fisheries resources in each country.

The analysis of these studies made it possible to, among others, identify the following trends in the

different countries in which the analysis was carried out:

1. Factors (potentials and constraints) that affect the involvement of fisheries communities in the planning and management of fisheries resources.
2. A typology of the kind of situations that affect some particular factors, such as the different paces of decentralization.

Factors that affect the involvement of fisheries communities

The analysis of the case studies show that the involvement of fisheries communities in the planning and management of fisheries resources is strongly influenced by the different factors presented in the graph below.

The different paces of decentralization

The following cases in point were identified:

- Countries where the decentralization process has not been completed (Niger, Cameroon, Burkina Faso).
- Countries where decentralization is becoming more and more effective (Senegal, Cape-Verde).

This typology is based on the common and divergent factors identified:

Common factors:

- All the five countries (except Cape Verde) have laws on decentralization which envisage the process at two levels (urban communities, rural communities).
- All the five countries organize elections using the universal suffrage system at every level, except for Burkina Faso which does not use it in rural communities.
- All the five countries have transferred skills in several sectors.

Divergent factors:

- The regional level only exists in Senegal.
- The laws on decentralization in Senegal and Cape Verde were promulgated before year 2000.
- It is only in Senegal and Cape Verde that skills have been transferred in the area of health and education.

This typology is based on the scope of decentralization and could serve as a basis for using other types of analyses aimed at involving communities in the process in all African countries participating in the SFLP.

Fisheries communities do not benefit fully from decentralisation

In Burkina Faso, most of the laws regulating fisheries and natural resources state that areas around lagoons, lakes and rivers belong to the State. Without any prior notice the water and forestry departments deny communities living around these areas the right to collect levies and to conduct surveillance activities on fisheries resources. For the same reason, these services balk at the thought of delegating their administrative functions to the communities.

In Guinea, officials of the ministry in charge of fisheries refused to work in collaboration with the fisheries communities on the surveillance of the resources at the beginning. But after the roles of the different parties were defined more clearly, fishermen have now been allowed to play the role of detecting boats that violate regulations, while the ministry officials are now more involved in dissuasive missions (waterway patrol, ship inspection) to discourage and repress violations.

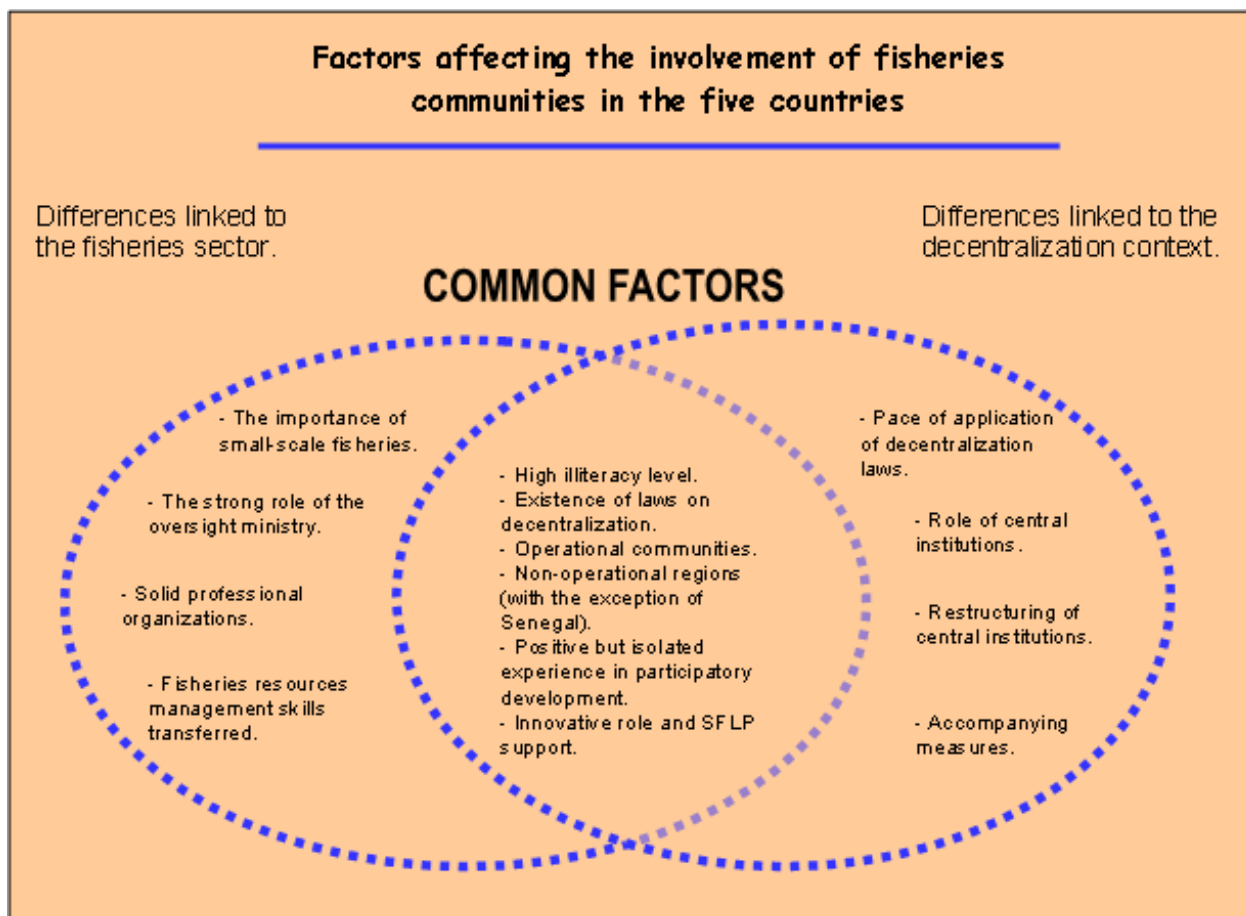
In Côte d'Ivoire, activities along coasts, lagoons and lakes generate financial resources on the form of taxes levied by the central administration. These resources are used to supplement the amount allocated for the functioning of the services in the State budget. Consequently, the Ministry of Animal Production and Fisheries Resources hesitates to transfer such responsibilities to the fisheries communities.

The risks of decentralization

If decentralization seems to be relevant in the current context, it also presents quite a few risks, the scope of which needs to be measured. Five types of risks have been identified by FAO: the replacement of the concept of supply with the concept of demand, lop-sided information, the heritage of paternalism, the traditions of patronage and the pace of decentralization

There is also the risk that the local communities can create too many levies in an effort to keep their coffers afloat. The communities and local governments are creating more and more taxes to finance the operations of some of the structures they set up within the context of ensuring participatory management of their resources. The fiscal pressure can eventually become too much for the communities to bear.

On the other hand, if the communities participate in identifying and implementing the new levies, some former ones that have become less relevant can be cancelled. In such a case, the participation of the communities will require more transparency, which will lead to the need to clearly define what the levies will be used for. The people levied are often more reluctant about paying levies when they do not know what they will be used for.



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THE RISKS OF DECENTRALIZATION

- 1. Total substitution of the concept of service supply with that of service demand.**
- 2. Faulty information sharing does not promote good coordination of activities.**
- 3. The heritage of paternalism impoverishes the supply of support services.**
- 4. The tradition of patronage creates risks for taking ownership.**
- 5. Institutional rigidity at decentralized levels dictates the pace of progress.**

Participatory management experiences are ongoing in Burkina Faso and Ghana. Management committees have been set up within this context. They are made up, among others, of representatives of the local administration and the communities. For reasons of transparency, ad hoc committees have been created within the management committees in Burkina Faso. The ad hoc committees are responsible for deciding on the amount to be levied. They also discuss how the levies should be managed. In Ghana, income allocation grids have been drawn up in such a way that each stakeholder knows exactly how much he is to pay.

The risks should not be seen as obstacles to decentralization, but rather as aspects to be taken into consideration in the elaboration of an overall strategy to embark on a decentralization process.

For example, it is not uncommon for a central power to argue that capacities are lacking at regional and/or local levels, that there is a high risk that support services will decrease – all this just to hang on to its powers. The result is that since local capacities often emerge only when a decentralized process is embarked upon, one is caught in a situation where the central power resists delegating some of its powers to the local communities.

It is therefore absolutely necessary for all issues at stake and all difficulties encountered to be carefully weighed and overcome, and for all potential support to be identified.

The Regionalization and Differentiation methodology (RAD)

The RAD-ITO model is used to orient the elaboration of a more appropriate decentralization policy, and to assess the performance of the ongoing process. It can be applied to both the agricultural sector² and the fisheries sector. To overcome the risks created by the heritage of centralized policies, it starts by proposing a decentralization methodology which requires that the needs of rural populations be defined on the basis of their region and the differentiation of policies (risk 1); and thereafter, on the basis of three accompanying policies linked to the field of information (risk 2), training (risk 3) and organization (risk 4); and finally, on the basis of wide consultation on the modalities and the most appropriate work schedule for embarking on a decentralization process (risk 5).

In order to prevent the first risk, the decentralization policy would need to create an intersection area between development stakeholders who have an overall rationale and a global supply of policies on the one hand, and stakeholders who have knowledge of the local situation and a specific demand for support projects and programmes on the other. It will only be at this point that a decentralized rural development strategy will be formulated.

In other words, in order to ensure that the supply of policies does not become too global, the policies must be differentiated on the one hand, by identifying the specific problems of each region, product and type of producer, and on the other hand, by the kind of support that is best adapted to the needs of the various local development stakeholders. However, in order to ensure that the demand for support made by local stakeholders are not too local and dispersed, the demands of the local populations should be regionalized at the same time, so that they can have a wider reach and enjoy adequate coordination

and coherence.

The combination of regionalization and differentiation will facilitate the transformation of centralized policies into policies that are much closer to local realities, while still ensuring a certain level of coordination and coherence that will enable them to become vehicles for rural development. In this way, the State can reorient its actions towards adequately adapted and differentiated policies that will enable the agricultural and rural sector to constitute the basis for a development strategy that will generate employment and income, and that will diversify the sources of agricultural and non-agricultural income, while at the same time helping the poorest and most needy groups in the communities to build up their capacity to access markets.

The differentiation of policies and the regionalization of demands can play a decisive role in ensuring that development stakeholders agree among themselves on an efficient, transparent, and differentiated rural development strategy through dialogue and consultation. What is at stake in this dialogue approach is the coordination of the actions of each stakeholder on the basis of mutual recognition of the capacities that each one can bring to the decentralization framework. The policies that accompany the decentralization process will be conceptualized and put in practice within the general framework. The SFLP guide on the elaboration of community projects³ offers some guidelines on communities' self-help projects (micro level) and their integration at meso and macro levels.

Accompanying policies: Information, Training and Organization (ITO)

According to the RAD-ITO model, if the impact desired from decentralization is to be consolidated, three policies are required to accompany regionalization and differentiation in order to create access to information, training and organization.

It had earlier been indicated that a lop-sided access to information did not facilitate coordination activities, nor does it ensure coherence. The policy on access to information has two objectives: one is the production of the kind of information required to elaborate a rural development strategy, while the other is the creation of conditions that will promote information flow between other rural development stakeholders. Free access to information by all is one of the conditions for successful dialogue between the State and other development stakeholders. Without it, there can be no decentralized and participatory development strategy. For dialogue to flow properly, all parties involved in the dialogue process must have access to the same quantity and quality of information on the constraints and opportunities (institutional, macro-economic and technological) that guarantee local development.

Furthermore, information generation and information flow can also create a certain leverage of local populations' control over development activities, while at the same time ensuring coherence in interventions. This is explained by the fact that stakeholders will have access to information that go beyond the usual details about the situation within which they are evolving. This is a priority issue if decentralization is to be given an economic, technological and participatory content.

The capacity of rural populations to take independent action has been hindered by the long period of paternalism. The technical skills of all the development stakeholders must therefore be created or strengthened as necessary so as to ensure that decentralization does not lead to a decline in the supply of support services, and to guarantee the execution of decentralized functions. The transfer of duties must therefore be accompanied by the transfer of skills towards technical services, local government levels, and civil society organizations.

The need for training also results from the fact that the decentralization policy emphasizes the demands of local populations. The capacity to formulate demands is however not evenly distributed between the different local government areas and civil society organizations. It actually depends on the social capital and the specific experiences that the organizations have accumulated over the years. Without a strong capacity building policy, decentralization will favour the richest and most active local governments and organizations to the detriment of those who actually require more support, but do not have the capacity to formulate and articulate their needs in terms of development projects and programmes. Capacity building should therefore be oriented as a priority towards these levels of government and civil society organizations.

If access to information and training impede local elites from their tendency to take ownership of decentralization, they can also be inadequate if no strong organization is in place to provide development stakeholders the opportunity to participate in the conception, implementation, and monitoring of policies. This is why the third accompanying policy proposed by the RAD-ITO model is to support civil society organizations in their efforts to get the State to recognize them as development players, and by creating an institutional framework that will promote their participation both vertically and horizontally, as proposed by the concepts of Organizational Development.

There are several dimensions to why organization is important. Organization can help to ensure that the concrete modalities for decentralization meet the demands for participation emanating from the rural populations, even if they have not been decided or formulated in a centralized manner. The objectives, modalities and pace of the decentralization policy can thus be agreed upon among the local stakeholders directly involved.

Organization facilitates institutional innovations that enable stakeholders to participate actively in policy differentiation and in the regionalization of demands for support. It is only through organizations that the different social groups can become stakeholders in their own development, because it will strengthen their capacity to take ownership of the functions that were previously centralized.

Finally, organization is important because the success of decentralization depends on the existence of local mediatory and consultative structures that can transform social pressure into development projects and programmes. The positive role of social pressure also deserves recognition. Centralized States tend to see conflict as opposition to their interventions whereas conflicts are more often than not, just a way of expressing a demand for intervention. If this demand takes the form of a conflict, it could be because there was no room for dialogue at local level. With the decentralized mediation mechanisms in place, social pressure can become a vehicle for making demands known and articulating them within the context of a rural development strategy.

The first area where dialogue and consultation between the State and other development stakeholders should be applied is as it relates to the pace of decentralization. In its definition, it must be acknowledged that regional situations, production conditions, and the strategies of each type of stakeholders are all constraints that make it necessary for decentralization process be achieved through repeated dialogue between national and local stakeholders, and the regionalization of the results of the dialogue. This will make it possible to modulate the pace of decentralization on the basis of the specific capacity of each region and sector of each local government or town, and for all social groups to take up and develop the decentralized functions that should be theirs. In summary, the RAD-ITO model proposes that decentralization be designed as a gradual process of transferring functions, resources and decision-making powers, at a pace that will make it possible to strengthen the institutions that will be required to support decentralization.

Conclusion

The decentralization methodology and the accompanying policies recommended by the RAD-ITO model are not compatible with a centralized State which considered of being the sole development stakeholder relating with beneficiaries of its policies. On the contrary, differentiation and regionalization imply that dialogue exists between the various stakeholders. Within this context, the SFLP is currently disseminating information on the practice of social and territorial agreement (or social charter⁴) in the fisheries sector.

These actions form part of the efforts to legitimize or re-legitimize the role of the State based on the following three major points which promote public exchange:

- The dissemination of accompanying measures (information, training, organization) linked to plans to restructure institutions at central level.
- Support in the elaboration and application of a legislative and operational framework for establishing sustainable partnerships and social consultation as they relate to social and territorial agreements at local level.

Support in strengthening the regional dimension, based on the RAD-ITO approach which makes it possible

to analyse and address the risks of decentralization.

1 RAD-ITO means: Regionalization and Differentiation – Information, Training and Organization. The RAD-ITO decentralization model identifies on the one hand, the risks associated with decentralization, and on the other hand, a methodology and accompanying policies that will help to control those risks and ensure that decentralization serves as a development tool.

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2 Bonnal J.- Rossi M., Manuel de formation : Comprendre, analyser, gérer un processus de décentralisation, the publication of which is underway

3 The Sustainable Fisheries Livelihoods Programme's Community Projects Elaboration Guide, Cotonou, April 2002.

4 See the conclusions on regionalization and the social charter in: Peemans J.P., Le développement des peuples face à la modernisation du monde, 2002, Population et développement N. 10, Academia Bruylant, Louvain-la-Neuve / L'Harmattan, Paris.