STRENGTHENING LOCAL GOVERNANCE IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES: A KEY ISSUE FOR SUSTAINABLE LOCAL DEVELOPMENT

ROUNDTABLE

[RA5]
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MAIN FINDINGS

In the face of the failure of top-down development, one of the solutions which is imposing itself is that of fostering development starting from the local area. The new role attributed to local authorities is mainly a result of the phenomenon of decentralisation. Therefore, there are two components to consider: local bodies, who are increasingly the ones who carry out the role of the state in providing local public services; and that of development, or rather the economy and how to create jobs at a local level. Job creation should be done by drawing up alliances between local authorities and businesses. Partnerships are a key tool in developing regions, in defining the structure of the project but also in providing funding. Therefore, the question of access to funding not only influences the strategies of local elected officials regarding international donors, but also has an impact on their policies.

SPEAKERS

Simon Compaoré
Mayor of Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso

Pierre Schapira
Deputy to the Mayor of Paris in charge of International
Relations, European Affairs and Francophony,
Municipal Councillor of Paris

Alain Yvergniaux
Special Advisor to the President for International
Affairs, Regional Council of Brittany

MODÉRATEUR

Bertrand Gallet

Managing Director, Cités Unies France

SUMMARY OF INTERVENTIONS

Pierre Schapira highlights the growing importance of the role of mayors, who are the outcome of the decentralisation process. In transferring powers from central government to the communes, which mainly affects local services, the mayor becomes the main point of contact for the local population. However, this transfer of powers is rarely accompanied by a transfer of resources. Therefore, it is up to local authorities to find sources of funding; these can come either from donors or from partnerships with other local authorities, with the funding very rarely coming from themselves. The challenge is therefore to create local funding through taxation, and this requires a Land Registry and a Civil Registration Authority to be set up in order to know where people live. For this reason, an address system was set up in Ouagadougou, with names and numbers being assigned to roads and houses in order to allow for taxes to be collected.

Simon Compaoré underscores that there are two main processes underway in Africa, urbanisation and decentralisation, and the first has contributed to bringing about the second. He believes that this process is also the response to the failure of large development projects which were not able to reach the grassroots level. The work of mayors therefore consists of improving lives at the grassroots level. Projects that have been started by the city of Ouagadougou are funded by external resources (by transferring funds from central government and partner networks) and the city's own resources (local taxes and duties levied on businesses in the city). However, these taxes are levied by central government, who decides when they will be transferred, and this fact highlights the fragility of the decentralisation process. The example from the city of Ouagadougou puts into perspective the fact that the question of funding, and in particular self-funding, is at the heart of the local development issue.

Alain Yvergniaux notes that there are different levels of local authorities, and focuses his contribution on regional bodies and the important role that they can play in promoting a local approach to development through structures which mobilise all stakeholders: businesses, NGOs, research and training centres, financial institutions, etc. This local development and

multi-stakeholder approach is one which is linked to central government policy and the work of international institutions (multi-level governance) and has the intrinsic aim of changing the development situation. These are the foundations of the French regions of Brittany and Centre in their work in Burkina Faso, and this is how they committed to a large economic cooperation project in order to develop a vegetable farming cooperative centred on Ouagadougou, which has created a large number of jobs and added value to this type of farming which is important for food security. Led by regional political authorities, this very pragmatic project is a multi-stakeholder one, mobilising many actors in Burkina Faso and Brittany. However, it also works in a multi-level way, with the West African Economic and Monetary Union (UEMOA) and the Burkina Faso Ministry for Agriculture, both of which are strongly associated with the project.

Pierre Schapira adds that achieving recognition for local authorities is not an easy task. As a matter of fact, local collectivities gaining their freedom are not greatly appreciated by central governments. The European Union used to only carry out development through NGOs, but now it is starting to invest in local authorities. However, local authorities and NGOs do not have the same remit: in terms of local governance, local authorities do the work, through the transfer of powers and good practices. Finally, this work responds to demands from partners in the South, who also bring their local populations onboard, providing a measure of viability.

SUMMARY OF AUDIENCE EXCHANGE

What can be done about local civil servants who do not have the powers necessary to deal with complex problems, especially in small cities and rural areas?

Bertrand Gallet believes that this question is of fundamental importance because it goes back to the central issue of local governance, and the fact that there cannot be governance without local civil servants with the right powers. Simon Compaoré highlights the fact that decentralisation is a recent process in Africa,

and this explains why it does not yet work perfectly. Quality decentralisation is accompanied by good decongestion at the level of central government, which should allow for technical services to be represented at the level of the region in order to provide support to local authorities. Local authorities have created a network in each country in which large cities provide support for small ones, particularly in terms of training. **Alain Yvergniaux** notes that for his partners in Burkina Faso, the problem is not one of powers but of the number of staff that the young authority has, with only six local leaders. For **Pierre Schapira**, training municipal civil servants is the key to success: the future of the municipality depends on this and is the starting point for all projects.

There are NGOs specialised in providing support for local authorities and elected officials, many of whom are barely literate. This can consist of training, help in recruiting staff or help in applying for a call for tenders, etc. Therefore, there is true interaction between NGOs and local authorities. Even though elected officials sometimes prefer to work directly with each other, transferring powers is sometimes difficult, particularly in rural areas, where NGOs have a role to play.

Bertrand Gallet, believes that intervention itself is a response to the question of the links between NGOs and local authorities. **Simon Compaoré** underscores the fact that it is the mayor who is in charge of city planning, and that it is a great shame that some NGOs do not consult this figure before starting up their projects. Of course, this collaboration has to be seen in terms of complementarity, but the mayor enjoys specific legitimacy since he has been elected, and also has the duty of being accountable to his population. This is why his actions cannot be compared with those of a responsible NGO.

It is difficult for small cities and rural areas to attract funding. Would an intermunicipal structure be a solution for strengthening local authorities in these areas?

Bertrand Gallet highlights the fact that the intermunicipal model is being imposed everywhere, particularly in former French colonies that have adopted the commune model. This is often carried out in an informal way, as is the case in Lebanon, in the Chouf region. The intercommunal model worked so well there that it has been adopted by the parliament and rolled out across Lebanon. **Simon Compaoré** notes that in Burkina Faso, legal texts make allowances for an intermunicipal setup. In some regions, communes are grouped together in order for them to help each other, even though this collaboration has not necessarily taken on the form which was set out in the legal texts, because it is still starting out. Nevertheless, these local authorities are still young, and each one of them also needs to define its own structure before leaping towards an intermunicipal approach.

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