



**International Centre for Local Development Studies**

19 rue d'Enghien 69002 Lyon France ☎ +33 (0)4 72 77 87 50 📠 +33 (0)4 72 41 99 88  
[ciedel@univ-catholyon.fr](mailto:ciedel@univ-catholyon.fr) [www.ciedel.org](http://www.ciedel.org)

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**Thematic evaluation of decentralization and local  
governance**

Overview of the state of decentralization in Africa and French Priority  
Solidarity Zones (Caribbean, Middle East)

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Christophe Mestre  
Corinne Lajarge



*This paper offers a condensed review of decentralization processes in Africa. It forms part of a broader evaluation of French action to support decentralization and local governance, commissioned from the International Centre for Local Development Studies (CIEDEL). It was written on the request of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Development. However, the analysis and observations contained therein are the sole responsibility of the authors and do not constitute an official position.*

## **The many origins of decentralization**

Although historically, decentralization can be traced back to the pre-colonial era, as Ousmane Sy implied by translating the term “decentralization” by “the return of government to the home”<sup>1</sup>, it must be acknowledged that, for the vast majority of French cooperation priority countries, the colonial period and the independence that followed saw a shift towards centralization of power into the hands of the State, even if some cities were granted local government status, as in central and West Africa, or the State was supported by local management systems, as in some Mediterranean countries, or by local self-government, as in Ghana.

Most decentralization processes actually began or accelerated in Africa at the turn of the 1990s, during a period that was marked simultaneously by the consequences of a decade or more of structural adjustments, which had reduced State presence at local level to its simplest form; by the end of the Cold War; by the repercussions of Mitterrand’s speech at La Baule; and by the rise in demands relating to democracy and/or identity, by citizens and some territories.

These processes culminated in national conferences which established the recognition of local self-government and launch of decentralization as a crucial stage in a State’s development. Similar changes took place during periods of social upheaval, for example in Haiti, where the principle of a decentralized State was noted in the Constitution that was drawn up when the Duvalier regime fell and decrees establishing local authorities were passed in 2006 following the return to the rule of law and the election of President Préval. Other examples include the Global and Inclusive Agreement on Transition in the Democratic Republic of the Congo signed in Pretoria in 2002, and the changes made in the wake of the “Arab Spring”: in Morocco, advanced regionalization was included in the new Constitution of 2011; and in Tunisia, the Constitution promulgated in January 2014 granted local authorities both legal personality and financial and administrative autonomy.

These processes of decentralization therefore stem from the quest to optimize the efficiency of technical and administrative management of local public services, in combination with pressure from social movements aiming for State reform and the emergence of an international trend towards State reform and democratization.<sup>2</sup>

## **Decentralization: an irreversible process**

In 2008, in the preface to the First Global Report by United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) on decentralization and local democracy in the world, Bertrand Delanoë wrote: *“The present Report clearly shows that the world is undergoing a quiet democratic revolution. Therefore, even if important aspects of this process have yet to be accomplished, especially in countries in conflict (in the Middle East, Asia and Africa) local democracy is gaining momentum all over the world [...]. In a world where more than half of humanity now lives in cities, local authorities are also the key to the solution of major contemporary challenges of all kinds: Democratic, as it is in the local sphere that the sense of citizenship is reinforced and identities are constructed to deal with globalization; environmental, since the preservation of our planet and the fight against global warming depends to a great extent on finding sustainable solutions to transform current models of production and consumption, particularly in the urban areas; economic, given that large amounts of wealth and opportunities, as well as extreme inequities are generated within the cities and in their surroundings; and social, as it is at the local level where the grounds need to be set for creating social inclusion, managing cultural diversity and ensuring human security.”*

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<sup>1</sup> Reconstruire l’Afrique, Ousmane Sy, Editions Charles Léopold Mayer, May 2010.

<sup>2</sup> This international trend is not driven solely by Western countries; many sectors of civil society and the political sphere in countries of the South have also been spurring on these developments for several decades.

The introduction to the report then highlights that “*in the last 20 years decentralization has established itself as a political and institutional phenomenon in most countries around the world. These countries have local authorities, consisting of local assemblies elected by universal suffrage and an executive, both of which are expected, to different degrees, to respond to their citizens. As is shown by widespread legislative or constitutional reform, the global process has resulted in wider recognition of the role and position of local authorities as well as a significant increase in their powers and financing, notwithstanding the many differences between countries. The emergence of new political leadership at the local level is reflected almost everywhere in the creation of associations of elected members or local authorities...*”

For all its weaknesses and imperfections, decentralization has now become an irreversible process.

### **Review of decentralization in 2014**

Thinking about what decentralization represents in 2014 means investigating the two complementary notions which are generally covered by this term:

- 1) The process by which a country moves from having a centralized government to a decentralized government; this shift is usually permanent, or at least long-term.
- 2) The resulting situation, i.e. the distribution of power between the central State authority and the local authorities.

A review of decentralization in 2014 leads us to identify several key ideas linked to these two notions:

#### **1) *The decentralization process: moving from a centralized government to a decentralized one***

#### **Decentralization enshrined in States’ basic texts**

Decentralization now features in the basic texts of most States. In a study carried out by UCLGA and Cities Alliance, “Assessing the Institutional Environment of Local Governments in Africa”, it was revealed that the constitutions of 40 out of 50 African States explicitly mention local authorities, either defining their roles and responsibilities or providing for such definitions to be laid down by legislation. These 40 States include all the priority countries suffering from poverty (PPPs). Other countries where this is the case include Haiti, Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco, Lebanon<sup>3</sup> and the Palestinian Territories.<sup>4</sup>

The fact that decentralization is clearly mentioned in these texts as a principle of State organization represents a major development of the past thirty years.

Likewise, the legislative framework is relatively clear for all PPPs. Indeed, with the exception of the Union of the Comoros, the remit of local governments in these countries is precisely defined in relation to the constitution, even though some decrees have yet to be passed.

#### **Strengthening of local democracy**

Local democracy, that is, the appointment of deliberative and executive bodies by democratic election (direct or indirect suffrage), is a key element of decentralization.

The UCLGA and Cities Alliance study mentioned above shows that 34 out of 50 African States hold elections for local government bodies, whether or not these cover all of the national territory. In 11 out

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<sup>3</sup> Strictly speaking, the Lebanese constitution does not mention decentralization, but the Taif Agreement, which was adopted by the parliament in 1989 and is considered constitutional, mentions decentralization in its Article 3.

<sup>4</sup> The Palestinian Territories do not have a constitution but a Basic Law, approved in 1997, in which Article 76 concerns local governments.

of 16 PPPs, some or all local government bodies are elected<sup>5</sup>, as well as in Morocco, Algeria, Egypt, Lebanon and the Palestinian Territories.

Even though there is less of a clear trend than for the inclusion of decentralization in the States' basic texts, it can be noted that local government bodies are elected in more than two-thirds of PPPs. These local elections are often tightly contested, with a high turnout<sup>6</sup> and regular alternation of power, in countries where such alternation is rare at the highest level of State government.

### **Decision-making capacity remains limited**

Yet, although texts exist and local elections are held, the reality of the situation is more complex. This is because the main driving forces that could enable the successful development of an operational decentralized system have not, or have only partly, been activated.

#### ***Local finances***

- In PPPs, financial transfers from the State to local governments are extremely limited and usually do not exceed 5% of the State budget (excluding grants) or 1% of GDP.<sup>7</sup> The same is true in Haiti and Algeria.
- In addition to being limited, these financial transfers are unpredictable and the logic behind their allocation is unclear. The UCLGA and Cities Alliance study shows that in 15 out of 16 PPPs, financial transfers are inexistent or erratic and irregular.<sup>8</sup>
- Lastly, in ten PPPs, local taxes are fixed and collected centrally, while the remaining six have a certain amount of freedom but only to set the rates of existing local taxes.

It is obvious that in States with limited resources and reduced fiscal efficiency, the funds transferred will never measure up to the responsibilities transferred. Yet the fundamental political change that decentralization represents depends on the State transferring to local governments, in a clear, regular and adequate manner, the basic resources they require to fulfil their core responsibilities, and above all, the responsibility and capacity to develop a real tax policy, which is subject to supervision and regulation, of course, but sufficiently independent to give them real political power. This is not currently the case, which restricts local governments' ability to act.

#### ***Human resources***

Local governments are generally understaffed and their staff often lack a specific status (the local civil servant status remains an exception) or, when such a status exists, it is not attractive: for example, in Burkina Faso the pay scale for local civil servants is lower than for national civil servants, even though they face tougher working conditions and higher expectations.

There are some extreme examples of this, such as in Senegal, where until December 2013, rural communities were unable to hire any staff other than the ASCOM (Community Assistant, effectively the equivalent of a Secretary-General), making it impossible to develop the local government and making it difficult simply to provide public services, such as registration of births, marriages and deaths.

At best, local governments succeed in managing the decentralized institution and some public services (registration of births, marriages and deaths, roads, cleaning, etc.) but it is very hard for them to get

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<sup>5</sup> In nine PPPs, there are local elections for all local governments; in two PPPs, Madagascar and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, there are local elections for some levels of local government.

<sup>6</sup> The turnout for local elections in December 2012 in Burkina Faso was 74%, whereas the turnout for the 2010 presidential elections was 55%.

<sup>7</sup> UCLG, Decentralization and local democracy in the world, First UCLG Global Report, 2008.

<sup>8</sup> In several countries, the State uses income from local taxation to resolve national treasury issues, and it can take a long time for this money to be returned to local governments, if it is returned at all.

involved in longer-term policy-making concerning land planning, urban development, local economic development, etc.

### ***Respect for project management and contracting by local governments***

As the UCLG report already pointed out in 2008, "...particularly in UEMOA (West Africa Economic and Monetary Union) and CEMAC (Economic and Monetary Community of Central Africa) countries, governments are often resistant to decentralizing the financial resources in keeping with the sectoral policies that absorb, even so, large flows of aid and public investment." The main sectoral ministries (education, health, urban development, public works, etc.) therefore continue to invest directly in fields of responsibility that have actually been transferred by the State to local governments. For example, infrastructure owned by local authorities in northern Mali is often renovated by State services without any consultation or discussion with the local government, while in Haiti, investment in basic infrastructure (roads and highways, etc.) is often carried out without taking the communes into consideration.

State services therefore often bypass local government contracting, and this is exacerbated by budget support from Technical and Financial Partners (TFPs), which does not take local governments into account.

Lastly, relations between devolved State departments and local governments are another sticking point in the decentralization process, as there is now a certain amount of overlap between devolvement and decentralization in many French cooperation priority countries. The only notable exception is Ghana, where devolved State departments have been placed under the authority of districts (a level of decentralization equivalent to communes), but as they continue to be paid by their respective ministries and to manage the funds they receive to implement projects at a local level, the problems have not been resolved. The regions of Madagascar are in a similar situation.

Some countries, such as Mali, are currently reflecting on ways to reduce this overlap and progressively transfer means and human resources from devolved State departments to local governments, preserving only core government departments and supervisory ones. This would effectively clarify the situation with regard to project management and contracting by local governments, as well as increasing administrative efficiency.

### **Breaking the decentralization "spell"**

A comparison of the texts, electoral processes and real transfer of responsibilities, means, staff and decision-making power helps to put into perspective the progress made by French cooperation priority countries in terms of decentralization.

These processes have not only been implemented very slowly (in many cases, over ten years have passed between the inclusion of decentralization in a State's constitution and the first local elections) but they have also encountered obstacles which slow them down to such an extent that they come to a halt or even regress, as the lack of political will to achieve decentralization leads to inertia in the management of these processes.

### ***2) Decentralized government system (distribution of power)***

With regard to the establishment of a decentralized government system in which local authorities play their part in cooperation with State departments, the following key elements can be noted:

### **Establishing a decentralized system leads to an increase in the number of local governments and the levels within them**

Currently, countries of the South in general, including French cooperation priority countries, are a patchwork of local authorities, which – except in a few very rare cases, such as Chad – cover the whole national territory.

These local authorities, which are often organized into several levels by the texts, are established gradually; levels within regions are often more complex to set up than levels within communes. Regions may remain in the planning stages (as in Burkina Faso), under State management (as in Madagascar) or poorly equipped (as in Morocco) for a significant period of time.

But whatever the situation, decentralization helps to establish a network of local governments, elected officials and technicians, who are often the State representatives who are closest to the citizens.

As a result, local governments now form part of the citizens' institutional landscape and as such, are recognized by them as primary interlocutors whom they may call on at all times.

### **Local governments are linked to a varying degree with traditional authorities**

Depending on the texts, decentralized systems may or may not take into account the authorities that have played a role traditionally (kings, leaders of townships, districts or villages, *mokhtars*, etc.), acknowledge their historical legitimacy (depending on the texts, these authorities may be elected or simply recognized) and build relations, which are often difficult, between the different types of legitimacy that characterize these traditional authorities and locally elected officials.<sup>9</sup>

### **There are great inequalities between local governments**

Within this territorial network, there are significant inequalities between local governments. Urban communes, especially large cities or their equivalents (districts, urban communities), have their own resources that enable them to operate territorial and local government successfully. Meanwhile, many rural communes do not have the means to pay their staff regularly, cover the salaries of the elected officials, run public services or make investments.

Likewise, the largest local governments – cities and major regions – can access international cooperation funds (multi- and bilateral financing, decentralized cooperation) more easily than small local governments with little or no capital.

### **Innovative local experiments**

In each country undergoing decentralization, we can identify local governments in both rural and urban areas that have set up innovative local experiments, alone or in groups, in order to assume fully their role as a decentralized local authority, either globally or in a specific sector.

For example, in Haiti, while there is not yet any legislation on cooperation between communes, the four communes of the Les Palmes region have set up a shared technical service to handle cross-communal issues (drainage basin management and risk management, for example); in Burkina Faso, urban communes have set up extra-municipal water and sanitation commissions, composed of elected representatives, commune officials, decentralized State technical departments, experts, etc., who assist the municipality in fulfilling the water and sanitation responsibilities transferred to it by the State; in Mauritania, the urban community of Nouakchott has set up a Services and Urban Heritage Watchdog, which aims to produce the basic information required to define, implement and monitor public policies at both local and national level. In Burkina Faso, the commune of Ouagadougou has assigned some of its staff to the tax department of the Ministry of Finance to improve tax collection.

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<sup>9</sup> For example in communes in Lebanon, mayors from municipal councils elected at the level of the commune coexist with “*mokhtars*”, who are elected in each district or village and represent the modern equivalent of the “village leaders” established when the country was under Ottoman rule. The *mokhtars* and the municipal councils share similar responsibilities.

It is thus possible to identify dozens of local experiments which all seek to strengthen local governance by improving internal operations, enhancing public services, or allowing the local government to develop a real medium- or long-term strategic vision.

### **Emergence of key local figures**

In this way, decentralization leads to the emergence of key figures who embody their local government and may become new members of the political elite, at local, national and international level: examples include the mayor of Ouagadougou, the president of the urban community of Nouakchott, the mayor of Moundou, the president of the region of Rabat Salé Zemmour Zaër, etc. These new figures of public authority exert an influence alongside the national authorities and play a real role on the country's political scene.

### **Establishment of local authority associations which represent a national force**

These local authorities often contribute to the establishment and development of associations of local authorities not only at national level (Association of the Municipalities of Mali [AMM], Association of the Municipalities of Burkina Faso [AMBF], etc.) but also at sub-regional and international level (Council of Local Governments of the West African Economic and Monetary Union [CCT WAEMU], UCLGA, UCLG, International Association of Francophone Regions [AIRF], International Association of Francophone Mayors [AIMF], etc.).

These associations of local authorities carry real political weight in the country, but also on the international scene, where they strongly advocate greater recognition of the role of local governments in development.

### **A decentralized system running at several speeds**

On the basis of these various observations, it can be noted that, as a result of current constraints on decentralization, the decentralized system does not enable all communes to reach the same stage. Decentralized local governments that have particularly dynamic elected representatives, receive external support, mobilize skilled management teams, or have better fiscal potential, succeed in improving the way in which they operate and the public services they provide (even if these still fall short of needs) by fully assuming their role in project management and contracting, and developing long-term plans for the local area.

Conversely, local governments with limited resources and less pro-active elected representatives fail to manage their basic operations effectively and abandon public services.

The decentralized system is therefore characterized by significant inequalities between local governments, but when certain conditions are fulfilled, local governments are able to assume their role fully.

### **Decentralization is caught between stalled State reforms and clear identification of the political challenges it represents**

In Africa and Haiti, after the enthusiasm of the national conferences in the early 1990s and the near universal implementation of decentralization that followed, all observers have noted in recent years that these processes of decentralization, and State reform more generally, have come to a halt. This point is also made by UCLGA and Cities Alliance in their study on the institutional environment of local governments in Africa: "The current situation in most African cities shows that most African decision makers have not yet grasped the importance of the proper functioning of cities for the proper functioning of national economies. We also know that this proper functioning is best ensured when the government respects the principle of subsidiarity. In other words, as long as cities and local authorities



are not put in a position to take initiatives [...] there is little chance that Africa will overcome the challenges posed by rapid urbanisation.”<sup>10</sup>

At the same time, it seems that the political challenges posed by decentralization are being pinpointed with increasing precision by the highest authorities of the States concerned, who see both the advantages and risks associated with pursuing decentralization, in light of the success of certain local governments in fulfilling their responsibilities.

It is clear to see that the tension between these two aspects either brings decentralization to a standstill or leads to the introduction of measures counteracting earlier progress. The following recent examples demonstrate the impact of this tension:

- In Chad, the first local elections in the country’s history were held in January 2012 in 42 urban communes. Firstly, a decree established the arrondissement communes of N’Djamena as fully operational communes, which placed the ten arrondissement communes at the same level as the city of N’Djamena and made governance of the city very complex; secondly, the government decided to instate a Government commissioner in each commune, as in the provincial capitals of Cameroon, which is currently the case in the capital, with the Governor assuming the role of Government commissioner.
- In Haiti, locally elected representatives in communes have gradually been replaced by temporary executive officers appointed by the Head of State and local elections are frequently postponed.
- In Morocco, the advanced regionalization enshrined in the new constitution of 2011 and regularly highlighted as a priority by the King has still not become a reality, as none of the organic laws or implementing decrees have been passed.
- In Mali, there has been no progress with regard to decentralization over the past ten years, in terms of the transfer of either responsibilities or resources, and many people have identified this stalling as a cause of the country’s recent crisis. Consequently, decentralization was placed at the heart of the presidential election campaign and round table discussions on the issue were held at the end of October 2013.
- In Madagascar, State transfers to communes are diminishing, regions are governed by a head of region appointed by the Head of State, and since late 2011, responsibility for decentralization has been split between two ministries, the Ministry for Decentralization and the Deputy Prime Minister’s Department for Development and Territorial Planning.
- In Mauritania, whole areas of responsibility have been taken away from local governments, such as registration of births, marriages and deaths, public bus services, etc.
- ...

While citizens have real expectations with regard to local authorities,<sup>11</sup> which they see as their primary interlocutors representing the State, central authorities are identifying the political challenges of decentralization, bringing the process to a standstill (lack of technical, financial or regulatory developments) or sending it into reverse (local autonomy and transfers of responsibilities called into question, etc.).

This tension currently enables certain locally elected officials who are capable of innovating to move beyond their legal mandate, develop experiments and position their local governments as crucial interlocutors of the government and TFPs. They assert themselves as providing services and improving people’s living conditions, and as change agents in both political and operational terms. This has been the case for several years in cities such as Ouagadougou, Kayes and Dakar, in provinces

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<sup>10</sup> UCLGA, Cities Alliance, Assessing the Institutional Environment of Local Governments in Africa, September 2013

<sup>11</sup> For example, during the period of occupation of northern Mali by terrorist groups, the citizens continued to communicate with their elected officials (whether the latter had stayed in the area or moved to Bamako) so that the officials would continue to resolve their problems, maintain the supply of rural agriculture inputs, etc.

such as Elias Piña (Dominican Republic), and regions such as Timbuktu and Hauts-Bassins (Burkina Faso). But these examples are still exceptions.

In the context of development, giving new momentum to decentralization processes therefore represents a key political challenge. French cooperation has a vital contribution to make in terms of political influence and technical tools. However, in order to restart these processes, it is necessary to understand the reasons why they have stalled.

### **Decentralization encounters deep-seated resistance**

A cross-cutting analysis of the various decentralization processes, projects and circumstances surrounding project implementation shows that these processes come up against deep-rooted resistance within the State. This opposition is generally based on “technical” arguments along the following lines: “the local governments are not ready”, “they do not have the capacities needed”, “the elected representatives are illiterate”, “the local governments do not have the means to carry out the responsibilities that are supposed to be transferred to them”, etc. These arguments, which are not all unfounded, obscure the real causes for resistance to decentralization, which are far more deep-rooted. These causes can be categorized as follows, according to the level of the main stakeholders concerned:

- ***Fear of loss of power, ignorance and indifference on the part of the central authority***  
At the level of the central authority (president, head of government, etc.), resistance tends to be caused by three factors, which may occur in combination:
  - Fear at a political level.  
For many State leaders, decentralization helps to give opposition leaders access to political power and therefore to a public platform, which allows them to remain present at a local and national level and thus gain strength as a political rival.  
This is felt all the more strongly when, as in many countries, it is well-established that the capital city supports the opposition and/or when local government associations are likely to be chaired by elected members of the opposition.
  - Fear linked to ignorance of the way in which the relationship between central and local authorities operates.  
While the relationship between the executive and the legislature is a well-oiled machine that is mastered by the central authority (even though relations are sometimes difficult), the latter's relationship with locally elected representatives is problematic in two respects:
    - The relationship with autonomous, decentralized bodies, which, irrespective of their political labels, have the ability to define local public policies and make choices that do not always correspond to national policies, requires negotiation and dialogue.
    - The central authority is uncertain and therefore anxious about the way to approach its relationship with locally elected members of the opposition who are responsible for decentralized local governments where they are able to manage and make decisions independently in the fields of responsibility that have been transferred, and who may publicly point out the central authority's failure to honour its commitments (in terms of financial transfers, for example).
  - Indifference  
Lastly, most central authorities feel a certain remoteness from local realities and their operations reflect this, as they show relative indifference to what is happening in local areas and therefore to the need to pursue State reforms in order to optimize operations at a local level.

- **Ignorance and indifference on the part of the political parties**

The political parties, like the central authorities, have a good understanding of the parliamentary mechanism, and are in constant communication with members of parliament, who are often party leaders. Locally elected representatives, meanwhile, rarely live permanently in the capital city; moreover, they are often in employment and have less time to devote to the operation of the party (except in countries where it is possible to hold both the role of a local representative and a member of parliament). Locally elected officials therefore carry relatively little weight in political parties, which results in the parties being ignorant of, or even indifferent towards, the processes of State reform.

- **Sectoral ministries resist for fear of losing power, having less control over their finances and seeing the quality of public services drop.**

Sectoral ministries, especially those with the largest budgets (education, health, public works, etc.) enjoy considerable independence in the way that they operate: they decide on their investment plans, they draw up their own maps (school catchment areas, health services, etc.), they manage their finances at the central level and report to the central authority. In their view, devolvement and coordination of sectoral public policies at territorial level (creation of authorities such as the Secretariat-General for Regional Affairs, for example), just like decentralization and the effective exercise of responsibilities by decentralized local governments, represent the following:

- the risk of losing their control over sectoral funding and therefore their ability to define and implement sectoral policies and the advantages that this brings them, such as the concentration of means (vehicles, ICTs, etc.) and benefits (bonuses, missions, training, etc.) at the central level;
- the risk of seeing public action decrease in quality, as a result of being divided among levels of government and institutions (ministry, decentralized local governments, etc.)

This resistance is exacerbated by the decision to place decentralization under the responsibility of a specific ministry or a ministry with a broader remit (internal affairs, urban planning, etc.) but nonetheless without hierarchical authority over other ministries, when decentralization is, by its very nature, an interministerial issue and should be overseen by the prime minister or even the president.

- **Devolved departments are unwilling to share their power**

Lastly, devolved State departments present at regional level see the processes of decentralization and local governance as a threat that their responsibilities, means and decision-making power will be transferred to decentralized local governments and their departments thus stripped of their functions.

Except in periods when internal or external constraints drive structural change relating to State reform (national conferences, alternation of political power, the fall of the Berlin Wall, demands made by donors, domestic crises, etc.), all these sources of resistance cause decentralization to progress slowly (Burkina Faso, etc.), to come to a halt (Mali under President Touré, Niger, Morocco, etc.) or to regress and be replaced by processes of recentralization (Haiti, Mauritania, etc.). For more than ten years, in most PPPs and southern and eastern Mediterranean countries, there have been few internal or external events that have given new momentum to these reforms (with the notable exception of events in Mali, the revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt, and the alternation of power in Senegal).

## **Political support for decentralization**

The decentralization processes that date back furthest – those sparked by social movements in the 1980s and 1990s – have reached a turning point.

For even if we consider decentralization to be irreversible, and although success has been achieved with regard to some local governments, there is a serious risk that current obstacles to the processes at work may result in local governments doing no better than State departments have done up until now. Local governments are therefore at risk of losing their legitimacy. And the hopes of citizens and social movements aspiring to a real transformation of the State, with more services provided locally, action to address citizens' concerns, better provision of basic public services, etc. are likely to be dashed. Citizens, or at least some groups, might then be tempted to adopt radical courses of action, challenging the State and its organization.

This situation casts doubt on the decentralization support strategies adopted by all TFPs and in particular, the French cooperation strategy.<sup>12</sup>

There is therefore a real need for the French State to develop a strategy to support State reforms, especially decentralization, on the basis of a clear stance as to whether it is appropriate to support these reforms in light of the context of different PPPs and southern and eastern Mediterranean countries.

In order to have an impact, this strategy cannot be defined independently of that of other TFPs, especially the other European countries and the European Union.

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<sup>12</sup> For example, a recent paper from the TFP consultation forum on decentralization in Niger reads as follows: “after almost a decade of implementing decentralization, it has become clear that the Government’s repeated claims that it intends to make this process a priority have been nothing but wishful thinking. This situation is all the more uncomfortable for TFPs supporting the sector as it underlines the limits of their assistance.”