



WORKING IN THE CONTEXT OF GOVERNMENT DECENTRALIZATION POLICIES

LEARNING NOTE

Learning note

**Working in the context of government decentralisation
policies**

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Abstract

The learning paper has been prepared as part of the recent evaluation synthesis on government performance. The paper contributes lessons specifically on government performance in the context of decentralization policies. It highlights the need to better understand the different forms of decentralization, local government functions and the related issues that would need to be considered when designing and implementing programmes at local level.

Decentralization of government structures sends power and resources from central to local governments. The evaluation synthesis on government performance emphasised decentralised government structures are usually better placed to provide services to rural people, if they are sufficiently empowered and properly funded. Aligning IFAD-funded projects to match with the capacities and resources at local governments can significantly improve service provision to poor and marginalised people. In practice, the quality and strengths of these services often remained patchy where decentralization processes were slow or incomplete.

The paper highlights some important lessons for IFAD on how to support decentralization. This includes empowering local people to demand transparency and accountability from local government officials.

IFAD can enhance programme performance in decentralised context through better analysis and knowledge sharing at country, regional and corporate levels.

At country level, through analyses of governance-related issues:

- The paper proposes a framework that could help to identify opportunities and challenges for IFAD programming (section I) as stand-alone analyses or as integral parts of the COSOP design.
- Country studies of devolved management practices of agricultural development programs would provide comprehensive and updated lessons and good practises. This should be a combination of extensive literature review and in-country fieldwork.

At regional level, through lessons sharing:

- This could include sharing country-specific programming notes and related “opportunities and challenges for work in devolved contexts”
- In addition, sharing experiences through annual portfolio review exercises at regional level.

At corporate level, through learning from good practices:

- Synthesis of regional / national experiences would help to identify good practices.
- Based on this, developing guidance and good practice notes.

Keywords: decentralization, devolution, deconcentration, delegation, local government.

Introduction

This note has been prepared in the context of the evaluation synthesis report on IFAD counterpart government performance, by the Independent Office of Evaluation (IOE) of IFAD. Government performance has been consistently noted as an area where IFAD's operations underperform. The synthesis report highlighted challenges with IFAD program in decentralised country context as a particular weakness including the country evaluations of countries as different as India, DRC and Peru. Other past studies have also underscored the importance of decentralization as key factor for IFAD program performance.¹

This note presents a framework for understanding the opportunities and challenges for IFAD's work in decentralized country contexts and proposal for how IFAD best can address them at an earlier stage or during implementation of its programmes. The Note is divided into two main parts. The first part presents the framework with focus on the following key issues:

- What type of decentralization is prevalent in the country?
- What functions of relevance to IFAD project operations are devolved?
- Human Resources Decentralization
- Fiscal Decentralization
- Participation and local accountability:
- National Oversight and Coordination modalities

The second part summarises implications for IFAD programming in terms of considerations for various aspects of project design and suggestions for improved corporate actions in support of decentralised aspects of agricultural development.

¹ IFAD's Performance and Impact in Decentralizing Environments: Experiences from Ethiopia, Tanzania and Uganda (<https://www.ifad.org/en/web/ioe/-/ifad-s-performance-and-impact-in-decentralizing-environments-experiences-from-ethiopia-tanzania-and-uganda>) IFAD Rome July 2005.

Part I: Understanding the opportunities and challenges of work in a decentralized country context

1.1 Five main issues to consider

To determine the opportunities and challenges for IFAD's work in a decentralized country context it is useful to explore the following five main dimension of Decentralization discussed further below.

Figure 1:
Dimensions of Decentralization²



The **type of decentralization** that is prevalent in the country: deconcentration, devolution or delegation (see Section 1.2. below).

Functions of local governments relevant to IFAD project operations that are devolved: agriculture extension, land management, agriculture sector and business regulation, rural credit schemes, cooperative movements, irrigation, agriculture inputs or others.

Human Resources Decentralization: the extent to which agriculture extension staff and other staff of relevance to IFAD interventions effectively are local government employees; the quality and number of staff of both Government and IFAD.

Fiscal Decentralization: how local government service provision is financed: the role of own source revenue or counterpart funding; the role of Inter-governmental fiscal transfers (conditional and unconditional); adequacy and equity of local government financing; and donor funding channels.

Participation and local accountability: to what extent can farmers and other specific IFAD program target groups (including poor farmers and female farmers)

² The categorization of dimensions is inspired by <http://www1.worldbank.org/publicsector/decentralization/admin.htm> and various practical analytical work on decentralization by the consultant.

effectively participate in the planning, design and budgeting of local interventions? To what extent can they hold elected leaders and local staff accountable?

National Oversight and Coordination modalities: does the central government (ministry responsible for Agriculture and other MDAs) effectively coordinate local level interventions – in appropriate manner for a decentralised context? Does central government provide effective local guidance and capacity building? Does the central government effectively monitor local level interventions?

1.2 Forms of decentralisation influencing operational responsibilities

A distinction is typically made between three main forms of decentralization: Deconcentration, delegation and devolution.³

Deconcentration is often considered to be the weakest form of decentralization and is used most frequently in unitary states⁴-redistributes decision-making authority and financial and management responsibilities among different levels of the central government. It can merely shift responsibilities from central government officials in the capital city to those working in regions, provinces, or districts, or it can create strong field administration or local administrative capacity under the supervision of central government ministries.

Box 1

Deconcentration - examples

Decision-making authority and financial and management responsibilities are transferred geographically from the centre (e.g. Ministry of Agriculture headquarter) to localised representatives of the same ministry (e.g. to district agriculture officers). It enables central government better outreach but does not change accountability relations.

For instance, under this setup, district agricultural officials are only responsible to their parent ministry, which also controls resource allocations and approves plans and budgets.

Some examples of deconcentrated agricultural services include Zambia (currently) as well as Kenya (before the new 2010 Constitution). An example of IFAD use of deconcentrated units is the Program Management Units under the ministry of agriculture in Peru.⁵

Source: ESR Government Performance

Delegation is the most widespread form of decentralization. Through delegation, central governments shift responsibility for decision-making and administration of public tasks to semi-autonomous bodies that are not entirely governed by the central government but are ultimately answerable to it. Governments delegate responsibilities when they create public enterprises or corporations, housing authorities, transportation authorities, special service districts, semi-autonomous school districts, regional development corporations, or special project implementation units. Usually these organizations have a great deal of discretion in decision-making.

³ The distinction is common in development organisation like the World bank, UNDP etc. Also FAO: Decentralized Development in Agriculture- An Overview by K.C. Lai, Consultant, Agricultural Policy Support Service, Policy Assistance Division, FAO, Rome, Italy, Vito Cistulli, Agricultural Policy Support Service, Policy Assistance Division, FAO, Rome, Italy for Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, FAO - <https://www.fao.org/3/a-am379e.pdf>.

⁴ There is no completely unitary state. Every state is at least composed of municipalities as decentralized units. Accordingly, the major question arises as to how to differentiate among a unitary state practicing deconcentration, a decentralized unitary state and a federal state. A minority of countries have a federal system of government: of the 193 UN member states, 25 are governed as federal countries (40% of the world population) and 168 are governed as unitary states

⁵ See Peru case study for 2021 evaluation.

Box 2

Delegation - examples

Central governments transfer responsibility for decision-making and administration of public functions to semi-autonomous organizations not wholly controlled by the central government, but ultimately accountable to it (e.g., agricultural extension authorities, land management authorities, regional development corporations).

In Kenya (where agriculture services are devolved to local governments), the Government has decided recently to establish a National Disaster Management Authority, to strengthen response capabilities however which is also leading to some overlap with the Kenyan local government functions.

Delegation is not a frequent form of decentralization in the agriculture sector.

Source: ESR Government Performance

Devolution, whereby powers and resources are transferred to local governments with clear and legally recognized geographical boundaries over which they exercise authority, and within which they perform a range of public functions that often can include both social sector service provision (education, health, etc.) as well as economic and regulatory functions such as land management, natural resource management, agriculture, roads and water.

Local governments normally have mandates for both expenditure decisions (investment planning and other expenditures) as well as revenue raising responsibilities (through local taxes and fees). When decentralization is undertaken in the form of devolution, accountability lines are substantially changed: from central/national government to locally elected councils. decentralization by devolution is a very common form of decentralization of agriculture sector services and found in countries as different as e.g. Uganda, Tanzania, Malawi, Ghana, Pakistan, India, Peoples of Republic of China.

In principle, devolution is the most complete form of decentralization that substantially alters the way that the public sector delivers services and thus the type of decentralization that potentially most significantly can influence IFAD operational responsibilities. It is the prevailing form of decentralization across many countries, however, in practice, it is common place that several aspects of devolution (discussed further below) are not implemented fully. This limits the potential impact of devolution, while also presenting opportunities for IFAD to address systemic government weaknesses for improved service delivery for the poor.

Box 3

Devolution - examples

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Local governments will normally have mandates for both expenditure decisions (investment planning and other expenditures) as well as revenue raising responsibilities (through local taxes and fees).

When decentralization is undertaken in the form of devolution, then accountability lines are substantially changed: from central/national government to locally elected councils.

Decentralization by devolution is a very common form of decentralization of agriculture sector services and found in countries as different as e.g. Uganda, Tanzania, Malawi, Ghana, Pakistan, India, and Peoples of Republic of China.

Source: IFAD resources

It is important to note that decentralization in itself is unlikely to resolve all the typical challenges of services, such as agricultural extension. The latter often include issues such as affordability, cost effectiveness, and technical competence. However, well-designed decentralization may strengthen the relevance and responsiveness of services (for details see Annex 1).

1.3 Assignments of functions across levels of government

This section seeks to address the question as to what functions of relevance to IFAD project operations are devolved to local governments, such as district councils or other types of local governments. Relevant functions could include responsibilities for agriculture extension, land management, agriculture sector and business regulation, rural credit schemes, cooperative movements, irrigation, and agriculture input schemes etc.

When designing and implementing IFAD projects it is important to understand if the roles assigned to different levels of government align with project interventions, and if they are likely to facilitate implementation of reforms where relevant.

In instances where local governments have been granted the responsibility for provision of some or several functions relevant to IFAD programming, it is necessary to establish the functions that have been devolved and clarify the related key issues, such as:

The extent to which the division of responsibilities is clear. are the functions distinctly described in legislation and guidelines? Is the legislation and guidance adhered to by main actors (such as various line ministries or development partners)? If the functions are blurred, then it might be relevant for IFAD to contribute to clarification of responsibilities (e.g. in design document or program implementation manual).

Adequate costing of functions: has there for instance been established any norms like the expected frequency or quality of extension services? Without well recognised national norms it will be difficult to ensure adequate national fiscal support and the realism of devolved delivery of such services will depend on general fiscal resources available at Local government levels (see below).

Higher-level functions: in addition to the transfer of functions from central to local governments – have there also been a transfer of functions from higher level to lower-level local governments? For instance, from district councils to village councils?

Roles vis-à-vis other stakeholders; most importantly, how have the roles of the local governments been defined in relationship to the private sector? Are efforts being made to ensure a more market-oriented approach for e.g. extension and how is that aligned to the local government roles?⁶

1.4 Fiscal decentralization

This section examines lessons from the existing literature review on fiscal decentralisation,⁷ exploring how to best finance services that are devolved to local governments (e.g. agriculture development). For IFAD programming it is important to consider the following main issues:

How is local government service provision financed?

The role of own source revenue

The role of Inter-governmental fiscal transfers (conditional and unconditional)

⁶ See annex1 for more detailed discussion of extension reform and potential role of devolution. Another analysis of devolution of agriculture extension in relation to other reforms is found in "Agricultural Extension in Kenya: lessons from India's Agricultural Extension Service" by Agnes Nkurumwa, Mucoki W Shelmith - Journal of Agricultural Extension Management - Vol 15, No 1 (2014). <http://epubs.icar.org.in/ejournal/index.php/JAEM/article/view/89785>.

⁷ A thorough introduction to fiscal decentralization of relevance to IFAD programming is found in "Fiscal Decentralization and Local Finance in Developing Countries, Edward E-local government books, Studies in Fiscal Federalism and State-Local Finance Series, by Roy Bahl and Richard M. Bird, Edward E-local government Publishing, 2018

Adequacy and equity of local government financing

Donor funding channels

Local Governments are typically financed through a mix of own source revenue and fiscal transfers.

Own source revenue includes various local taxes (where the local government is allowed to set local rates/tax policy and where the local government also typically plays a significant role in the actual collection of the revenue. Own source revenue can normally be spent according to the local priorities of the local government. If the local governments have significant own source revenue, they could decide to spend on IFAD programming activities – like agricultural extension, credit for the poor, irrigation schemes etc or better still use resources to sustain or expand activities after programme closure. In addition, it is important to recognize that local government procedures for collection of own source revenue often have very important regulatory impacts of relevance to IFAD projects. For instance, local government will often place a tax on crop production, on land, properties and regulate various agricultural business through licences and fees. A poorly designed local tax system may pose a significant challenge to agricultural businesses and IFAD may through programming contribute to regulatory reforms that both maintain Local government own source revenues for service delivery while also improving the business environment for small scale farmers.

Fiscal Transfers are regular transfers from central government to the local governments that are included in the national and local budgets. The terms “fiscal transfers” and “grants” are often used interchangeably, and all imply the same as the more academic term: “intergovernmental fiscal transfer”: funding of local governments through fiscal resources mobilised by the central government (thus the term “intergovernmental”). These fiscal transfers can be

- Unconditional in the form of block grants where the local government can determine how to spend it according to their own priorities. Some local government have a quite significant degree of unconditional grant funding – for instance Kenya after its new 2010 Constitution, whereas its neighbours Uganda and Tanzania today have very limited degree of unconditional grant financing. This determines the extent to which local government can plan for local priorities. In Kenya the local government could decide to allocate substantive fiscal resources from the unconditional grant for agriculture / rural development, whereas in Uganda and Tanzania they would have to rely on own source revenue and conditional grants (below).
- Conditional, whereby the transfers are made for a specific purpose (specific-purpose, or conditional, transfers are intended to provide incentives for governments to undertake specific programs or activities). The degree of conditionality can vary. A fiscal transfer can for instance be broadly earmarked “agriculture development” (as the DADP grant was in Tanzania from 2006-2011), or it can be narrower and for instance only finance the salaries of a (central government determined) number of agricultural extension workers or specific set of irrigation support activities etc. The more conditional a grant is the less discretion the local government have for responding to local priorities. However, some element of conditionality can be useful to ensure that national policy priorities are adequately implemented at local level. For development partners like IFAD, then conditional grant transfers represent an opportunity for integration of Development Partner funding into government systems with potential for some sustainability of the intervention modalities (e.g. by establishing continued poverty oriented agricultural services).

If well designed, fiscal transfers can successfully contribute to improved service delivery and local good governance. This would occur when the design includes the following aspects: (i) clarity of the purpose of the transfers, (ii) adequacy of funding compared to the objective of the transfer (iii) equitable allocations among local governments of

available resources (iv) transparency and simplicity of the allocations and (v) the incentive structure of the transfers. These five factors are further discussed below.

- (i) The **purpose** of the fiscal transfers needs to be well defined, while also recognising the need for local discretion on determining specific activities. If the purpose of the fiscal transfer is not well defined it will be difficult to determine the relevant size of the grant.
- (ii) The **adequacy** of funding is crucial for successful implementation of devolved functions. A recent evaluation of (decentralised) agricultural extension⁸ found that “the promises of decentralization often remained unrealised because funding through own source revenue and fiscal transfers often remained too meagre” quoting examples from Malawi, Ghana but also recognising more promising developments in Latin America and Asia. IFAD may work in support of adequacy of fiscal transfers partly through analytical work and possibly also through provision of program funding in a manner that will enhance the overall size of fiscal transfers.
- (iii) **Equity of fiscal transfers** is another common challenge: many countries have for historical reasons allocated more funding to specific regions and local government than others. Such inequities in fiscal allocations are often characterised of being pro-rich as the most well-endowed localities often receive more than the neediest. To overcome such biases, it is necessary to analyse root causes e.g., the individual preferences for staff postings by agricultural staff or national policy biases).⁹
- (iv) **Transparency and simplicity of the allocations** are important factors for enhancing equity as well as accountability in use of funds. A common approach to ensure this is to: Use simple need-based formulas for allocation of fiscal resources; Ensure transparency of actual fund allocation by publishing fiscal transfers and their purpose nationally (e.g., through newspaper adverts or websites) and locally (through notice boards etc.).
- (i) The **incentive structure** of the transfers may encourage good local government performance in specific areas (e.g. through Performance Based Grants where an explicit system for annual performance assessments are utilised as basis for fiscal allocation: those local governments that perform well are granted additional funds).

Donor funding may be provided in parallel with or integrated into the fiscal transfer system. The latter will rely on government Public Finance Management (PFM) systems with some potential fiduciary risks (that needs to be assessed). The advantages of using the fiscal transfer system are (i) it may provide a vehicle for more sustainable development of systems for financing agriculture services through local governments (ii) from the national government perspective it may ease the burden of special reporting and also ensure that resource allocation to the supported local governments are more transparently reflected in government budgets and accounts (iii) at local government level it may in a similar way ease PFM workload as no (major) additional procedures are required.

If integrated into the fiscal transfer system, then donor funding is typically delivered as a conditional (purpose specific) transfer. This may include innovations like introduction of fiscal incentives for good performances (the well performing Local government are provided with additional funds). Those Performance Based Grants have in recent years become popular for World Bank funded Program-for-Results Financing (PforR) implemented through Local government.

⁸ Davis, Kristin E., ed.; Babu, Suresh Chandra, ed.; and Ragasa, Catherine, ed. 2020. Agricultural extension: Global status and performance in selected countries. Washington, DC: International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI). <https://doi.org/10.2499/9780896293755>

⁹ For an in-depth study see e.g. ODI 2014: <https://odi.org/en/publications/local-government-authority-local-government-fiscal-inequities-and-the-challenges-of-disadvantaged-local-governments-in-tanzania/>

1.5 Decentralizing human resources

Decentralization of human resources entails the transfer of administrative authority and responsibility from the central unit. In other words, instead of having a central office, you delegate human resources functions to heads of specific departments, business units, or branches. The availability of an adequate number of qualified and motivated staff for the management of developmental interventions and activities in different sectors is critical for successful decentralised implementation.

The extent to which local governments are capable to recruit and dismiss, provide incentives, or in other ways manage local staff will determine its ability to motivate staff and direct it to task, are deemed most important at the local level. The table below illustrates aspects of the employer functions and how devolution of human resources has an impact on local governments to: (i) Hold staff accountable; (ii) allocate staff within the local government for most needy deployment; (iii) manage fiscal resources (determine if e.g. staff cost savings should be allocated other services); and (iv) attract and retain skilled staff to ensure a motivated and dedicated work force.

Figure 2:
Devolution of HRM Functions and Related Impact on LG Autonomy¹⁰

Devolving the Employer Function

Dimensions of the employer function:	Impact on Administrative Autonomy: Ability to:			
	Hold staff account-able	Allocate staff	Manage financial resources	Attract & retain skilled staff
Budget Transparency ▪ Paying staff from its own budget	✓		✓	
Budget & Establishment Control ▪ Controlling overall staff numbers ▪ Controlling staff nos in local offices & fac's ▪ Authority to dismiss surplus staff		✓ ✓	✓ ✓	
Recruitment ▪ Recognition as the formal employer ▪ Authority to hire ▪ Ind. merit-based recruitment mech.	✓ ✓ ✓	✓		
Career Management ▪ Transfers within local government ▪ Horizontal mobility ▪ Promotion	✓	✓ ✓		✓
Performance Management ▪ Directing & supervising activities & tasks ▪ Conducting evaluations ▪ Ability to discipline/fire	✓ ✓ ✓			✓
Pay Policy ▪ Setting local hardship/remote allowances ▪ Setting overall wage rates		✓	✓	✓

It is important for IFAD programming to understand the specific arrangements for local staff management. For example, in Uganda for instance Local government employ their own staff and they will remain in place, whereas in Tanzania local staff is deployed by the central government and are often transferred across Local government.¹¹ IFAD may also facilitate reform of local staff arrangements where this is identified as a major blockage for improved local service delivery.

¹⁰ Adapted from: Green, A., 2005, 'Managing Human Resources in a Decentralized Context', in ed. World Bank, East Asia Decentralizes: Making Local Government Work, World Bank, Washington D.C., ch. 7.

¹¹ A study concluded that the centralised HRM of agricultural extension staff was a major impediment for improved agricultural extension: Asian Journal of Agricultural Science 10(1): 1-8, 2019, February 15, 2019 Decentralisation by Devolution and Farmers' Access to Agricultural Extension Services in Dodoma, Tanzania – a study by Zacharia S. Masanyiwa, Samwel J. Mdachi, Baltazar M.L. Namwata and John G. Safari.

1.6 Spaces for participation and local accountability:

Working through devolved local government systems with IFAD programs may provide an avenue for institutionalised participation by IFAD target groups in planning and delivery of services. In theory, local devolution should enable citizens to better hold their government accountable. In practice, there may be different factors facilitating or constraining citizen participation and accountability.

To analyse the space for local people and farmers (including poor farmers and female farmers) to effectively participate in the planning, design, and budgeting of local interventions it useful to consider:

The **size of the local governments**: smaller units of say 100-400 households of a village government can allow more direct forms of participation than larger district councils or provincial structures with 1 million people or more.

The **composition of elected councils**: the extent to which female, poor farmers, etc. are represented.

The **effective power (de jure and de facto) of local councils**: to oversee technical staff, to approve budgets etc. Can the councils effectively influence departmental plans? Are councillors representative of the poor or do they pursue narrow individual interests to the detriment of pro poor policies?

Planning and budget procedures: are effective participatory planning and budget procedures in place? While many countries in theory have some forms of participatory processes in place, are they effective? Are they relevant for development and implementation of agriculture sector activities or designed primarily for social sectors (such as education and health?)

Ways of participation: how are farmers groups involved in planning and resource allocation? Are measures been put in place that can enhance local government responsiveness to farmers groups (such as the use of vouchers distributed to farmers groups that they can use for purchase of services from the local governments)?

1.7 National oversight and coordination modalities

This section explores whether the central government (the Ministry responsible for Agriculture and other Ministries Departments or Agencies (MDAs)) effectively coordinates local level interventions in a manner that is appropriate for a decentralised context.

Decentralization reforms based on devolution of functions and resources to local governments will typically assign all local level public sector agriculture implementation responsibilities to local governments including the local planning and budgeting for such activities. The central ministries will typically retain responsibilities for research and policy setting as well as oversight and capacity building of local governments. Larger strategic interventions (e.g. for larger irrigation schemes) will also typically remain a central government responsibility under reforms, nonetheless, in practice, central government agencies (like the Ministry of Agriculture) often finds it very difficult to relinquish powers and resources.¹² Similarly, it is also typical that the new functions assigned to the ministry under decentralization reforms in supposed support of local governments are very poorly implemented – functions related to oversight and support. The selection of IFAD national partner institutions is in this manner not always straightforward and may in several cases have to include other institutions than just the ministry responsible for agriculture – see illustrative example from Malawi below.

¹² For instance, the Ministry of Agriculture in Malawi maintains 95% of the (non salary) agriculture sector budget allocations even 20 years after the official launch of decentralisation reforms

Box 4

National Institutional arrangement for decentralised service delivery in Malawi

Many basic services – including agricultural development and extension – are in principle devolved to local government authorities (District Councils) in Malawi.

The **sector ministries** are in principle responsible for mainly policy formulation and supervision of the local governments.

The **Ministry of Local government and Rural Development** is responsible for setting local government specific policies and support the implementation of some rural development projects.

The **National Local Government Finance Committee** is established by the Constitution to spearhead fiscal decentralization to local governments, and it also ensures day to day coordination and implementation of all fiscal transfers to local governments for both recurrent and development purposes.

Source: ODI: Situational Analysis of Fiscal Decentralization in Malawi 2022.

Part II – Lessons for IFAD Programming in a Decentralised Context

2.1 Project design and implementation issues

Public sector decentralization in partner countries is one of many issues that IFAD need to consider in its work at various stages of the project cycle – although primarily early in project design, such as under preparation of “Country Strategic Opportunities Program”. IFAD COSOPs could consider having a breakdown of a country’s decentralization information under the section on “Country at a glance” – with specific conclusions regarding how the decentralised context brings programming opportunities and challenges.¹³

The subsections below highlight key issues related to different aspects of project design and implementation in a decentralised / decentralising country context.

2.1.1 Institutional arrangements in programme design

The clarification of institutional arrangements in project design is probably the most critical aspect that influences the relative success of IFAD interventions in a decentralised context. The design needs to reflect on both opportunities and challenges (see Part I).

Overlooking the role of local government in project design can lead to lack of acceptance by local government and subsequent problems with implementation. Programme design should include local government structures for service delivery; it should seek to address weaknesses and support institutional capacities that will stay beyond the programme.

Delivering through local government

In an “Area Based Programme (ABP)” interventions are typically delivered by local governments. They have some advantages:

- It can target the neediest areas
- It may allow for greater local impact as resources will be focused on a small population,
- It may ease direct project oversight and monitoring,
- It can allow for testing new approaches on a small scale (“piloting”).

However, the approach has also some pitfalls and challenges if the intention is to nurture permanent institutional improvements:

- The focus on a few selected local governments may lead to biases in national resource allocation: the allocation of resources in ABPs are typically poorly monitored in national budget statistics,
- The targeting of a few local governments can easily lead to project implementation structures and implementation modalities that are impossible to upscale (not replicable) –if replicability is intended then particular attention need be paid to financing arrangements (see below).

Delivering through Central Government/ National Partner

The choice of national partners in a decentralised context also needs special attention as decentralization often reduces the direct implementation role of e.g. Ministry of Agriculture and the supervisory / supportive responsibilities at national level often are divided among several MDAs. The following example from Malawi illustrates the point:

¹³ Some COSOPs, like the recent Uganda COSOP, includes some analysis of decentralisation issues – but only superficially without explicit conclusions as to how this context should influence program design.

Delivering through national partners, example of Malawi

The **Ministry of Agriculture** is under the decentralization policy responsible mainly for policy as local government support – in practice it also implements several local projects. The Ministry is organized in six technical Departments namely Agriculture Extension Services, Crops Development, Animal Health and Livestock Development, Agriculture Research, Agriculture Planning Services as well as Land Resource Conservation. The Ministry also includes Irrigation as the government institution responsible for the irrigation sector and has the Principal Secretary solely designated to oversee irrigation matters.

The **National Local Government Finance Committee** (NLGTFC) manages and oversees all fiscal transfer to local governments and support local implementation of various projects (as the current NLGTFC has submerged a former donor financed project implementation unit: the Local Development Fund).

The **Ministry of Local government** that is responsible for co-ordinated approach to decentralization: sets decentralization related policies (including legal responsibilities of local governments), sets policy for local government own Source revenue and also oversee local government performance through an annual assessment system.

Source: Author

For IFAD in its program design, it may be necessary to include several national institutions with due consideration of both de-jure and de facto roles.

2.1.2 Fiduciary management systems

Working in context of relative decentralization IFAD will typically have two main options for providing finance through local governments:

- a. Direct transfer of funding to (selected) local governments with a special project financing agreement either with the involved Local government or through a national institution. Possible disadvantages of such an arrangement are:
 - i. Funds may not be fully integrated into Government PFM systems and special arrangements for financial reporting, procurement must be set up – leading to local government challenges of multiple reporting etc. and lack of strengthening of national procedures.
 - ii. It can be difficult for the national government to monitor how much is allocated to each local government (unless funds are disbursed in accordance with local government votes)
- b. As (part of) a normal intergovernmental fiscal transfer – this would include consideration of:
 - i. Grant design with regards to:
 - Investment menu /eligible expenditure items
 - Formulae for grant allocations (overall size of grant and how funds are to be shared among Local government)
 - Areas of PFM system that require improvements (procurement, planning, budgeting etc) – the project may where required seek to improve the national systems rather than find ways of bypassing it.
 - ii. Other reforms of intergovernmental fiscal transfer system – for instance use of fiscal incentives for Local government to improve their performance in agreed areas,¹⁴ like: how participatory the budget process is, how well the local

¹⁴ The use of such fiscal incentives in reformed IGFT systems are common in world Bank funded PFR programs that involve local governments. In Tanzania in 2005 the Government also sought to introduce such incentives for agriculture sector funding

government implements local investments, how well the Local government report on use of funds, how well the local government proceed with agreed steps for local reform of extension service etc.’

2.1.3 Capacity Building in Program Design

Decentralised systems for local government staff management offers opportunities for a more localised approach to staff training and development, but relevant national institutions for local government capacity building – like the Institute of local government in Ghana – needs to be considered.

For training of local government staff, it is critical to note the degree of de-facto human resource decentralization (ref section 1.5). In many countries where extension workers in principle are devolved, then the central government de-facto retain the powers to transfer staff from one local government to the other and are at partly in charge of staff discipline and capacity building (for example in Tanzania). To focus capacity building solely on a set of project specific local governments run the risk in such a context of having the newly strained staff transferred to their local governments before project implementation is complete.

Decentralised systems offer special opportunities and challenges with regards to the monitoring and development of institutional capacities. Compared to a deconcentrated set-up, typically there will be a lot of variation of institutional performance as local government under devolution are semi-autonomous and accountable both to central government as well as a locally elected council.

Box 6

Systems of monitoring performance

At least 15 countries in Africa and Asia have developed systems of monitoring the performance of local governments with regard to aspect of good local governance and delivery of local services – and linked these performance assessments to the fiscal transfer system whereby those local government that perform well receive additional funding.¹⁵ These systems are based upon a comprehensive annual assessment of local government performance across a set of agreed indicators that typically include (i) cross sectoral aspects of local government planning, participation, procurement, investment management and accountability, as well as (ii) sector specific performance indicators that address sector specific blockages for improvements of sector performance. These systems have proved very effective for improvement of local government performance – especially when the fiscal incentives are coupled with local government access to discretionary capacity building funding.

Source: Author

through a large sector program where also IFAD provided support. In Uganda the large UglIFT program has since 2021 included aspects of incentive-based finance to Local government also for agricultural related activities.

¹⁵ These countries include Uganda, Tanzania, Kenya, Mali, Sierra Leone, Nepal, Bangladesh, Ghana, Indonesia, Solomon Islands, Bhutan and emerging systems in the Philippines and India)., See <https://www.uncdf.org/ield/performance-based-grant-systems>

2.2 Enhancing Corporate Knowledge of working in decentralised contexts

This section stresses on the manner in which IFAD might assist to increasing understanding of decentralization.

In order to increase the organizational knowledge, events must be organized and geared at IFAD officials or staff and should involve independent experts who can contribute with wider knowledge and support, including background papers that are prepared in advance of the meetings.

Generation of Knowledge and Tools

While decentralization reforms in the past have been identified as an important factor for explaining relative success of IFAD interventions and raised in evaluation reports, the depth of analysis in country programming and evaluation concerning what aspects of decentralisation have worked well or require strengthening has been quite limited (except for IFAD 2015 op.cit.¹⁶).

More general academic literature or “good practice notes” from other development partner organisations like FAO or the World Bank on the topic of public sector decentralization of agriculture-related functions is also very limited compared to the literature of sector decentralising of e.g. health and education.

Enhancing programme performance in decentralised contexts

IFAD can enhance programme performance in decentralised context through better analysis and knowledge sharing at country, regional and corporate levels.

At country level, through analyses of governance-related issues.

- The paper proposes a framework that could help to identify opportunities and challenges for IFAD programming (section I) as stand-alone analyses or as integral parts of the COSOP design.
- Country studies of devolved management practices of agricultural development programs would provide comprehensive and updated lessons and good practises. This should be a combination of extensive literature review and in-country fieldwork.

At regional level, through lessons sharing:

- This could include sharing country-specific programming notes and related “opportunities and challenges for work in devolved contexts”.
- In addition, sharing experiences through annual portfolio review exercises at regional level.

At corporate level, through learning from good practices:

- Synthesis of regional / national experiences would help to identify good practices.
- Based on this, developing guidance and good practice notes.

¹⁶ AD's Performance and Impact in Decentralizing Environments: Experiences from Ethiopia, Tanzania and Uganda (<https://www.ifad.org/en/web/ioe/-/ifad-s-performance-and-impact-in-decentralizing-environments-experiences-from-ethiopia-tanzania-and-uganda>) IFAD Rome July 2005.

Annex

Issues and Challenges to Decentralization of Agricultural Extension

The Online Sourcebook on Decentralization and Local Development¹⁷

Decentralised extension services has long been a feature of federal countries. Many developing countries are now decentralising extension in the expectation that the service will be closer to the client, and thus more relevant. Budgetary constraints also play a role in the decision. There are three main reasons why governments decentralise agricultural services (Smith, 1997):

- a desire (or demand) to roll back the role of the State due to central government failings or complexity of local issues;
- an inability of the State to continue to finance a whole range of services, and;
- a view that democracy is best served through devolved functions with enhanced participation at local level.

If those are the reasons for decentralising agricultural services, disappointment is likely. A weak state will not provide the basis for effective decentralisation. Strong central institutions are needed to create a framework within which it is easier for local government to operate, and a shortage of administration expertise at central level is bound to be even worse at local level. Similarly the financing constraint is likely to be even greater for local governments, who find it difficult to raise taxes to pay for local services or to impose sanctions on those unwilling to pay. In practice, fiscal decentralization may provide central governments with a convenient excuse for abandoning certain functions and does not guarantee improved delivery.

In the case of extension, however, decentralization does seem to offer particular hope for improving **relevance** and **responsiveness**. These, together with sustainability, should be the main criteria to rate the success of decentralised extension. Many problems and solutions are location specific. In terms of relevance this should give a clear advantage to the local provision of advice. However, administrative boundaries rarely coincide with agro-ecological zones (nor with socio-economic situations): there may be a large diversity of situations within the purview of a local government, while the capacity to adjust the advice to local conditions (or to specific groups) may be negatively affected by decentralization. In particular, good linkages with agricultural research may be difficult to establish at local level if there is no research facility in the region. **Tunisia** offers an example of a largely decentralised extension system in the context of a centralised research environment. The new Regional Research Poles may remedy this, if they receive the resources and authority to conduct work based on regional needs.

Similarly, **responsiveness** to farmer problems may not automatically result from decentralization. Extension managers become closer to the client but not necessarily more attentive to their problems. Staff attitudes need to change, and farmers need to get organised to make them heard. In the **Philippines**, some farmers were able to get advantage of tailored made extension activities. But for most upland farmers, there has been no change in a system that never met their needs adequately (Malvicini, 1996).

The other areas where centralised extension is generally weak, such as limited coverage, low effectiveness, and low-cost efficiency, are less likely to be improved directly by decentralization. However, decentralised services in **Colombia** increased coverage by a factor three and cost-efficiency also improved. This is a rare case where decentralization was accompanied by increased resources: the number of staff was multiplied by four (Garfield et al., 1997). Rivera (1996) sees three main policy directions dominating the decentralization of extension: structural reform to improve institutional responsiveness and accountability, fiscal decentralization to share extension costs with local governments, and farmer participatory involvement in decision making and management of extension. These policy objectives echo the three motives indicated earlier for decentralising, and suggest possible remedies to the risks they entail. But will governments who want to reduce extension budgets be willing to initially maintain the same levels of spending and delegate control over it?

The financial issue is central, and compounded by the fact that decentralization is occurring in a context of decreased faith in (public) extension. In this context, the central level is unlikely to provide the support required to facilitate decentralization. At the local level, where extension needs to be re-created as a farmer-driven service, farmers have also learned to be sceptical.

¹⁷ https://www.ciesin.columbia.edu/decentralization/SB_entry.html

Will they invest in it and get organised to obtain the best out of it? Will they accept to share costs, as needed to compensate for the decrease in public funding, and also to ensure accountability? And if so, can cost-sharing be done without prejudice to poor farmers or to other key policy objectives (e.g. environmental protection)?

It is already apparent that decentralization of extension is unlikely to fulfil the excessive expectations it has aroused. But the outcome is hard to predict, because the circumstances and the modalities of decentralising extension services vary so much. Hence the need to document and analyse existing experience. This study remains to be done. We only wish her to point to some areas which need particular attention, and highlight a few hypotheses which require testing.

Areas of Concern and Information Needs

In many countries, decentralization is ongoing, or just starting. It will take some years before the dust settles and an objective and well-informed picture emerges. Information is often anecdotal and does not conform to a common framework which would facilitate comparisons and give confidence in drawing lessons. The context of decentralization is rarely documented. If government is already largely decentralised, the reform of extension is likely easier as institutions and mechanisms are already in place. Also, extension does not operate in a vacuum. We need to know how the relationships with other services are taken into account when extension is decentralised. Finally, analysts rarely distinguish between transition problems and structural issues, i.e. those which pre-existed decentralization but may become more apparent after. The distinction is admittedly difficult when the process is still ongoing; and may be somewhat artificial as the former could become structural if not addressed early enough. Transitory difficulties distract attention from the deeper issues, which is a pity since decentralization may be a unique opportunity to tackle those.

Transition Difficulties

Because decentralization of extension is often part of a sweeping reorganisation of government central services, the transition problems are not specific to extension. Essentially, they relate to the allocation and channelling of funds to local governments, and to staff management. Devising and implementing new allocation procedures is complex and rarely a smooth process, as expectations relating to the use of funds are bound to differ between local and central levels (otherwise, why decentralise?). For the staff devolved to lower government levels, a simple hierarchical structure and uniform status gives way to a complex line of command, typically involving both the line ministry and the local government, and to regional differentiation of status.

Uganda illustrates those transition difficulties. District councils are given primary responsibility for allocating budget resources for extension. But the budget mechanism, flow of funds to district level and financial management procedures still need to be clarified, five years in the process. Moreover, resources available are just enough for salaries, leaving little for staff development and extension activities. The staff are now employed by the district councils, but technically under the ministry of agriculture, who has delegated its responsibility to the National Agricultural Research Organisation (NARO). NARO is not prepared to the new task, and may see the extension service only as an arm for transferring research results to the field. This would run counter to the intention of decentralised, farmer responsive services. The role of NARO should rather be one of supporting staff engaged in locally program activities.

In the **Philippines**, a recent survey (Malvicini, 1996) shows that devolved extension staff have lost career development perspectives; salary increases are blocked to progressively align remuneration with that of other municipal employees who have lower education levels; and there are no funds for staff training. Another issue is the politicisation of new recruitment. As a result, quality of services is decreased.

Structural Issues

The main areas of concern relate to the structural issues of accountability, relevance, the lack of a constituency, and quality.

Accountability. Decentralization does not give farmers control over the management of extension or over the appointment of individual staff. Specific mechanisms are needed to ensure participatory management of programs by farmers. In Colombia, the law that created the UMATAs (municipal extension offices) also required the creation of farmer dominated Municipal Committees for Rural Development to co-ordinate and prioritise rural development

activities, including extension. However, less than half the municipalities have created these committees, and they seem mostly powerless.

A related issue is that farmers are not an homogenous lot; decentralised, public extension cannot address the needs of all groups. The role of the public sector must be redefined to permit multiple approaches which account for user diversity, and to develop partnerships with farmer organisations, NGOs and the private sector for service delivery (World Bank, Participation Sourcebook, Washington 1995).

China has raised accountability through various cost-sharing mechanisms. The most radical approach features contractual sharing of benefits and risks between farmers and an extension agent on a project they have negotiated together. This is applied mostly in horticulture, cash crops and livestock production (Liu Yonggong 1998).

Relevance. Technical relevance is not necessarily improved by decentralization. Van Crowder (1996) already raised the question of what effect decentralization has on the research-extension linkages: does it result in a de-coupling of research-extension linkages, or does it actually improve linkages. Technical relevance requires a local research capacity to verify and adapt technologies to farmer conditions. NARO in **Uganda** is setting up a network of Outreach Centres. It is not yet clear if these centres will be able to move beyond their present role of technology dissemination towards supporting a farmer-led, problem-solving approach. Now, it is fair to recognise that research-extension linkages rarely worked well in a central setting. Decentralization may be an opportunity to revisit the research-extension nexus in the light of more global concepts such as the Agriculture Knowledge and Information System (AKIS), encompassing research, education and training, as well as traditional knowledge, and featuring multiple communication and delivery channels.

Constituency. Agricultural extension is not a high priority for local governments. Health, schools and public infrastructure are seen more important. In **Uganda**, a 1997 survey showed that local governments did not allocate resources as expected to the (centrally defined) priority programs. Only three out of 32 districts surveyed had budgeted over 3% of their expenditure on agriculture; most had budgeted to spend only one percent (Uganda 1998). Government response has been to tie financial transfers through conditional grants, which runs counter to the objective of decentralization. The issue is not simply one of farmer representation in local assemblies. The central extension services were rarely seen by the majority of farmers as meant for them. To build a constituency among farmers requires important changes from the staff. They must change attitudes and start listening to farmers. They must also acquire the skills (diagnostic, participatory technology development, etc.) needed for identifying and for meeting farmer needs.

Building a constituency for decentralised extension is a condition of financial sustainability. In **Colombia**, where costs to the central government have initially increased, the aim is to gradually transfer the fiscal burden to municipalities, once the demand for extension services has been created. Meanwhile, municipalities are obligated by law to have an extension office.

Quality. Concern of degrading quality is a recurrent theme. In Colombia, this is attributed to looser links with research, political recruitment, and reduced use of private consultants. The reason for the latter is again political: directly employed staff are more easily controlled. However, one aspect of quality has improved: the extension agents are now seen closer to small farmers. They are in every municipality and part of the local government, which is more accessible to farmers than the central government.

In the **Philippines**, the quality concern is linked to the cessation of training, the lack of career development opportunities and of incentives for improvement, and again the politicisation of staff recruitment. Training is needed to facilitate the re-orientation to community-based approaches; if not provided, staff may become "obsolete" and extension may collapse at the local level (Malvicini 1996). Malvicini argues that a strong central level is crucial to quality, as it can provide and enforce suitable norms regarding staff recruitment, management and training, facilitate linkages with research and the free flow of knowledge among regions and outside, and develop effective quality control and monitoring systems. But surely, this centralised vision of quality control is mostly relevant to the transition stage, until organised beneficiaries can have a large say in what quality means for them.

Hypotheses That Require Testing

A general hypothesis is that, unless the structural issues of extension are addressed, there are only limited benefits from decentralization - essentially in the form of shorter decision lines and

greater proximity to the client - and these may be more than offset by politicisation, reduced funding, disruption of knowledge linkages, etc. which all affect quality.

Decentralised extension is unlikely to reduce costs in the short term. Increased resources are needed to re-orient staff and provide incentives in a reform which is feared by many; and to energise other support services without which extension staff remain powerless to meet farmer expectations. Only if the new extension is appreciated is there a possibility that local funding (including user contributions) may in the future be willingly spared for the service;

Decentralization of extension is possible, and more likely to succeed, in the absence of intergovernmental decentralization. Although it often takes place in the context of a general reform of the state, this need not be. If extension is restructured separately, it may be easier to take into account its specificity and address the crucial issues.

The reorganisation of extension services in Zaire (now Democratic Republic of Congo) in the early 1990's is an example of such a decentralization in a very difficult context. After restructuring, the system included four types of organisations (FAO 1997):

the "Service National de Vulocal governmentarisation" (SNV), with a National Directorate and 11 Regional Co-ordinations, whose role is in planning, co-ordination, training, methods and control;

a network of public and private providers. In 1995, 121 different organisations participated in extension: the public sector, with 22 organisations in 11 regions represented 57% of total extension staff; parastatals (48 agencies and projects), contributed 24%; and the private sector (51 NGOs), 18%;

service organisations with which the SNV established partnerships to ensure essential support services in research, seed production, marketing, input procurement, etc. Many of these were producer organisations, which the SNV helped technically and financially by mobilising external aid resources through mini-projects;

farmer groups, working with the extension specialist on a community project to define an annual program, carry out demonstrations and other extension activities, and to prepare mini-projects for solving problems related to the adoption of new technology.

Such a form of decentralization provides mechanisms that improve accountability, relevance and cost-efficiency.

Decentralised extension requires decentralised and participatory research. Just re-arranging disrupted research-extension linkages will not provide decentralised staff with the support they need for solving farmers problems. Research must focus on farmer needs, farmers need to be involved in planning implementing and evaluating research activities.

Indonesia is experimenting with a new approach to decentralised adaptive research through Agricultural Technology Assessment Institutes (BPTP) integrating researchers and extension specialists under one roof to assess new technology under farmer conditions and develop solutions to farmer problems. This is breaking the tradition of a top-down, linear research-extension-farmer relationship and has potential to develop instead a mutual working pattern where the three groups act like a team with a common objective, if and when the reform is completed and the BPTPs become financially autonomous from line agencies.

Under a CIAT initiative, **Bolivia, Ecuador, Honduras** and **Peru** have seen the development of locally elected committees (**CIALs**), composed of experimenting farmers who manage and conduct research on behalf of the community as a whole. In **Colombia**, where the CIALs started in 1990, a number of these have evolved into local seed enterprises. Integration of research, extension and input supply services is thus achieved at community level (Ashby, 1995).

In the complex local political landscape created by decentralization, where local governments need to assert their authority vis-à-vis traditional structures and/or new grass-root development organisations (e.g. NGOs, producer groups, etc.), extension is probably less at stake than services involved in natural resources protection. However, controlling extension workers may be seen as conferring an advantage to local politicians. Where this is the case, devolving responsibility to user groups might be strongly resisted by local governments.

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