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Final Report on the Workshop: Decentralization and Social Policies in Latin America

Quito (28 - 30 November 1994)
Prepared by Mario Torres

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1. OBJECTIVES

The workshop was held on 28-30 November, 1994 in Quito, Ecuador. The list of participants appears in Appendix 1. The workshop was organized by CIUDAD, under the auspices of the Social Policy Program of the International Development Research Center of Canada (IDRC).

The overall objective was to identify the activities which could add value to IDRC projects on decentralization and social policy, with the purpose of consolidating and focusing the Center's efforts in this area.

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The specific objectives were:

- To clarify concepts and methodological procedures used in IDRC-supported projects on decentralization and social policy in order to identify the elements of a research framework in this area.
 - To identify mechanisms for collaboration, the communication of project results, and the development of research areas and methodologies of common interest.
 - To facilitate the formation of a critical mass of knowledge on decentralization and social policy.
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2. ORGANIZATION

The discussion was organized as follows:

- Presentation of a position paper on "Decentralization in Latin America" by Alfredo Rodríguez, SUR, Chile. (The final version entitles "The Contents of Decentralization: Concepts, Pros and Cons, and Challenges")
 - Presentation of a set of conceptual and methodological issues by the consultants Luis Verdeso to and Gloria Ardaya.
 - Discussion of the conceptual and methodological issues of greatest importance to the study of decentralization as identified by the participants.
 - Preparation of a summary of the ideas discussed.
 - Proposal and discussion of mechanisms for collaboration among researchers and their institutions.
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3. PROJECTS AND PROPOSALS

The following IDRC projects and proposals for new projects on decentralization and social policy provided the referential framework for the workshop:

A. Projects

92-8753 Sustainable Andean Development (Bolivia,Ecuador, Peru) 92-8759 Municipal Management Information System (Chile)

92-8761 Municipal Administration and Youth Policies in Peru

93-8763 Municipal Management of Social and Environmental Policies (Ecuador)

93-8762 Implementation of Integrated Social Policy in Bolivia

93-0405 Local Agenda 21 Initiative

93-1015 Sustainable Cities (Global)

The common objectives of these projects are:

- To develop guidelines and a general framework for the planning of sustainable development at the municipal level.

- To identify the mechanisms and means for improving the capacity of the municipal government for applying sectoral and integrated policies.
- To provide relevant, appropriate and timely information for the policy and program decision-making process at the municipal level.
- To promote and conduct the synthesis of results obtained, by means of sectoral research and by components in order to formulate development plans and policies.
- To promote the training of human resources.

The most important particular objectives of those projects are:

92-8753 Bolivia, Ecuador, Peru

- To organize case studies in order to identify the limitations and opportunities for promoting sustainable development in the Andean region.

92-8759 Chile

- To design an information system for municipal management.
- To establish a data base for the municipalities on selected government information.
- To make possible access to municipal data bases.

92-8761 Peru

- To identify the ideological, normative, administrative and financial obstacles to the appropriate execution of youth programs by the municipalities.

93-8763 Ecuador

- To analyze the financial, administrative and institutional conditions of the municipal administration in order to evaluate its capacity for applying decentralized social and environmental policies.
- To identify information and training needs.

93-8762 Bolivia

- To identify planning procedures which allow the central government the inclusion of local needs in its programs.
- To identify the mechanisms which allow the integrated application of policies at the municipal level, through the involvement of different local actors, organizations and institutions.

93-0405 Local Agenda 21 Initiative

- To develop and establish mechanisms for consulting the community about its needs related to the provision of services.
- To establish data bases to measure the changes in local conditions.
- To establish reporting and monitoring mechanisms in order to support the achievement of municipal program objectives.

93-1015 Sustainable Cities

- To analyze the interrelationships between government management, urban environment and sustainability, and urban poverty.

B. Proposals

The general objectives of proposals are:

- "Decentralization in Colombia: Trends and Challenges"

To evaluate the process of decentralization, from the perspective of the view of society embodied in the national constitution, and the conception of decentralization which it contains. The analysis will take into consideration the normative, fiscal, territorial, political, administrative, economic, social (welfare and equity), cultural, environmental and planning aspects of the Colombian decentralization process.

- "The modernization of the municipalities in Lima-Callao"

To examine the elements and factors which contribute to strengthening the efficiency, management capacity, efficacy, and legitimacy of the municipalities within Metropolitan Lima.

- "Public Policies: From intentions to measures, from measures to results"

To enable the municipalities access to institutional mechanisms which make it feasible, on the one hand, to know and measure the social debt, and on the other, to plan policies in such a way that they are strategically oriented towards obtaining results that can be evaluated by society.

4. INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

The presentation made by Alfredo Rodríguez summarized the central issues of his paper, and the contributions made by different researchers to the electronic conference on "Decentralization and Policy Integration" set up by IDRC, as of June 1994. AR dealt with the following issues:

- Recent nature of the decentralization process.
- The political and economic context of the decentralization process characterized by the return to democratic institutions, structural adjustment policies, globalization processes, slow economic growth, and growing poverty.
- - Historical background of the decentralization process.
 - Types of decentralization: deconcentration, delegation and devolution.
 - Functions of decentralization: legitimization of the state, democratization, greater.
 - Factors which slow down or facilitate the decentralization process, and their results: cultural values (resistance to change), the starting points of the process (greater or lesser centralistic antecedents of the country), actors which participate in the process quality and quantity of human and economic resources allocated to the process implementation, and the characteristics of the civil society

(democratic practices, and degree of participation in the local society).

(These issues are discussed extensively in the position paper, and in the existing communications in the electronic conference).

5. CHALLENGES

AR concluded by singling out the challenges for the decentralization process in the region, which should be the subject of further research:

- Definition of clear administrative, economic, political and cultural goals for the decentralization process.
 - Execution of the decentralization process through differentiated programs, adjusted to local capacities, in order to obtain similar results in all municipalities at the national level. Programs should take different forms and timing adapted to local circumstances.
 - Design of evaluation instruments for assessing the equity of the process and the degree of participation of the local community.
 - Obtention of genuine local participation in order to ensure that the process be endogenous to the places where it is applied, as to date it has mainly been an exogenous process induced from the central government.
 - Renewal of the actors and political parties that participate in the policy-making process, with the aim of providing the decentralization process with adequate leadership.
 - Redefinition of the state role since national and local society change as the process of decentralization intensifies. Decentralization requires a state with new roles.
 - Reinforcement of municipal management capacity for improving the execution of decentralized programs. Decentralization presents challenges for which there are insufficient human resources, both at the central and municipal government level.
 - Creation of the financial and management capacity necessary to make the process viable and sustainable.
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6. THE CONCEPTUAL DISCUSSION

A diversity of conceptual issues were discussed after AR's presentation. The most relevant topics, and the discussion surrounding each of these, can be summarized as follows:

A. Globalization

Economic, technological and financial globalization conditions the decentralization process through its effects on the regulatory capacity of national states. This question is expressed in the relation between the management of the foreign debt and the financing of decentralization. A way of examining this relation is by studying the ways in which the state and the market condition through the policies and mechanisms for the assignation of resources, the new role of the local government.

B. State, society and market

The structure and administration of the state and the organization of the market make up the national framework of the decentralization process. The dominant view among current policies is to give market mechanisms the role of assigning the resources for development. The implementation and evaluation of decentralization have to take into account the capacity which these market mechanisms may have for allocating said resources in the most efficient way, particularly at the local level.

It is especially important to bear in mind the fact that market mechanisms tend to favor the groups and production systems which are most competitive, leaving aside the weakest groups, and those systems of local production that are most traditional, thereby affecting those communities with fewer comparative advantages.

The role which is being assigned to market mechanisms makes it necessary to redefine the structure and role of the state. This includes the agencies of local, municipal or provincial government, as the case may be. As a result of decentralization, local government is going to have a greater responsibility as an agent operating for the common welfare. This situation implies that decentralization should be geared towards (i) achieving better regulation of market mechanisms in order to better rationalize the allocation of resources towards communities with fewer advantages and (ii) developing mechanisms for management and social integration which reinforce the capacity to govern, as well as participation at the local level.

Within this framework, the study of decentralization should consider the role of national, and even international, actors who may have the capacity to define the market mechanisms and influence the policy decision-making and state reform processes.

C. Democracy, municipal policy and participation

The economic crisis and the deepening of poverty have coincided with the process of re-democratization in the region. This process has contributed to raise the expectations of the population for an improvement in their standard of living. Decentralization, in this context, can facilitate the participation of new social actors, who are in a position to change the profile of the civil society -NGOs, grassroots organizations and indigenous groups will be joining the ranks of the actors that traditionally dominated the local scene. However, the social sectors in greatest need do not have the capacity to organize themselves effectively: women, the elderly, migrants, marginalized peasants, workers from the informal sector, etc.

The municipality is a geographical and institutional environment in which decentralization will promote a new kind of decision-making processes. The development of the capacity to participate in these processes is essential in order for municipal political life to take into account the local interests of the different actors and social sectors. This capacity to develop effective local political activity will depend, to a large extent, upon the relation existing between local and national politics-which will depend, in turn, upon the management of the relations between the local government, the central government and the market.

Traditionally within the region, the local dimension has been only partially present in

national political life. Decentralization will force traditional political parties to change their organization and practices. The reason for this is the fact that -as has already been mentioned- the profile of local civil society is going to change with decentralization. In addition, local government -be it municipal or provincial- will become the primary level as far as political delegation, administration of conflicts, and organization of consensus with regard to development programs and projects.

A crucial aspect of municipal politics will be obtaining the participation of civil society. To that end, the following problems require consideration:

- The participation of non-organized sectors which are usually the target populations of social policies.
- The effective representativeness of local organizations - many of which do not represent the interests of all of their members.
- The building up of mechanisms of integration and consensus, in order to achieve the effectiveness and efficiency of decentralization - particularly in the case of social programs. The study of decentralization should include the analysis of said mechanisms, in order to facilitate coordination between politicians and civil society.
- The modalities of citizen participation in projects involving joint management and participatory planning.

D. Local government

The government of a given locality, towards which programs are decentralized, is not restricted to the existence of a municipal administration. The local government includes also the following:

- The agencies of different sectors and state's decentralized institutions.
- The existence of urban and rural production systems, and their representative organizations. Productive activities at the local level are a means of social integration and conflict, among families and communities.
- The existence of political, sectoral, and administrative territories, and of ethnic territories which often overlap. There is a need to make a distinction between ethnic and political territories, as the municipal administration may include ethnic groups whose territories and productive organizations go beyond municipal boundaries.

At the local level, the social and cultural identity of individuals, families and communities is expressed more clearly. Decentralization offers an opportunity for a local cultural identity to express itself in a new way.

To sum up, decentralization at a local level takes place within a context in which diverse political and administrative structures, social organizations, productive systems, families and communities coexist. For this reason, it is necessary to have clear classification criteria for different types of municipalities, in order to evaluate the management of each one appropriately, guide the decentralization process more effectively, and improve the efficacy and efficiency of the process.

E. Levels, mechanisms and instances

The decentralization process is a process of reform of the state administration, by means of which a set of administrative and financial functions are assigned to local governments-mainly to municipal governments. The process takes place at different levels, involves mechanisms of management and resource allocation, and has instances of decision which are quite diverse. In this regard, the following require attention:

- The process involves different levels of management existing between the central and the local government, which have different functions and competencies. It is important to consider the existence of consortia and associations of municipalities, and regional organizations. The international level should also be taken into account, as some municipalities may have direct management capacity at this level, e.g. capacity to process and obtain international contracts and loans.
- Decentralization requires to give attention to the integration of policies, and to achieve coordination and consensus between local agencies and actors
- representatives of sectoral agencies, managers from the private sector, unions, NGOs, etc. However, it is also clear that there are sectoral policies which must necessarily continue to be a national concern.
- The relations between the different levels, functions and administrative processes which converge at the local level make it necessary to examine the role of strategic planning, and of information systems.

F. Information and decentralization

The flow of information between the different administrative levels and phases of the decentralization process is essential for the effectiveness and efficiency of the process.

In addition, information is essential to make the process more transparent. To that purpose, information should be accessible to civil society. The hypothesis is that communication about results, existing resources, and mechanisms of the social programs available to the population, will facilitate consciousness-raising on the part of the citizens.

The existence of such a consciousness will permit monitoring and evaluation of the actions taken more easily. Indeed, one of the objectives of information systems should be to generate accountability.

From the above, it is evident that information should facilitate the elaboration of performance indicators in the areas of planning and municipal management. In the case of sectoral indicators, these should make possible a more integrated planning and management of municipal policies. Indicators should be comparable throughout the units involved in the decentralization process

- municipalities or other types of local government
- in order to be able to measure the efficacy and efficiency of the process as a whole.

Among the different types of indicators, the most important are those which measure performance, as these make it possible to correct the decentralization process and the mechanisms involved in its operation.

In conclusion, information should be useful for:

- The design of local plans, with participation of the local actors.
- The education of the population, so as to better articulate their demands, and increase the feasibility of participation of new social actors and sectors.
- The promotion of local organization.
- The consultation of the local population -for example, by organizing mechanisms such as local plebiscites- in order to increase accountability.

G. The economics of decentralization

The financial sustainability of the process is essential. It is necessary to integrate the economic dimension of the problem within the sociological and political science studies.

The analysis of fiscal viability is indispensable, in order to evaluate the results and performance of decentralization. (In general terms, this topic was not discussed at length in the workshop).

H. Evaluation of the process

Evaluation can be carried out in order to assess: how the process is going on (which mechanisms make decentralization work or not work?); how deficiencies are gradually overcome (what is the level of satisfaction of the users involved in the process?); or, how the variables which are exogenous to the process can be controlled (how is the process gradually made more viable?).

One important evaluation perspective is the analysis of the political and historical aspects of the process. Decentralization must be examined not only from the standpoint of its technical administrative, legal or financial aspects, but also within the broader framework of the development process. With this in mind, evaluation requires:

- Indicators as to how the process is progressing.
- Analysis of the impact of decentralization upon economic and social policies, in order to establish how it affects the satisfaction of basic needs, governance capacity and economic reform.

7. THE METHODOLOGICAL DISCUSSION

The discussion on the methodological problems of the study of decentralization sought to identify the problems inherent in this area of study. Therefore, attention was not directed towards the usual problems which social or economic research may have, but rather to those which are considered to be typical of this area. The following problems were mentioned:

A. Identification of decision-making processes

As was indicated at the conceptual level, decentralization is a complex process where several different types of decision-making processes converge. In order to identify, describe and examine these types, the following aspects must be born in mind:

- **Actors:** who are the actors that intervene at the central, intermediate and local level? what are their characteristics? what mandate do they have? how is their authority exercised?
- **Structure of the decision-making process:** how is the process organized? how are the different instances of decision articulated?
- **Mechanisms:** what are the operational steps to be followed in decision-making? what rules govern each one of these? what are the forms of collaboration and complementation? how are conflicts resolved?
- **Instruments:** what are the legal, administrative, technological, financial, etc. instruments which are used in the decision-making process?
- **Results:** what are the results of the process? how are they obtained, registered, measured and evaluated?

One general methodological problem is that the decentralization process is not an institutionalized -crystallized- process but rather, is in a state of consolidation. This makes quite complex the qualitative and quantitative measurement of the aspects above mentioned.

B. Participation

Measurement of the participation of different types of actors and sectors is another critical methodological problem in the study of decentralization. The following aspects need to be considered:

- **Actors:** what are the perceptions, values and practices which the actors involved bring to their participation in the process of decentralization?
- **Structure and content:** which are the entry points to get into the decision-making process? who has access to these entry points? to what levels of participation do they have access? what is the content of the participation?
- **Mechanisms for participation:** how does one participate? what are the steps that guide to entry participation and exit of the decision-making process?
- **Instruments:** what are the legal, administrative, political and technological procedures for participation?
- **Results:** which are the indicators that are used to measure the results of the participation? what is the relation between these results and other results produced by decentralization? how does feedback operate within the process? how is information about the results disseminated?

C. Construction of indicators of efficacy and efficiency

Measuring the efficacy and efficiency of decentralization involves complex methodological problems. The examination of these aspects has to be done at the different levels and instances of the process, involving the gathering of specialized financial information and the elaboration of performance indicators.

The following indicators were mentioned as examples: the human development index, per capita income, level of education, and life expectancy.

The indicators should make it possible the measurement of the efficacy and efficiency of the process and its impact. The measurement of these two aspects is complex because the programs under examination -the usual unit of analysis- are quite different.

Besides, it becomes necessary in many cases to take into account cross-cutting dimensions -such as normative and fiscal aspects -which are common to different sectoral programs. For these reasons the obtention of financial and institutional performance indicators is of particular difficulty.

D. Definition of the local context and of the unit of decentralization

In order to examine decentralization, it is necessary to be clear as to the criteria that define the units of decentralization. This is no simple task due to the possibility of overlapping of different territorial, administrative and ethnic definitions within a single locality.

The above is important in order to develop methods and techniques which measure the way in which activities decentralized to the municipalities interact with other activities in the same community that respond to other structures, functions, and action (an example is the presence of programs of sectoral agencies that report directly to the central government). This aspect is important for the integration of policies at the local level.

E. Links between the national, regional and local levels

Another critical methodological problem is the identification of the links which exist between the national, regional and local levels, as well as the ways in which these operate, and the flow of decisions and information between them. In particular, the examination of how information flows, constitutes a critical methodological problem in the analysis of decentralization.

The analysis of the relationship between different moments of the decision-making process ("interphases") is essential in order to grasp how the process is conducted and the ways which can be proposed for improving it.

F. Comparability

The evaluation of decentralization requires that the criteria for comparability between different local units be indicated. Due to the fact that municipalities and other units of local government differ from each other according to the individual characteristics of each place, it is necessary to make the criteria and indicators used in the comparison explicit. It is essential that indicators at the local level be comparable with similar indicators at the national level, in order to be able to examine the process as a whole.

The obtention of comparative data is essential. To this purpose, it is necessary to have clear criteria for classifying types of management and types of municipalities, and constructing matrices for the classification of municipalities.

If the criteria for comparison are reliable, it will be possible to apply the indicators of efficacy and efficiency reliably, measure participation, and evaluate the results of decentralization throughout different municipalities. It should be stressed that one of the most complex problems involved is the comparative measurement of performance.

G. Integration of policies

Finally, another key methodological problem is that of examining the degree of integration of policies at the local level, the way of bringing about integrated policy, and the measurement of the results. One methodological difficulty to be faced is the effective integration of sectoral indicators into municipal planning and management. The analysis of the integration of policies demands an interdisciplinary approach.

8. PROPOSAL FOR COLLABORATION AMONG RESEARCHERS

The last part of the workshop was devoted to discussing the convenience of adding value to IDRC projects, and the organization of new collaborative activities. The following points were mentioned:

A. Problems

- There is a low utilization of research results produced in the region on decentralization. The Canadian experience is little known.
- Activities which are carried out tend to suffer from "localism", which leads to little communication, and to fragmentation between the different research efforts that are carried out in the region.

B. Objectives

Several objectives were discussed for an eventual program. Activities of support and collaboration between researchers and institutions participating in the workshop were mentioned including the following:

- To set up a regional conceptual framework for policy analysis and evaluation.
- To generate a consolidated critical mass of knowledge, human resources and institutional capabilities to conduct research, provide training and policy advice in relation to problems of decentralization and social policy.
- To induce a demand for knowledge on the part of potential users, and to create a regional forum for the analysis of the problems related to decentralization.
- To increase communication among researchers, policy-makers and program operators.

C. Actions

Short-term and medium-term actions were proposed as follows:

- To support studies on economics of decentralization, national decentralization processes, evaluation of decentralization, analysis of endogenous capacity to carry out the process.
- To promote communication. Use of electronic mail for informative purposes between members of the group and external researchers. To this end, it might be useful to prepare and circulate a brief monthly bulletin on decentralization and social policy.
- To organize electronic conferences. It was proposed that conferences be held on selected topics as social participation and decentralization, and financing of decentralization.

- To organize a data base with information on institutions, researchers, studies and bibliographies.
- To carry out consultancies and policy advice activities. Provision of advice and conduction of evaluations for the design and execution of research projects, organization of training activities, and generation of expertise in order to enable the improvement of the decentralization process.
- To integrate young researchers into the proposed activities.
- To promote new research studies.
- To evaluate selected policy experiences on decentralization of social policies.
- To organize seminars and workshops. Examination of the possibility of organizing seminars every two years to discuss progress made in specific critical conceptual and methodological areas, seminars for discussing a single issue in-depth, and workshops for examining technical/methodological issues involved in the research and evaluation of the decentralization process.

D. Organization

It was proposed that the execution of a program including activities indicated above, be coordinated by a small secretariat located in one of the centers participating in the meeting, backed up by a multidisciplinary team of researchers working from their respective institutions.

Lic. José Blanes from CEBEM, Bolivia, was named to draw up the draft of a proposal and a budget. The document will be circulated to those participating in the workshop, in order to obtain their comments and a formal commitment on the part of their institutions to support and participate in this new initiative, if interested. The proposal will also be discussed with IDRC, and presented to the Center for its consideration. It was proposed that this document be circulated by March, 1995.

ANNEX I

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