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The role of local administration in  
development.

# Institute of Development Management

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The Role of Local Administration

in Development

William Tordoff

IDM Lecture Series

1978.

**Botswana  
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FOREWORD

This second IDM evening Public Lecture Series which ran from October 1977 to November 1978 was organized under my predecessor, Dr. George Haythorne. As with the first Series, each of the five lectures deals with an important aspect of development.

Since there are inevitably delays in acquiring and printing a full set of five lectures and since the topics will have interest to different groups it was felt that more timely publication of individual lectures would better serve the purpose of communicating the contents of these lectures to a wider audience.

Professor Tordoff is a Professor of Government at the University of Manchester. He delivered this address on 18 October 1977 at the IDM's regional offices in Gaborone. Professor Tordoff draws on a wide range of experience in analyzing the role of local administration in development. He is presently a member of the President's Commission on Local Government Structure in Botswana.

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Fred Schindeler  
Director

## THE ROLE OF LOCAL ADMINISTRATION IN DEVELOPMENT

BY: William Tordoff \*

Arthur Lewis, the economist, once said: "The economics of planning is not very complicated; what matters is good politics and good public administration." As a non-economist, I doubt whether the first part of the statement is true, but the statement as a whole is valid in the sense that it is easier to draw up a development plan than to implement it. Good politics can mean many things: one thing it does mean is that there must be a political commitment to the plan. Though a plan must be subject to constant review and adjustment, it will be thrown badly out of gear if Ministers embark on major projects not included in the original plan. Sound administration is essential for plan implementation: it is the experience of many African countries that shortage of skilled manpower is a more serious constraint on development than finance. Economics, politics and administration cannot be kept in separate, watertight compartments: each affects the others. To paraphrase A. H. Hanson: "A decision which is economically rational is not rational at all in the wider context if it upsets the political apple-cart." Nicholas Kaldor, the Cambridge economist, went to Ghana in 1961 to advise the Government on how to overcome its balance of payments problem. He recommended tough exchange control measures and a compulsory development levy. When we pointed out to him at a University of Ghana seminar that the latter would be unpopular, he replied that he was there to give technical advice - it was for the politicians to determine whether his advice was politically acceptable. Not long after he had left a serious riot occurred among dock and railway workers at Sekondi-Takoradi, then the country's major port. Or take the interaction between politics and administration with Ghana again as an example. At independence in 1957 Ghana had a strong civil service, with 60% of its senior posts already Africanised; but the politics went wrong and by 1966, when Nkrumah fell, the country was bankrupt.

I mention these things because, though my concern is with local administration, we cannot ignore the political and socio-economic context within which the administration operates. The social context is important: I recollect the story of a poultry scheme undertaken by a UN agency in rural Senegal to benefit the local people; only when the hens were laying was it discovered that egg-eating was locally taboo! I begin therefore by looking at a number of factors which will affect the role of local administration in development. These include:

1. The nature of the state: (i) is it unitary or federal? i.e. is there a supreme central legislature to which other law-making bodies in the state are subordinate or is there a division of law-making powers between co-ordinate authorities, federal and state, each supreme within its own sphere? The federal solution is rare in Africa and for our purpose it is more relevant to concentrate on the unitary state,

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and (ii) the extent of decentralisation within it. In text-book form, we can distinguish between the deconcentration of authority, whereby the central government confers what may be wide discretionary powers on its agents in the field, thereby retaining the reality of central control, and devolution whereby the central government retains its legal supremacy but devolves some of its powers on subordinate authorities. Deconcentration (administration decentralisation) is, if you like, a French-type solution - in France the key figure is the Prefect, acting as representative in his Department of the Ministry of the Interior; local authorities, the mayor and the commune, exist but are really projections of the central government at local level. Deconcentration characterises government in the rural areas of many French-speaking African states, as well as to a considerable extent in Kenya and Sierra Leone. Devolution (political decentralisation) is more of an English-type solution, with representative local government institutions at the heart of the system and operating alongside agents of the central government. In one form or another it exists in many states including Ghana, Tanzania, Zambia and Botswana, though the form and extent of this devolution may vary considerably.

2. Another factor affecting the role of local administration is whether the state is a one-party state, a two or multi-party state, or a military regime. Since independence in or around 1960, the trend in Africa has been towards the one-party state, with the supremacy of the single party legally established (as in Tanzania in 1965 or Zambia in 1972) or established, as in Kenya, on a de facto basis. Multi-party states are few - they include Botswana, Gambia, Sierra Leone and Lesotho - but only in Botswana and Gambia have democratic elections been held in recent years. Everywhere in Africa, the concept of a 'neutral' administration is difficult to sustain: even in multi-party states one does not think, in British terms, of the swing of the pendulum with one party displacing another in an election, but of snowballs, with the dominant party now winning now losing support but without its overall dominance being challenged. African governments therefore expect that public servants will be firmly committed to support their policies. In military regimes, with political parties proscribed, administrators may well have an expanded role - the military, unsure of its own legitimacy, usually relies heavily on the administration.
3. A third factor will be the strength or weakness of the party organisation: KANU in Kenya and TANU (now CCM)<sup>x</sup> in Tanzania offer sharp contrasts: it would probably have been politically impossible

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<sup>x</sup>KANU=Kenya African National Union; TANU=Tanganyika African National Union; CCM=Chama cha Mapinduzi (the Revolutionary Party of Tanzania).

for Nyerere to have given, as Kenyatta has done, civil service Provincial and District Commissioners such wide powers and made them his 'agents of development'.

4. Again, in the fourth place, the role of the local administration will be affected when it is politicised - i.e. by having a politician placed by the President at the head of it. This happened in Ghana in 1957, in Tanzania in 1962-63, and in Zambia in 1968-69.
5. The socio-economic context must not be forgotten. Compare, for example, predominantly agricultural and relatively socially homogeneous countries such as Botswana and Tanzania with (say) Zambia and Nigeria, which have relatively high levels of urbanization and industrialization, cultural diversity and social stratification. The local administrator in Nigeria has to accommodate himself to a wider range of traditional and modern interest groups than his counterpart in Botswana.
6. Another environmental factor affecting local administration are the goals pursued by the government. Where these are clearly articulated and brought together into an official ideology, as with ujamaa in Tanzania, planning and administrative discretion is likely to be more circumscribed than in a country like Kenya where the ideology is weak. Ideology can be a spur to development, but it can also be an economic straightjacket if policies which have failed are persisted in for ideological reasons. There may of course be common elements in two given ideologies - thus, the Presidents of Tanzania and Zambia share a commitment to participatory democracy and to equalization measures - but the nature of society may make it more difficult to implement such anti-elite measures in one country than in another. Zambian society, in its attachment to the materialist ethic, is more like Ghana than Tanzania.
7. This brings me to the value system of local administrators themselves. If they see themselves as an elite with an entrenched social position to defend and if they themselves embrace the materialist ethic, they may drag their feet in achieving the political goal of a just and egalitarian society. Thus, local agricultural officials may be inclined to concentrate their efforts on the progressive and responsive farmer to the neglect of the poorer and less knowledgeable sections of the community.
8. Role performance will also be affected by the size and competence of the local administration; in this sphere, the colonial legacy and the nature of past and present educational and training programmes will also be relevant. It is often said that underdeveloped countries tend to have underdeveloped administrations; if, Nyerere pointed

out, we argued otherwise, we would be saying that the colonial authorities gave us all the education and training that we needed. The problem recedes after independence as competent personnel are trained and gain experience.

Alexander Pope said: "For forms of government let fools contest, what'er is best administered is best". Though the statement itself is open to question, it is true that the best system of government will fail if the administration is weak. When manpower is in critically short supply, it becomes very important to deploy it rationally. If there is a genuine commitment to decentralisation, this means (in my view) that the centre must not be allowed to monopolise key personnel. It also means that district officials must be allowed to stay in the same district long enough to get to know the people and understand local problems. Zambia has encountered major problems because of the frequent changes in district personnel, especially District Governors. Manpower training must also be relevant to the country's needs to provide administrators who are development-minded, innovative and resourceful, and who can communicate not only with their own colleagues but with the people whom they serve.

So much then for factors which affect the role of local administration in development. These factors vary of course from country to country, and so too does the institutional machinery created to achieve development. However, most Anglophone countries in Africa have at one time or another made the same sort of arrangements or adopted the same devices. Let us look at some of them. Everywhere the emphasis in district administration has shifted from law and order to development functions and the district commissioner (or whatever he is called) has become the chief co-ordinator of the development efforts of central government departments and agencies, the local authority, the political parties and voluntary organisations in his district. He has tended to lose many of his former powers - usually law and order to the police, magisterial functions to the judiciary, and often local government supervisory functions to local government officers or inspectors employed by the Ministry of Local Government. To assist him in his co-ordinating role and to undertake some planning functions there have been created district development committees and, below them, village development committees with sometimes, as in Zambia, ward development committees in between. These are non-statutory bodies, representative of the various interests in the district, and varying widely in size and effectiveness. The tendency in at least some countries has been for the representatives of the central government departments to be the most articulate and decisive members.

In English-speaking Africa, representative local government institutions were inherited at independence or created soon after it, constituting a parallel structure to central government at district level. They acquired many of the powers formerly exercised by the chiefs and traditional authorities. In Botswana the district councils seem to have prospered. Under the Accelerated Rural Development Programme (1973-76) they showed an implementing capacity much greater than most observers had expected, sometimes breaking the construction targets for primary

school and health facilities laid down in the 1973-78 Plan. Elsewhere, however, the record of achievement of local authorities has been rather dismal: district councils have been abolished in Sierra Leone and Tanzania, country councils have been stripped of most of their powers in Kenya, while rural councils in Zambia perform minimal functions at a high public cost. In Ghana, the local authorities had a chequered history before 1966, when, on the military's assumption of power, they were replaced by appointed committees of management. However, Ghana has not abandoned representative local authorities and has recently reconstituted them, as has also Nigeria.

The reasons for these failures are many and it would be tedious to list them all. They include the inability of councils to attract and keep good quality staff. Some countries have sought to meet this problem by creating a unified local government service, as Tanzania did in 1963 and Zambia and Botswana more recently. Ghana has gone further and has merged her civil and local government services into a unified public service. Other reasons are the irresponsibility and extravagance of councillors, inadequate financial control, the non-viability of council units (thus Nkrumah's Ghana constantly experimented with the size of the local authorities) and political interference.

Where local authorities have failed or proved ineffective, the de facto trend has been to increase the power at district level of the administrators and other representatives of central government departments. In Tanzania this trend, and the growth of a state bureaucracy at the centre, alarmed TANU and Mwongozo (the TANU Guidelines) in 1971 the party pledged itself to end what it called "bureaucratic dominance", which it described as "a colonial legacy", and to give power back to the people. This has not yet happened and TANU (now CCM), like the CPP in Ghana and UNIP in Zambia, has proved a blunt mobilising instrument for development. Mobilisation, often favoured by single political parties, may not in any case be conducive to sustained development. As Colin Leys has written:

"...mobilisation, which has been identified as a weapon of quick implementation, does not clearly indicate that peasants change faster than if they were left to run their own affairs...If anything, mobilisation tends to reinforce the feeling of dependence on government institutions among peasants."

In conclusion, I shall refer briefly to the contrasting experience of the one-party states of Tanzania and Zambia and the multi-party state of Botswana in order to illustrate some of the points already made, as well as to provide a basis for discussion.

Tanzania: Following independence in December 1961, Tanzania politicised its regional and district administration: politicians - called Regional and Area Commissioners - were appointed by the President to head the regions and districts respectively; they were made ex-officio regional and area secretaries of



TANU. This arrangement was retained following Tanzania's adoption of a socialist strategy of development in the Arusha Declaration of January 1967. The Government then said that in the past it had relied too much on money for development and that agriculture was the root of development. Under what might be termed a programme of communal socialism, the people were encouraged to come together in ujamaa villages in order to enjoy common services, including a school, a dispensary, and piped-bore water. When fully established, the villages would constitute communal units of production, with the people jointly owning and farming the land. The voluntary nature of ujamaa was stressed. However, from 1974 millions of people have been forcibly moved into villages and the emphasis has shifted from the productive to the social aspects of ujamaa, though communal production remains the ultimate aim.

Also as a consequence of the Arusha Declaration, the Government in 1972 embarked on a major decentralisation exercise, explaining that under the former organisational structure projects had been planned and implemented from above and that the people were not themselves involved in planning and implementing development programmes which affected them. This would be remedied under the new structure. At the district level, the former district councils were wound up, local and central government responsibilities were merged, and reconstituted district planning and implementation committees, with elected and ex-officio members, were established. Ward and regional development committees were retained, with a revised membership. In addition, a District Development Council was set up with the TANU District Chairman as chairman and a District Development Director (working to a counterpart at regional level) as secretary; the broad-based membership included elected councillors representing wards. Some re-organisation of TANU was also undertaken to enable the party to play an increased, mainly supervisory role in the planning process; this was carried further in 1977 when TANU and the Afro-Shirazi Party of Zanzibar merged to form a new party, Chama cha Mapinduzi (the Revolutionary Party). There have been some benefits from this system: planning and implementation activities are better coordinated than previously, especially by the Regional and District Development Directors and their staff, and project implementation has been speeded up - many matters which formerly had to be referred to the centre can now be decided locally. On the other hand, the centre still retains considerable powers over the regions and popular participation has been largely sacrificed to bureaucratic control. Moreover, civil servants take the key decisions on planning, the party restricting itself to a consideration of broad policy issues.

Zambia: Zambia is a difficult country to govern. It combines a modern industrial sector on the Copperbelt and line of rail with an underdeveloped rural sector; however, to talk simply of a 'dual economy' is misleading because of sharp differences in the level of underdevelopment of the outlying rural provinces. The economy is over-dependent on copper and the sharp drop in price since 1974, coupled with increased costs of production, mean that Zambia is now facing an economic crisis. A further attempt is being made to step up agricultural production both for home consumption and for export.

Following independence in 1964, an Under-Minister was appointed to each of Zambia's eight provinces (a ninth - Lusaka Province - was created in 1976), but the district remained under a civil service head; provincial and district development committees were established. In 1968-69 President Kaunda initiated decentralisation measures which involved posting a Cabinet Minister and permanent secretary to each province and placing a District Governor in each district. In 1976 a member of the UNIP<sup>x</sup> Central Committee was posted to each province and outranks the Provincial Cabinet Minister, though the latter still presides over the (large and unwieldy) PDC. This arrangement parallels that at the centre where the party Central Committee is formally superior to the Cabinet. It is no less wasteful of manpower and has recently been the subject of critical comment in the National Assembly.

Decentralisation has not gone as far in Zambia as in Tanzania, and the provinces have only a very small share in the Government's annual capital and recurrent expenditure. The institutional arrangements under decentralisation include provincial, district and ward development committees and village productivity committees, as well as predominantly elected local authorities. There is a commitment to participatory democracy, but central control has not been significantly relaxed.

Botswana: Four official bodies operate at district level. These are:

1. the District Administration, under a (civil service) District Commissioner, together with representatives of central government Ministries and Departments, and the District Development Committee, of which the District Commissioner is chairman and the District Officer (Development) is secretary;
2. the District Council, whose staff (including a Council Planning Officer) belong to a united local government service;
3. the Tribal Administration which, though stripped of most of its former powers, still attracts a substantial following; and
4. the Tribal Land Board, which is serviced by its own administrative secretary and the District Officer (Lands).

A number of people feel that this arrangement entails unnecessary overlapping of functions, is wasteful of manpower resources, and generates needless conflict between the four bodies; they therefore argue that it would be better to group them together under the District Council, which would become the focus of development. Others however, argue that the extent of conflict is exaggerated, that some conflict is not in any case a bad thing so long as mechanisms exist to resolve it, that integration on the lines proposed might increase conflict between the centre and the local administration, and that the Tribal Administration, freed of control by the District Commissioner, might then be able to manipulate the District Council in its own interests. Technically, it would be possible to work out institutional

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<sup>x</sup> United National Independence Party.

arrangements for an integrated authority centred on the District Council. The question is whether this is desirable and whether it would serve to promote or to retard local development. I leave this open for discussion.

Each of the three countries reviewed is committed to using its local administrative machinery in order to achieve 'rural development'. The practical meaning attached to this term depends on a number of considerations, and not least on the ideological base of the government concerned. But (as Professor David Evans of the University of Zambia has argued) whatever the 'mix' of policy objectives - increasing agricultural output, expanding rural employment opportunities, and reducing income disparities between the rural and urban sectors and within the rural sector itself - a strong case can be advanced in each country for shifting more responsibility in planning and implementation from the centre to the provinces and districts.



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