

# The Effect of Decentralization on Conflict Prevention in Sub-Saharan Africa

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## I. Introduction

More attention is being focused in recent years on the relationship between decentralization and conflict.<sup>1</sup> Since the beginning of the 1990s, developing countries have introduced decentralization policies; however, the objectives and results of these policies have been varied. The following are thought to be the typical reasons why the relationship between decentralization and conflict has been attracting attention. In particular, conflict-prone sub-Saharan African (SSA) states have more vigorously introduced policies of decentralization and conflict prevention in a simultaneous manner.

First, the end of the Cold War saw a rise in domestic conflict, making an issue of the question of what the state's minimum function for preventing such conflicts and encouraging national recovery should be. Many countries have descended into conflict after the collapse of the centralized systems which they maintained during the Cold War; and, decentralization is seen as an alternative state function. Over the past few years, some donors have actively promoted research into the relationship between decentralization and conflict (Schou and Hang, 2005; Braathen and Hellevik, 2006; Monteux, 2006, p.164-66; GTZ, 2006; Siegle and O'Mahony, 2006).

Second, consideration of the dynamics and conflict between ethnicities, religions and other identity groups comprising states shows that they have an effect on regional relationships and decentralization (Ndikumana, 2004; Bangura 2006). Stewart (2007) notes that when groups having different identities, possess horizontal inequality in terms of the allocation of resources and wealth, political

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decision-making authority or in the survival of cultural traditions, the risk of conflict increases. Inequality between groups spreads amongst people as a sense of relative deprivation (Gurr, 1970) and tends to increase during the initial stages of development (Cramer, 2005:4).

The struggle to acquire political power is related to both decentralization and conflict. Decentralization and autonomy have been seen as ways to keep one group from monopolizing state power and, from the eyes of minorities, as effective principles for governing (Horowitz, 1985; Sisk, 1996; Gurr, 2000; Saideman et al. 2002). In recent years another view has developed which sees decentralization as a strategy for the majority to employ against minorities (Seely, 2001), and which sees autonomy as a prescription for softening separatism (Weller and Wolff, 2005).

Traditionally, research into decentralization and conflict has tended to focus either on analyzing them in terms of the forms of government in which they occur or on using regression analysis to understand their relationship. These approaches are either too discrete or too general, with neither surveying the overall trends of decentralization. This paper seeks, therefore, to make a tentative examination, using a broad timeline between 1980s to mid-2000s, of the relationship between decentralization and conflict from the standpoint of the political dynamics between groups, placing it amongst the development patterns of developing countries.

Specifically, there are three research questions to be answered. First, what is the significance of decentralization for inter-group equality and justice? Second, what is the relationship of decentralization to the principle of super-ordinate national governance? Third, how can the central government create a stable, constructive relationship with minorities seeking autonomy or secession through the framework of decentralization?

This paper takes the following structure. First, the next section will provide the necessary framework for performing an analysis by offering a definition of decentralization together with an explanation of the motives behind it and the relationship it has with conflict. The third section will look at the latent relationship between types of decentralization policy and conflict in SSA. And, finally,

the fourth section will put forward policy prescriptions which take into consideration development activities.

## **II. Analysis Framework**

### **1. Definition of Decentralization**

In this paper, “decentralization” is defined as, “the transfer of authority and responsibility for public functions from the central government to subordinate or quasi independent government organizations or the private sector (Rondinelli, 1998:2).” Political decentralization comes close to autonomy by allowing local areas, in principle, to elect their own politicians through regular elections of regional legislators and government heads. On the other hand, administrative and financial decentralization allows for partial progress to be made through centralized local bodies.

Regular autonomy indicates territorial autonomy; however, non-territorial and corporate autonomy are related to consociational democracy (Lijphart, 1977). Also known as power-sharing, this is the idea of using the proportional-representation system to achieve governance via a large assembly of political leaders representing important groups making up a plural society. From the standpoint of preventing conflict, decentralization is one form of power-sharing. Wunsch (2000) states that, in order to control conflict in Africa, a combination of federalism, consociationalism and the principle of subsidiarity is appropriate.

Finally, let us contrast political decentralization in a federal state and a unitary state. Federalism utilizes a constitution which stipulates that the authority and functions which cannot be carried out by the individual provinces comprising the state are to be transferred to the federal government. In contrast, decentralization in a unitary state involves the central government transferring political authority and functions to lower political and administrative units; thus, in principle, the authority and functions transferred to these lower units can always be reclaimed by the central government.

### **2. Motivations for Decentralization**

Decentralization is an official policy and objective, and the power elite is

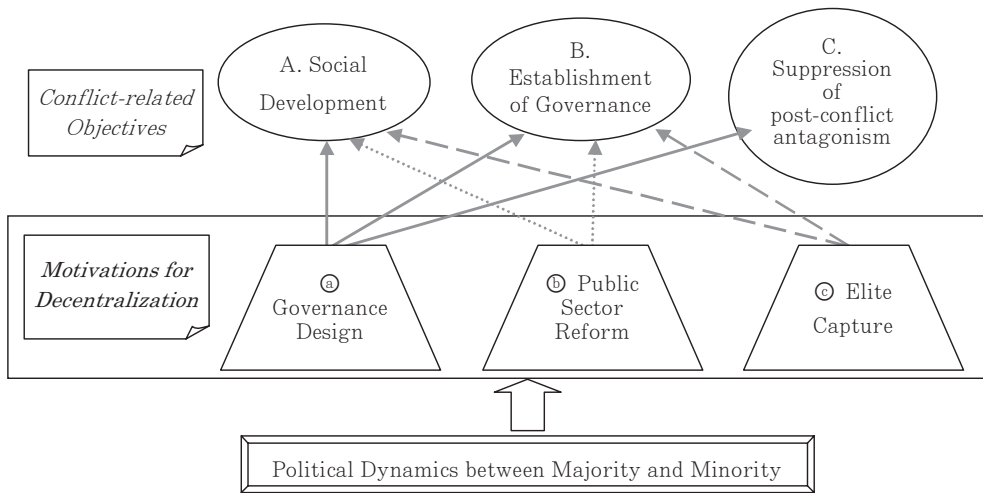
motivated by the public mind. At the same time, the power elite may have private motivations which reflect conditions specific to the country. Under normal conditions, three primary motivations for decentralization can be considered.

- ① Governance Design: Within the political framework of a state, this is related to allocating power between identity and regional groups. Democratization is also a related factor.
- ② Public Sector Reform (PSR) : Since the mid-1990s, it has been implemented with more focus on improving service delivery to the poor than on downsizing government (World Bank, 2003).
- ③ Elite Capture: Power elites can influence the allocation of resources. Decentralization becomes a tool of “elite capture” between the central and local governments (Crook, 2003).

### 3. Linkage between Decentralization and Conflict

Fig. 1 shows the framework of analysis for decentralization and conflict. It is necessary to start with the overall factor of majority and minority dynamics. This is because it affects three general motivations for decentralization as explained above. Secondly, these motivations produce a variety of policy objectives for decentralization; however, they have been typically divided into the three objectives related to conflict: A (social development, thereafter referred to as “development”), B (establishment of governance, thereafter “governance”), and C (suppression of post-conflict antagonism, thereafter “post-conflict”). Each of these objectives are very diverse in themselves; however, A is considered to reduce potential conflict through fair allocation of resources; B is designed to mitigate the tensions between antagonistic groups and respect the participation of minorities and the role of self-determination; and C is an element for supporting power-sharing after a conflict to ensure social stability.<sup>3</sup> These categories are relative and undergoing changes, and multiple objectives could co-exist.

According to Speiser and Handy (2005), researchers broadly agree that three minimum functions of the state are 1) to have a monopoly on violence, 2) to provide national services, and 3) to ensure political order. C, A, and B in Fig. 1, while varying slightly, agree with this order.



Source: created by the author. (Note): Arrows do not connect all motivations and objectives.

**Fig.1 Analytical Framework for Decentralization and Conflict Prevention**

By considering three levels of the structure in Fig.1, it is possible to analyze the realities of decentralization and conflict which traditional research has overlooked. The motivations for decentralization are often considered to be hidden in “black box” of the political processes. However, we can assume them by analyzing two other observable dimensions: the political dynamics between majority and minority; and the conflict-related policy objectives of decentralization.

### III. Latent Connection between Decentralization and Conflict

In this section we will examine the relationship between the upper two levels of Fig. 1. This would enable us to clearly see the relationship between the motives of the power elite who support policies, the policies themselves, and conflict. In societies where differences in value and interest are deemed to be structured at the group level, decentralization is thought to be a political method capable of decreasing antagonism between groups. However, the objectives of decentralization and the motivations for conflict vary from country to country.<sup>4</sup> Underlying the progress of decentralization amongst developing countries during the 1990s was not only the pressure exerted by donors but also the political motivations of power elites (Manor, 1999:36-37). Sufficient consideration needs to be given to the process whereby their motives and policies were formed.

Decentralization provides political representation and power at the local level in place of political interests eliminated at the national level (Hartmann, 2002:10), and also provides opportunities for minority groups excluded at the national level to participate in the local political process and thereby reduces the risk of latent conflict (Schou and Haug, 2005:17). It also has a significant impact upon resource allocation. Poor regions can receive resources with the strengthened ability to levy taxes and share the revenues, while they can lead to increased regional tension when there is a significant disparity in access to local resources (Siegle and O'Mahony, 2006:50).

In order to take a more systematic view of the above discussion, Table 1 below is used to give us three conflict related objectives of decentralization policy, each of their effects, risks, and their relationships to conflict. Type C (post-conflict) corresponds to the period following conflict, while type A (development) and type B (governance) correspond to any periods.

### A. Promotion of Social Development

In this type, decentralization could lead to the elimination of conflict by supplying services in a non-preferential way, by unifying with other policies to bring about socio-economic development, and by decreasing the inequity and

**Table 1 Conflict-related Objectives of Decentralization Policy**

Type	A. Promotion of Social Development	B. Establishment of Governance	C. Suppression of Post-conflict Antagonism
Effect	Decentralization, through the fair allocation of resources, promotes social development to any group in a non-preferential way.	Decentralization strengthens the elements of self determination for minorities through a set of frameworks.	Decentralization is introduced as an element for supporting power-sharing in post-conflict societies.
Risk	Monopolization of resource allocation by specific power elites and groups. Leaving inter-group inequality untouched.	Invigoration of local parties and systems lays the groundwork for future separatist movements and suppression of new minorities under new units.	Promotes the artificial maintenance of the current situation and prevents the formation of intrinsic governance.
Relationship to Conflict	Easing of tension between groups as a result of social development, if economic growth continues.	Acceptance of participation by minorities could lead to the control of conflict	Directly puts the burden of common responsibility on the shoulders of those involved in conflict.

Source: created by the author

sense of inequality amongst people. This initiative, at least its rhetoric, is found in many countries and produces results which are seen in hindsight.

The examples of this type are Ghana, Mozambique, Kenya, Malawi, Cameroon, Zambia, and so forth. The former regimes of Sierra Leone, DRC and Sudan contained this character. The present Rwanda and South Africa are gaining this character from post-conflict status. This type is diverse, allowing for weak political decentralization, administrative decentralization and even quasi-centralism.<sup>5</sup> The motivations for this type are related to governance design (Fig. 1: motivation Ⓐ) to promote economic liberalism, and to PSR (motivation Ⓑ) to improve efficiency and fairness.

If the economy grows, all groups would be able to receive a greater portion of the allocation pie. In this situation even the groups which are resistant would undergo change, and within the mutual relationships that exists between other functional groups, the process of urbanization and globalization will create a sense of multiple identity and attachment to multiple groups. In this model, if democratization makes progress, it is possible to facilitate the wellbeing of citizens while continuing an appropriate minority policy. However, this process takes time, and its success depends on the stability of long-term economic growth and efforts in reallocation policy.

In reality, however, there are a number of countries that have problems with their reallocation policies. Ensuring the transparency of public funds is crucial, and decentralization is one useful means of accomplishing this. For example, Kenya's administrative decentralization left in place disparity between regions. Oyugi (1995: 128) states that this decentralization gave the center the power to use approval as a means of frustrating those areas that were not in good favor with the [centralized] system. Currently, political decentralization remains mostly a formality; while legislator-led financial decentralization stands out prominently, there is little coordinated relationship with administration.

Mozambique had the possibility of achieving consociational democracy in type C (post-conflict); however, in 1994, the leaders of the majority Frelimo and the minority Renamo rejected the proposal put forward by Western Europe. For the minority this system was meant to be a group defense mechanism

(Rothchild, 2000). Majoritarian democratic Mozambique experienced continued rapid growth and received the support of many donors; however, the regional election bases for both groups remain separate, and resource allocation remains beneficial to the ruling party (Vaux et al., 2006, p.14). In addition, the system of decentralization is still weak, with the provincial governors and district administrators of rural areas being controlled by the regime, i.e., the majority.

#### Effects of Decentralization

Hirschman (1981) points out that when economic growth continues, those who are relatively poor in society possess an “endurance for inequality” which involves expectations of social change (quoted in Cramer, 2005:16). Similarly, when the government is enthusiastically involved in poverty reduction, dissatisfied groups are also likely to keep an eye on the situation. However, the period people show endurance for the government efforts is not so long, and efforts at expanding governmental delivery of services to improve access for clients are varied.

Liberalizing people from traditional bondage and integrating them in a nation state from narrower units are considered to be a modernization process. State-wide market creation is very important task and disparity among local markets can be temporarily justified. In this context, decentralization is necessary to the extent that it satisfies the issue of governmental efficiency and client focus management through its operation. Other policies such as promoting trade, investment, and special economic zone are sometimes carried out and promote imbalanced growth strategies.

So-called developmental states in the East Asia which were constructed to respond to various developmental challenges, can be regarded as a successful part of type A (development). Their characters were highly centralistic, interventionists and protectionists; strong state capacity and collaboration with interest groups; and industrial policy by concentrating capitals. They were often undemocratic regimes, but they somehow shared the foods among people, especially after the Green Revolution. Edigheji (2005) recommends the democratic developmental state in SSA, which also takes on board the attributes of procedural democracy.



Many SSA countries showed steady economic growth, while centralizing the governance structures since the independence period. Type A (development) was promising model at that time, but became irrelevant in the 1980s due to financial problems. The difficulty of continuing type A in SSA showed sharp contrast with East Asia. The reason is that the institutions, including those of the state, have not been developed steadily in SSA. Economic boom is coming back in the 2000 mainly due to the mining export with privatization policy, which is not yet accompanied with sound institutional development in the government sector.

### Risks of Decentralization

The suggested risk of this type is domination by power elites and specific groups. Bardhan (2005) shows that the question to be examined is “Does decentralization increase scrutiny of service delivery by citizens (Fig. 1: motivation ④), or does it strengthen domination held by the local power elite (motivation ③)?” Prud’homme (1995) warns of the dangers of “corruption proliferation”, such as the intervention of local politicians, non-transparency in decision-making within a closed society, and the difficulty of monitoring by local governments. Actually, several local grant schemes in Kenya are equipped with these characters. When there is a marked disparity in resource allocation among local areas after decentralization, it is an indicator of both weak government and the intentional distortion of resource allocation.

In this type, it is possible that not only inequalities between groups, but also within groups, will deepen. In some countries with rapidly expanding economies, there is strong concern about both. However, including countries with low growth that have adopted type A (development), few countries are seeing decreasing inequality between groups. In order to dispel the discontentment of minorities during times of growth, the government needs to pay attention to the functioning of the reallocation of the outputs produced by the country’s growth in an equitable way.

Pre-war situations of DRC and Sierra Leone can be identified as very weak type A (development). The ordinary people and rural society have been neglected as evident in non-provision of social services and negative economic growth rate.

Even though classified as resource-rich countries, both are marked as highly unequal, urban-biased society. The dynamics of conflict is not simply based on the confrontation of ethnicity and religion within the country, but also explained by more complex dynamics of groupings and more influence from the neighboring countries. Bad governance is thought to be originated from neo-patrimonial regimes such as Mobutu and Stevens, and in both countries, their crises shaped the conditions for the cause of the war.

## **B. Establishment of Governance**

This type focuses on participation in the political and development processes and attempts to construct a system of governance that directly prevents internal conflict (motivation ②). The examples are less than a dozen, including large countries: Uganda, Tanzania, Ethiopia, Nigeria, South Africa, Mali, Mauritius and so forth. Either a policy of political decentralization, federalism, non-territorial autonomy, or some combination of these, is implemented. Especially, in multi-identity societies, there is compelling reason to implement this as a policy for reducing confrontation between minorities and the majority.

Even when inequality between groups exists, whether one or more of those groups will exhibit discontent depends upon the structure of governance (Stewart, 2001:19). Bangura (2006:3) emphasizes the role of ethnicity in shaping choices and mobilizing individuals for collective action when inequalities coincide with group differences. And, if the public sector fails to develop mechanisms to regulate difference and ensure inclusiveness, it may be rendered ineffective or illegitimate. The identity group and kinship relationship are significant in the low-income societies where social trust is chronically deficient.

Amongst target countries for type B (governance), there are some which have low growth and which are in the process of post-conflict. In Ethiopia, the pie has not increased much, due to recurrent food shortage crises. In Nigeria, another federal state, despite the fact that it is an oil producer, the reallocation of resources is not done properly and has resulted in discontent amongst local residents (Braathen and Hellevik, 2006), and efforts to establish local governments which receive allocations of resources continue. In 1992 in Mali, special

status was granted to the country's northern region in response to the demands of the Tuareg minority, and since then a nationwide policy of decentralization has been implemented, including this region.

The combination of democratization and developmental aid provided by international donors has been the driving force behind decentralization. This means that successful democratization has resulted in an expansion of finances due to aid — a combination of type B (governance) and A (development). This has resulted in the role of local governments becoming extremely important in the effective implementation of service provision. The pressure exerted by the electorate does not depend on majority or minority; however, generally, minority emphasizes the importance of national minimum standard in social expenditures which go to all citizens equally.

#### Effects of Decentralization

Minority power elites are able to increase their political power within decentralized units and receive new allocations from the central government. Their political battles might turn into allocation battles in some cases. Englebort and Hummel (2005) interpret this trend as the factor which keeps separatist movements in SSA from surfacing. In a decentralized unit, local people could attribute their bad performances to their own activities as well as those of the central governments. When autonomy is granted to local regions, the citizens busy themselves more with internal governance issues than issues of separatism or resistance (Hartmann, 2002: 10).

The good examples of multi-identity societies are Uganda and Ethiopia. The former contained an “overwhelmingly powerful minority”, and the latter enabled “minorities” to seize political power. Since the 1990s, Uganda, a unitary state, has strongly promoted decentralization at the district level while Ethiopia has promoted it at the regional level, and then down to the lower level. Thus, Uganda has contained movements towards federalism by Buganda, and in Ethiopia the ruling Tigray minority reduced the risk of other groups uniting to resist the central government.

In Uganda, the military's Resistance Council, which has existed since the civil

war of the 1980s, has become the base for local administrative organizations and the ruling party has subsequently absorbed the state and its ethnicities under its direct control. Ethiopia adopted ethnic federalism as a means of reversing the oppressive control of its former government (Lake and Rothchild, 1996); however, following this, the minority adopted a divide-and-rule style of government where they held key political and administrative positions. What Uganda and Ethiopia have in common is that after the tremendous collapse that followed their conflicts, there were no strong vested interests, allowing major reforms to be carried out (Ndegwa and Levy, 2003: 12).

In newly decentralized units, it is crucial that consideration be given to new minorities. In Uganda, the decision on what language to use was left up to each primary school unit in 2007. However, every pupil is not enjoying the native tongue, because some communities in the same district speak different dialects. Likewise, in Ethiopia 18 different instruction languages are used. In Uganda, the medium of instruction is stipulated as English in urban areas, where many people have different language backgrounds and most of the good schools are located, thereby closing off an opportunity for local people to connect with their native tongue. This is a serious choice dilemma.

Tanzania, frequently misunderstood as a federal state, is a unitary state. Important factors motivating decentralization in Tanzania were the pursuit of democracy following independence and the pursuit of PSR, even though donors strongly promoted. Tanzania has not experienced major conflicts occurring in the process of democratization, except for the island of Zanzibar. Ethnicities are divided into a great diversity of groups with Swahili being the official language. In addition, no large gap exists between the rich and the poor, which is helpful for ensuring stability.

### Risks of Decentralization

Decentralization empowers people and can foment their discontent within their new decentralized units. Brancati (2005) points out that, while decentralization can function as a means of reducing ethnic conflict and secessionism, by enlivening the activity of regional parties, it also has the effect of indirectly

promoting ethnic conflict. Uganda and Ethiopia have regional disparity problems and anti-governmental sentiments among people in the Northern and Somali area respectively. These areas are marked with the low level of social indicators.

When combined with the policies of type A (development), elite capture (motivation ©) can take place. It is said that, when the power elite between the center and local unite, the result will be “elite capture” collusion. In Uganda and Ethiopia, the collusion has been progressed, based on the monopolistic position of the ruling party. When they do not unite, the result may be serious debate or conflict. The reality seems to lie somewhere in between. It becomes more likely that political gerrymandering will occur in gray areas. In return for the central government’s approval of the establishment of a new local government, the group in question will trade some of their political support for the present regime in the next election.

Opinion on the merits and demerits of federalism as a means of preventing conflict is also divided. There are those who see ethnic federalism as potentially offering short-term stability but danger in the long-run (Deng, et al., 1996: 82). On the other hand, Saideman et al. (2002) argues that federalism sees protests but rarely rebellion, and Hale (2004) states that countries lacking a core ethnic region are extremely resistant to separatism and collapse. However, it is often said that the case of many countries may demonstrate that what makes the government work for the people is not the institutions, but the intentions of political elites.

Migration within a country by settlers can lead to conflicts with the original inhabitants over who constitutes the majority. This conflict starts over issues of land ownership and, when the population of the settlers increases rapidly, progresses to conflicts over the acquisition of political posts in the local government. When the settlers’ or immigrants’ culture system differs from that of the original inhabitants, the root of the resulting conflict becomes deeper. Schelnberger (2005) sees this problem as the reason for the negative impact decentralization had in Uganda’s Kibaale district. Likewise, the relocation of the headquarters of the Local Government Area in Nigeria has been the source of conflicts among major ethnic groups (Diprose and Ukiwo, 2008).

### C. Suppression of Post-conflict Antagonism

This type has the conflict prevention function for a post-conflict society. The examples are the present Sierra Leone, DRC, Sudan, Burundi, Angola, South Africa (1993-97), and so forth. Post-conflict decentralization is never easily achieved.<sup>6</sup> It could waver between two extremes: accelerating the collapse of federalism through encouragement of secessionist movements and retrogressing to political centralization (Lake and Rothchild, 2002). Another fear is that a newly created local majority will discriminate against the new local minorities (Horowitz, 1991).

The typical policy adopted to counteract these pessimistic scenarios is consociational democracy. Majoritarianism (Westminster-style democracy) emphasizes majority decision as the most basic method for achieving greater self-determination for citizens. However, majoritarianism, with its “winner-takes-all” system of elections can result in the views of the minority going unheeded, which makes it unsuitable for an already fractured society. The alternatives to this are consociational, consensus-style deliberative democracy or constitutionalism.<sup>7</sup> The salient feature of the consociational approach is its allocation of legislative seats to designated groups, the formation of grand coalitions, proportional representation election districts and the awarding of veto power to minorities; just like constitutionalism, it puts some sort of external constraints on democracy.

The consociational approach is usually debated as a problem of governance design (motivation ②) accompanied by external intervention from donors and international society. This element is also recognized as decentralization; however, while on the one hand there is a risk to the fixation of the present ethnicity situation, construction of a system which cuts across ethnicities without external intervention would be difficult. These artificial institutional designs are different from the process of spontaneous decentralization that occurs within countries. Over and above institutional design, it is important that there be unchanging cooperation between those parties involved in the conflict, and the consociational approach is a model that requires this in order to function well.

However, many type C (post-conflict) countries have adopted consociationalism just as a formality. They utilized several types of power sharing

agreements which was imposed by the outside actors and often lacked sufficient domestic consensus about cooperation between parties. Therefore, specific risks take place when outside collaborators withdraw. The present Sudan has adopted this type since peace agreement in 2005, applying the South African model. However, it is still uncertain whether this transitional power sharing framework works well. Ultimate decision about the independence of the Southern Sudan will be made by a local referendum in 2011.

Currently, in post-genocide Rwanda, there is an intentional effort being made to forget the artificial differences created between ethnicities during the period of colonialism, and decentralization is taking place through performance contracts between district governors and the central government (motivation ⑥). This decentralization reflects a switch in governance from type C (post-conflict) to A (development). Type B (governance), which consciously focuses on the existence of the majority and minorities, was not adopted. In Rwanda, the citizens live in a mixed way, and the country size is not large. As long as the socio-economic inequalities are limited, this approach can be effective. Otherwise, it can transform into the pretext of the ruling minority.

There are other types of decentralization in post-conflict societies. There are simple restoration of a traditional decentralized system and community-based activities without the existence of local governments. In Sierra Leone, while post-conflict governance should not be the reconstruction of a pre-war structure but the creation of a new structure, solidarity among people are not recovered in the society. It is striking to know that former rebel children are now treated better in a rehabilitation center to receive various services than ordinary children, making a perception of unfairness.

### Effects of Decentralization

The consociational approach presupposes effort will be put forward by the power elites of majority and minority. This model was used in the construction of most of the basic principles of the interim constitution of South Africa in 1993. Decentralization was introduced as multiple components; and, in hopes that it would be a tool for conflict management, “regions containing whites and

blacks were combined and the number of local governments reduced in order to construct stronger local governments (Hartmann 2006:12)". Also, the regional minorities were given latent favorable treatment through a bicameral system which provides provincial representatives to the central government; and eleven national languages were recognized (Carbone, 2001: 231).

Mine says that the consociational approach in South Africa is steadily seeing the principle of coalitions being replaced by majority-rule politics. This is seen as a process of switching from type C (post-conflict) to A (development).<sup>8</sup> And yet, South Africa can be considered as type B (governance) due to its federal system. Caspersen (2004: 570) says that the consociational approach creates stability; however, the difficulty lies in getting it accepted in local societies. Since the Dayton Accords, this model has had a dominant role in Bosnia; however, in recent years other model such as Horowitz's integrative model has also become necessary.<sup>9</sup> Lemarchand (2006:3) says that Burundi, even in the ethnic composition of the military, has been relatively more successful in adopting the consociational model than Rwanda and DRC.

Decentralization is the important clue for solving many problems facing Sierra Leone and DRC. In Sierra Leone, solving political marginalization of young people is the key. New system needs to be built with old chief networks, the symbol of neo-patrimonial rule, though some changes have been already introduced. In DRC, it is critical to solve political antagonism among the regions, provinces and residents. Decentralization is required by the enormity of the territory, but revenue-sharing stipulated in the constitution draft will not be easily agreed upon by stakeholders among various regions and provinces. Power sharing arrangement was attempted in both cases (i.e. Armed Forces Revolutionary Council in Sierra Leone and transition government in DRC), but they were only temporal.

#### Risks of Decentralization

The consociational model is neither sufficiently democratic nor is it stable (Lijphart, 1977: 47). Maphai (1999, quoted in Braathen and Hellevik, 2006:24) says about South Africa that the reason this model functioned was because the



hostility between groups was already subsiding. After this model has approached the majoritarian democracy, another concern emerges. It is not easy for the majority to keep political motivations high due to their poverty. Moreover, decentralization that leans heavily on ethnic schisms needs to have cross-sectional exchanges that are appropriately institutionalized lest the schisms become permanently fixed in place (Monteux, 2006: 166).

Horowitz (1985) criticizes the idea that this model can easily be applied to developing countries, because society is fractured by hostility to other groups in Africa and Asia. This model is also hard to apply to societies where conflict continues within part of it. Tull and Mehler (2005) point out that, because aid from donors in Africa is overly focused on peace settlements through power-sharing, it sends the wrong signal to leaders hopeful of holding national power, making it likely that they will adopt anti-government violence rather than non-violent methods.

New minorities are again critical issue. In eastern part of DRC, ethnic confrontation derived from Rwanda genocide is continuing. These conflicts cannot be mitigated easily. Along with the introduction of territorial decentralization, a variety of policies need to be incorporated to tackle with identity group confrontation. With serious group inequality, environmental collapse and youth bulge, identity groups are easily trapped in the stereo-type mirror image of friend or foe. Decentralization policy is not effective without grappling with these structural problems.

#### **IV. Policy Prescriptions**

With the point of view gained from the above discussions, this section attempts to answer concisely the research questions given at the outset of this paper and extract various implications, including those for development policy.

First, what is the significance of decentralization for inter-group equality and justice? Although there is no automatic guarantee that the decentralization policies will actually bring about equality or social justice, they have potentials to lessen the psychological discontent of minority groups under the well-designed governance framework. When the fair distribution of resources is not facilitated,

the governments need to appeal their efforts to meet the needs of each identity group. In low-income countries, long term economic depression and rapid population growth tend to increase frustration and aggressiveness of young people.

If type A (development) country is trapped in some sort of “laissez-faire” policy, it could not deal with these antagonistic feelings in an appropriate way. Type B (governance) is considered to be more inclusive, but legitimacy is not attached to it without strong commitment of political leaders and well-designed allocation formula. Without significant equalization process, type C (post-conflict) can not obtain the capacity to transform the reconstruction of the societies from an externally driven process to an internally driven process.

Second, what is the relationship of decentralization to the principle of superordinate national governance? With regard to this argument, the scope of this paper allows only limited insights. In multi-identity societies, it is easy for a country to transit to “superficial” political decentralization: while the local ‘majorities’ sweep the local legislatures, the central government grips the local administrations with major discretionary power. If further political decentralization is demanded, there is a risk of secession, depending upon how this further decentralization is carried out. This dividing line is likely to have a strong link with possible growing inequalities among the local units and unfair regional distribution of revenues. There is a heated debate on if rebuilding state institutions in weak states is possible. In many cases, the state could be revived by adopting a best framework of governance.

Third, how can the central government create a stable, constructive relationship with minorities seeking autonomy or secession? In order for minorities to have a collaborative relationship with the central government within the framework of decentralization, interchange of personnel, goods and information among groups is necessary; and some elements of consociational democracy need to be incorporated. Under whatever circumstances, the government and, in some cases, the U.N. mission should not deal with groups in a segmented or fixed fashion. What is needed is the principle of sound gradualism, balancing both non-preferential policies and policies of affirmative action. While rectifying the inequality of groups, the government need to integrate groups into a single nation.

Donors and foreign policy makers need to scrutinize the socio-economic and demographic conditions and react to abuses of human rights, political inequality and exclusiveness in the society, with a specific purpose of preventing the conflict. They need to react to any fundamental downside risks observed in the society through various measures, and consult with one another on how to interpret the changes and how effective their measures are. If the central government is too exclusive, outsiders need to help minorities to obtain advanced autonomy.

### **1. Fundamental Issues**

Type A (development) combine with other policies to encourage socio-economic development and a reduction in inequality; the incidental result is the prevention of conflict. One of the typical risks associated with this type is elite and major group capture: resources would not be evenly delivered among the population, even if they are allocated to all regions. Since decentralization policy has many purposes and institutional limitations, the significance of type A cannot be denied; however, when it comes to conflict prevention, this type is not so suitable for solving specific group/area problems.

Policies associated with type B (governance) apply to the governance issues in more advanced developing nations; but, there is vital demand for them in low-income, multi-identity societies. Minorities exercise self-determination which helps to limit the points of contention they have with the majority and thereby prevent conflict. However, normally the capability of these local communities is extremely low and they are dependent upon the central government for resources. The risks of this type are that the power elite of a minority will enhance their political power within a newly decentralized unit, and raise their hostility. When political decentralization is accepted, it is necessary that there be a shared vision between the majority and minorities.

The consociational model within type C (post-conflict) presupposes an offer of governance which involves cooperation between the power elite of both majority and minorities that underwent conflict, with decentralization being a part of this governance. This model works best when there is no overwhelming majority

and when the power elite of both majority and minorities cooperate. Otherwise, it can be just a compromised power-sharing scheme which is not sustained by various motivations of power elites and the citizens.

## 2. Transition Patterns

The problem is what to do when countries with their own individual needs adopt inappropriate policy objectives of decentralization. This is the transition process phenomena, and it reflects the state of national reconciliation. Examples would be countries using type C (post-conflict) which are transitioning early to type A (development) while they are still in the process of rebuilding, or countries which should adopt type C adopting type A from the start.<sup>10</sup> The former can easily occur when a minority has seized power, and the latter can occur when the majority has seized power.

Secondly, type B (governance) engenders a risk of secession together with a respect for autonomy; however, when mixed with successful type A (development), the resistance felt by groups will be alleviated and can be incorporated into nationally consistent policies. Conversely, type B not equipped with resource allocation would emphasize independent budget revenue and financial administration and increase inequality between regions and the risk of secession.

Which path is desirable for governance and development in a given country is a topic which is, in principle, best left up to the people of that country. However, if there is likelihood of significant risk in foreseeable future, donor agencies should be proactive about giving advice and providing assistances.

## 3. Measures for Minorities

Generally speaking, decentralization which is desirable for minorities is extremely important in societies with stagnant growth. When antagonism is marked between groups, the central government, which is often controlled by the majority, would consciously weaken local governments in order to dis-empower minorities. However, antagonism is not the only possibility, cooperative needs can also be produced. During the course of democratization, the demands of the minority could increase and discontent towards the inequality between minority

groups could accumulate. Movements for autonomy or secession could spring from this discontent. If the situation becomes fluid, the minority power elite may become greedy and try to control the acquisition of resources; and if minority groups are fragmented, a local separate movement may be emerged. On the other hand, in the event that the majority and minorities are able to rebuild their relationship, decentralization will likely have a role to play.

There are several applied cases. Regarding natural resources, in some cases minorities having large resources and majority not; in others majority having large resources and minorities not. The former would be a typical example of secessionist and independent movement by minorities and the majority tends to control these claims; the latter is that humanitarian crises could take place before the conflict and the conflict could be resource reallocation claims among the groups. Regarding neighbors, minorities could be persistent in their independence or autonomy if their common groups are located in the neighboring countries.

It is also crucial that new minorities not be passed over and ignored within newly decentralized units. If new minorities are created through political decentralization, policies should be adopted which include administrative decentralization for the units subordinate to the politically decentralized unit in order to secure as much freedom of choice as possible for minorities at that level.

#### **4. Development Policies**

The managers of donor agencies should take account of the geography and the trends of poverty and identity groups in targeting their operations. Country-based Human Development Reports and National Development Plans usually illustrate the comparison of income and social indicators among regions. Decentralization policy needs to be viable for diminishing the socio-economic imbalance of the regions, provinces and districts. They should recognize conflict prevention potentials as well as the risks posed by decentralization when framing country assistance strategies, selecting aid vehicles, channeling aid funds and linking the efforts with other partners.

They should also be sensitive to the fact that social tensions may arise if aid

promotes decentralization that increases inequality among the groups and regions and empowers local power elites who enjoy little public credibility. At the same time, they need to pay attention to not only institution building of decentralization but also the amelioration of inequality and related social changes. Policy consistency in this regard is required to ensure conflict prevention (policy objectives) through decentralization (policy instruments). And also amidst the steadily progressing course of globalization, decentralization is necessary in order to preserve respect for minorities' cultures, languages and their rights to make their own decisions with regard to these.

In SSA, a civil society must be fostered which transcends the boundaries of the existing inter-group framework. The importance of civil society is found in its ability to legitimize, from the standpoint of exchanging unbiased, correct information; from the standpoint of creating multiple identities; and from the standpoint of supporting CSO (Civil Society Organization) strengthening of weak communities. Through the mutual interaction of civil society and government, the government's policies could become more democratic and decentralized. An approach which establishes democratization within communities is important, and the creation of pluralism through development within groups would bring about psychological changes.

Finally, there is relationship-building between the government and communities. The empowerment of people comes from the creation of communities and governmental capacity development, and it is desirable that this power creates a positive cycle that benefits both communities and government. Decentralization plays an important role in bridging the distance between both of them; however, with regard to conflict prevention, it does not function well when local governments are overly controlled by the central government or specific groups dominate a community. Greater understanding and support by donors and international community are needed for relationship-building between local governments and communities.

## Notes

- 1 This paper includes the standpoint of conflict prevention within the term 'conflict'. Also, the term 'conflict' assumes armed conflict.
- 2 Decentralization usually falls under four categories: deconcentration, delegation, devolution and privatization or marketization. Bray (1994) states that the first three are called territorial and vertical decentralization and privatization or marketization are called functional and horizontal decentralization.
- 3 According to Kraxberger (2007), 'revival and reconstruction' school which has dominated the debate on failed and collapsed states, tends to focus key debates include whether reconstruction should be internally and externally driven. In this article, the former corresponds to B and the latter corresponds to C, at least for the initial period.
- 4 Olowu (2003) points out that the promotion of conflict resolution is a motivation for democratic decentralization in Africa along with the failure of public sector management by central governments, non-state domestic pressure, pressure from donors, urbanization and globalization.
- 5 This is the case when general decentralization is weak, such as the rural regions of countries where political decentralization is given only to urban areas.
- 6 In Fig.1, only governance design (motivation@) works at least initially.
- 7 Constitutionalism is a system which stipulates individual and group rights in advance that cannot be infringed upon through majority decision. The consensus-style model follows the majority-rules decision-making process; however, it uses extensive debate and discussion and intrinsically develops the principles of democracy.
- 8 Mine, Y. Associate Professor of Osaka University, Interview 2007.9.18.
- 9 Both models rely on inclusive rules for coming to lasting solutions; however, the former is based on the political structure of ethnic units while the latter attempts to transcend ethnic divisions at the political party base.
- 10 Countries in the midst of the reconstruction process are likely endowed with high economic growth and large-scale reconstruction aid. And, it is easy for these countries to fall under the impression that this rapid growth and generous assistance will continue into the long term.

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