

Intergovernmental relations: a global view

Introduction

This special edition on intergovernmental relations arose from a discussion between the editors Risto Harisalo and Ita O'Donovan at the University of Birmingham in the Summer of '91. The focus of our attention at that time was the deep tension that existed in the United Kingdom between Central and Local Government. What was unique about this tension as Stewart notes in his article for this edition was the extent of that tension.

What was of interest to the editors was that this tension was created by a fundamental political dilemma that can occur in any country where two or more tiers of government exist. In the British case the Central government was Conservative and the local governments were predominantly controlled by the opposition Labour Party. This was combined with a strong political agenda from central government, which was not shared at the local level. We witnessed a major challenge in the 1980's to local government, through a legislative package that sought to change the financial, political and internal organisation of local government. In essence Central government were seeking to redefine the way local government delivered their services. This of course was to strike at the core rationale for local government. Local authorities are the lowest tier of government, perceived to be closest to local consumers and often seen as meeting local needs better than central government.

The editors were especially interested in the hierarchical aspects of the relationship between central governments and local governments. Local authorities interpret their relationships with central government by the degree to which they are, or are not, subject to control by central government. The intergovernmental exchange processes reflect differential status. Central government usually has wide power to influence local government activities. Whereas local government has to appeal upwards to central government and usually only on matters relating directly to local government activities.

This led the editors to seek papers from fellow academics who were in close touch with developments in Central-Local relationships in other countries to examine recent developments in this hierarchical relationship. John Stewart's paper "A Case Study In Centralisation: The British Case" examines recent developments in the United Kingdom. Armando Pereira looks at a realignment of local, regional and central power in Portugal through the new metropolitan governments. Adrian Campbell points to a central tension within Russian local government between democracy and efficiency. Andrew Nickson in his paper "Democratization and Local Government in Latin America" suggests that strengthening local government can assist in the redistributive process. Philip Amis looks at central local relations in East Africa. He chooses Kenya and Uganda which have had contrasting political and economic histories. Finally Donald Curtis in his paper "Government and Community in Nigeria" indicates that Central government often imposes constraint upon local government which inhibit diversity and initiative.

The Selections

John Stewart's paper "A Case Study in Centralisation: The British Case" examines recent developments in the United Kingdom. The article makes the

point that centralisation/decentralisation can only be understood in the context of each political system, and suggests that it is easier to assess the direction rather than the strength of the movement a government is making. What is unique about the British case is the language of the debate and that the direction of the movement is aimed at pulling power back to the centre. What is familiar in the case, is the means chosen to achieve it; namely legislative changes and an alteration in the financing of local government.

The second paper by Armando Pereira "The New Metropolitan Governments in Portugal: Realignment of Local, Regional and Central Powers traces the current debate in Portugal on decentralisation. The article highlights a dilemma for local governments as the lowest tier, will the new metropolitan governments increase or decrease their power base. This question is also being asked by central government in Portugal, not least, becomes the party in control at the centre is not necessarily in control in the regions. Nevertheless, while Government contemplates the possibilities of having a strengthened regional power, which may or may not be supportive of the Centre, it appears to have chosen a move towards a deconcentration of power in contrast to the British solution.

Adrian Campbell's paper "The Rise and Fall of Local Democracy in Russia" raises the interesting issue of how Local Government conducts itself, when the framework for its relationship to Central government is dramatically changed. The paper explains how the reform processes at both levels of government have led to a lack of concern with the real purpose of government which is the delivery of services to the citizen. Instead the democratic movement has found itself concentrating on the growing conflictual relationship between representative and executive wings of government at all levels. This is coupled with the inability of the new Presidential authority to impose its will on local governments.

Andrew Nickson's paper "Democratisation and Local Government in Latin America Points, to the long centralist tradition in Latin America which is now witnessing the recent and uneven phenomena of a resurgence in local government. Even though decentralisation is at an early stage, its viability is being questioned by those who fear that increased financial transfers will mean more opportunities for clientelism, which essentially is antidemocratic. A second concern is that increased revenue transfers to local government will have the knock on effect of increasing public sector spending. However the author points to the countervailing forces of democratisation and decentralisation which have been promoted by the emergence of a civil society, who value and understand the need for strong local institutions as a balancing force to the centralist tradition.

Philip Amis's paper "Local Government reform in Kenya and Uganda in the 1980's:" compares and contrasts the experience of local government reform in these two countries in the light of the decentralisation trend which began in the 1980's. Amis recognises the point made in the Stewart paper, that decentralisation can only be understood through the political system operating in each country. Here he notes the contrasting political and economic trajectories of Kenya and Uganda. Kenya has maintained the hierarchical control system of provincial administration, and Uganda since the rise to power in 1986 of the National Resistance Movement, has had a clear Ten Point Programme emphasising discipline, participation and decentralisation. A key element of this programme is the emphasis on accountability of local and national administration to the citizen. The experience of two municipal local governments operating in their own political environment are then examined with a particular focus on the local government finance in Nairobi and Jinja. The paper points to the importance of well defined and non conflicting roles between different levels and institutions of government and to the need to es-

establish a direct link between local government finance and political accountability.

The final paper by Donald Curtis "Government and Community In Nigeria", points to the simple truth that one of the main purposes of government has been interpreted as the need to provide services to its people. This has been organised in almost all cases in post colonial governments in a bureaucratic manner with Central government taking a lead role and establishing the rules and procedures under which decentralised or deconcentrated government might fulfil this purpose.

This assumes that the State has the resources and should be responsible for development. This has been challenged more recently with the notion that the private sector and free markets can provide services which have traditionally been attributed to the State. The author suggests another argument that provision of needs that are shared can be delivered by organising for common benefit at more local levels. This argument suggests that in the past central government sought to limit the number of local governments in order to limit the number of transaction involved in controlling their activities. More important Curtis argues is to permit services to be organised at the level appropriate for provision.

A consistent theme in all the papers presented here has been the hierarchical relationship between Central and Local government. Central government appears to favour a controlling relationship with local government. The question remains however if this tendency reduces the ability of local governments and other local level institutions to develop innovative practices for the benefit of the communities whom they serve. It is equally noticeable that local governments have very few mechanisms by which they can act to redress the balance of central policies that impinge negatively on local communities. In many instances Central government while encouraging local government to be a provider of services has not sufficiently developed its own role as an enabler in the implementation of such a policy.

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