

Decentralisation and the Political Process in Tanzania

1962 – 1972

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Abstract

In 1972, an administration programme of development planning and regional administration was launched in Tanzania. This reform was a major change from what previously existed. At independence in 1961, decentralization had taken the form of devolution in which local government institutions were formed at the district and urban levels. These institutions had been legally established. They had formal powers to decide on several public affairs in their domains. They consisted of elected local representatives. Revenue was secured and controlled independently of the central government. Although they might receive grants from the Government, their use was left at their disposal.

However, this local autonomy was generally eroded until another form of decentralization- 'deconcentration' was adopted as a Government Policy in 1972. In this form of decentralisation, administrative discretion and responsibility were transferred to staff outside the central headquarters. Additional administrative structures were created in the regions and districts. These staff members were allowed to plan, make routine decisions and adjust the staff implementation members were of allowed central directives to plan, to make local routine conditions. Decisions. But they and depended on the central government for revenue.

This study sought to examine the relationship between the process and the movement in decentralization from its form of devolution de-concentration in the 1961-1970 decade. In particular, the study to address issues relating to the extent to which the decentralization policy of 1972 was an outcome of the power struggle between the political elite and the rural elite, and whether decentralization necessarily took the form of de. concentration when the political elite controlled local administration.

The study looked at the historical trend of the power struggles between the two camps. The argument was that, from the 1960s, the political elite gradually consolidated its control of society. In the course of doing this it denuded local council step by step until it abolished them

in 1971 to be replaced by bureaucracy in 1972. The political elite first wrested power from the chiefs; then from the kulaks.

Through the Arusha Declaration, the political elite hoped, among other things, to snatch power from the kulaks. The strategy which was adopted was the formation of Ujamaa villages whose members would join together voluntarily and work collectively. In this way, the organisation of agricultural production would change in favour of the peasants; hence, taking away the economic power of the kulaks who benefited from the individualization of agricultural production. However, it was difficult to get the co-operation of the rural people because the majority preferred individual ownership of land.

Further, the rich farmers were still a dominant force in local leadership. As a result, some kulaks even joined together to form ujamaa villages in order to access credit, land and other amenities which were meant to allure the peasants. In the light of this, it was difficult for the political elite to entrust the administration of the rural countryside to the district councils. In order to ensure political control of the countryside, bureaucracy was extended to the district level. It was this need for political control of local administration that led to over-centralisation prior to the 1972 policy. Therefore, it was the power struggles between the political elite and the rural elite that shaped decentralisation from devolution to de-concentration.

According to the study, factors which led to de-concentration included the search for administrative efficiency, search for regional equality, quest for meaningful local participation, and consolidating political control of society. Of all the factors, political control was the most dominant. The central government sought to check on the administrative efficiency of local institutions, oversee a unified development of all regions in the hope of redressing some inequalities, suppress the dominant classes at the local level, and facilitate popular participation. However, all this was being done not merely for popular interest but mainly for the interests of the ruling elite.

Central control through field administration was a means by which the ruling elite ensured that their needs were met with adequate resources and that their priorities were not subsumed under the broader range of interests competing for resources. The ruling elite attempted to control local administration so as to keep itself firmly in power.

The central purpose of this study was to highlight the socio-political forces which were associated with Government pressure to de-concentrate planning and administrative responsibilities. According to the study, the political trend in the decade under study showed a tendency towards authoritarianism. This had been reflected mainly in the various policies formulated during the decade. Most of the policies reflected an effort by the political elite to consolidate power and entrench it.