

ELEMENTS FOR A REDESIGN OF DECENTRALIZATION IN BENIN

Abstract:

Initiated in Benin in the 2000s, decentralization has emerged as a major pillar of institutional reforms aimed at bringing the administration closer to citizens and strengthening local governance. However, its evaluation reveals persistent challenges that call for an overhaul of the current model. This research is approached from the perspective of the sociology of public action and social change theory. It draws on a review of the literature and empirical data to offer a critical reading of institutional mechanisms and processes of social transformation, highlighting conflicts, ruptures, and continuities. The analysis is structured around four complementary themes. First, the overall objectives pursued by decentralization—citizen participation, efficient public services, and balanced territorial development—appear to have been partially achieved due to political and financial constraints. Second, the institutional framework, marked by a complex legal and administrative architecture, suffers from a lack of coherence between the different levels of power, limiting the real autonomy of municipalities. Thirdly, structural advantages, such as proximity to decision-making and the emergence of local initiatives, face significant limitations: insufficient resources, low professionalization of actors, and increased dependence on the central government. Finally, the reasons for a profound reinvention of the model today lie in the need to adapt decentralization to socio-economic changes, the requirements of democratic governance, and the imperatives of sustainable development. The planned overhaul should include a clarification of powers, a strengthening of the financial and human capacities of local authorities, and better coordination between local and central institutions. This work highlights the urgent need for a multidimensional and pragmatic approach capable of transforming decentralization into a real lever for inclusive development and democratic consolidation in Benin.

Keywords: Decentralization - local governance - institutional reform - development - Benin.

Introduction

For more than three decades, decentralization has been a major reform in African states, presented both as an instrument of democratization and a lever for territorial development. For J. MANOR (1999, pp. 12-16), decentralization aims above all to bring the state closer to its citizens in order to strengthen the effectiveness of public action and improve the legitimacy of local institutions. This principle of proximity is also highlighted by D. RONDINELLI, J. NELLIS, and G. CHEEMA (1983, pp. 5-9), who define decentralization as a structured transfer of authority, responsibilities, and resources to local entities that are better placed to meet the needs of the population. In Benin, this movement is part of the legacy of the National Conference of February 1990, which laid the foundations for institutional reform geared towards democratic openness and participatory management of public affairs. Law No. 97-029 of January 15, 1999, the legal basis for local governance in Benin, reflects this ambition by setting out the powers of municipalities and the terms of their organization. As J.-F. BAYART (1996, pp. 45-52) shows, decentralization reforms in Africa are part of an attempt to readjust in the face of the limitations of a centralized state, historically marked by distance from the people and a weak capacity to integrate local dynamics. According to him, these reforms aim to bring public action closer to citizens by correcting the dysfunctions inherited from a state apparatus perceived as unresponsive and often disconnected from social realities.

47 However, decentralization cannot be understood solely through legislative texts: it is
48 embodied in practices, power relations, and social dynamics. O. GAGBEI (2021, pp. 5-8)
49 highlights that local governance in Africa faces a fundamental tension: on the one hand,
50 centralized state institutions that claim to organize citizen participation, and on the other, the
51 aspirations of populations for participatory democracy rooted in their social and cultural
52 practices. This tension explains why the results of decentralization are sometimes mixed:
53 while it opens up new opportunities for citizen participation and endogenous management, it
54 also reveals structural limitations such as insufficient local resources, institutional overlaps,
55 and persistent territorial inequalities. These observations are now fueling calls for a
56 reconfiguration or "reinvention" of decentralization, a concept advocated by P. SMOKE
57 (2015, pp. 4-7), who believes that current reforms must go beyond the simple transfer of
58 powers to aim for a profound transformation of public governance. In this perspective, J.-M.
59 KAUZYA (2005, pp. 9-12) emphasizes the need to strengthen citizen participation,
60 professionalize municipal administrations, and adapt institutional models to local contexts.
61 Thus, the analysis of decentralization in Benin requires a multidimensional approach based on
62 four fundamental axes: the overall objectives pursued by decentralization; the institutional
63 framework that organizes its implementation; the structural advantages and limitations that
64 determine its effectiveness; and, finally, the reasons that are currently prompting researchers
65 and practitioners to consider a profound reinvention of the model.

66 1. Methods, materials, and analysis model

67 1.1. Methods and materials

68 The analysis was conducted from a socio-anthropological perspective using a qualitative
69 approach. It combines two main tools: a literature review organized around the founding texts
70 of decentralization in Benin (laws, decrees, municipal development plans), academic works,
71 and institutional reports on the one hand, and field surveys (semi-structured interviews with
72 elected officials, municipal employees, citizens, and observations of local meetings) on the
73 other. This diversification of sources makes it possible to understand both the normative logic
74 of the reforms and their operationalization in the Beninese context. The materials used
75 therefore range from legislative texts to empirical data collected in the field, including
76 scientific literature that situates the Beninese case in the subregional and international debate.

77 1.2. Analysis model

78 The analysis model used for this research is organized around three levels:

- 79 - Institutional: legal framework, powers, resources, center-periphery relations.
- 80 - Socio-political: actors, power relations, local practices, social logic.
- 81 - Territorial: local dynamics, initiatives, capacities, constraints.

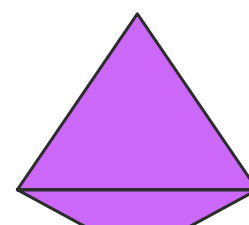
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Figure1 : Diagram of the analysis model

Institutional level

Legal framework and resources

Socio-political level



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97 **Source:Ourselves**

98 **2. Results**

99 **2.1. Decentralization: from aspirations to meaningful objectives**

100 Decentralization is a political and administrative process whereby the state transfers some of
101 its powers and resources to local authorities. In West Africa, as elsewhere, it is seen as a
102 strategy for modernizing public action and a means of bringing the state closer to the people.
103 Its objectives are multiple: to improve governance, stimulate local development, strengthen
104 citizen participation, optimize the management of public resources, and consolidate
105 democracy. Deductively, it reflects a profound transformation in the relationship between the
106 state, society, and territories.

107 **Figure2 : Objectives of decentralization**



108
109 **Sources: Ourselves**

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111 A primary objective is to improve public governance. The central government, often
112 perceived as distant and cumbersome, struggles to respond effectively to local needs.
113 According to D. RONDINELLI (1981, p. 140), decentralization brings decision-making

114 centers closer to citizens, increases responsiveness, and improves the quality of services. By
115 entrusting responsibilities to municipalities, departments, or regions, the state establishes a
116 more flexible form of governance that is better adapted to socio-cultural realities, which is
117 essential in African contexts marked by regional and ethnic diversity.

118 It also aims to reduce the distance between the state and the people. J.-F. MEDARD (1990,
119 pp. 323–353) describes the African state as "neo-patrimonial," often perceived as distant from
120 ordinary citizens. Decentralization creates a direct link between institutions and local
121 communities. A town hall that is close to its residents can better address complaints,
122 understand priorities, and adapt its actions, thereby strengthening the legitimacy of the state
123 and equity in the provision of public services.

124 It also encourages citizen participation. E. OSTROM (1990, p. 88) has shown that
125 communities manage collective resources effectively when they participate in decision- .
126 Community consultations, participatory budgets, neighborhood committees, and open
127 municipal councils make it possible to integrate local knowledge, customs, and real needs into
128 public action. This participation promotes transparency, buy-in, and understanding of citizen
129 dynamics.

130 In addition, decentralization stimulates local economic development. G. CHEEMA and D.
131 RONDINELLI (2007, pp. 1-20) emphasize that local authorities are better at identifying
132 investment opportunities and managing infrastructure. Thanks to increased financial
133 autonomy (taxes, land, development funds), they build basic infrastructure, enhance local
134 resources, and create an environment conducive to entrepreneurship, thereby promoting
135 bottom-up development.

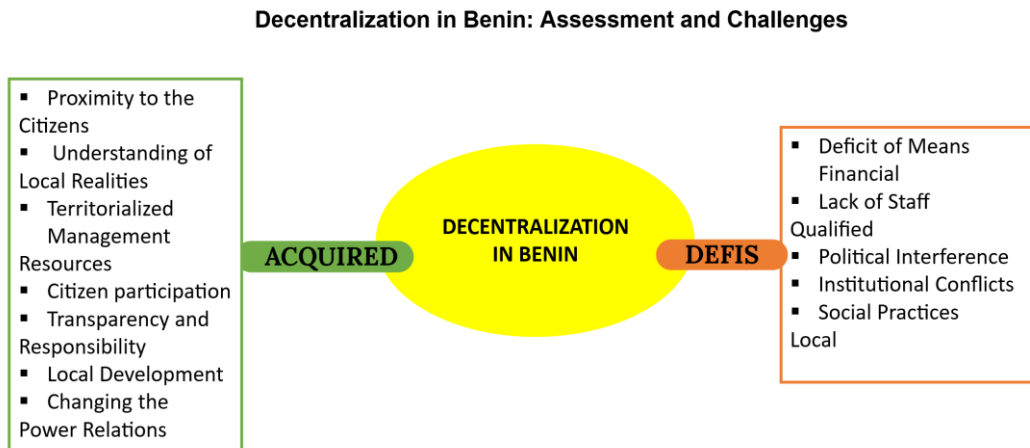
136 It also improves the efficiency of public services. The central government suffers from
137 administrative and logistical burdens. By transferring the management of water, sanitation,
138 primary health care, and basic education to municipalities, they can respond more quickly and
139 precisely. R. CROOK and J. MANOR (1998) consider this efficiency to be a major argument
140 in favor of decentralization.

141 Furthermore, it reduces regional inequalities. In many African countries, resources are
142 concentrated in large cities. Decentralization aims to strengthen peripheral and rural areas.
143 Equalization funds and local financing policies support poor communities, promoting more
144 balanced development.

145 Finally, it consolidates democracy. It stimulates local political competition, empowers elected
146 officials, and promotes civic engagement. According to J. MANOR (1999), public
147 participation in local governance deepens democracy. Local elections also allow new elites to
148 emerge from communities, enriching national political life.

149 **1.1. A look back at the results of decentralization after two decades of** 150 **implementation.**

151 Since the 1990s, decentralization has become a key element of public governance reforms in
152 several developing countries, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa. In Benin, as part of the
153 Democratic Renewal, it was introduced with the aim of modernizing the state, improving
154 democracy at the local level, and promoting grassroots development. However, after more
155 than 20 years of implementation, this reform has had mixed results, combining institutional
156 progress with persistent structural obstacles.



161 Current research on local governance therefore encourages us to go beyond a purely
 162 normative interpretation of decentralization in order to study its concrete impacts on local
 163 social, political, and economic dynamics.

164 One of the main achievements of decentralization is the rapprochement between public
 165 administration and citizens. The establishment of municipalities and districts has helped to
 166 reduce the institutional distance between the state and local populations. According to J.C.
 167 RIBOT (2006), decentralization has the potential to consolidate the legitimacy of the state if it
 168 truly enables the transfer of decision-making powers to local authorities that are accountable
 169 to citizens. In the Beninese context, this proximity has simplified access to basic
 170 administrative services, increased the visibility of public action, and encouraged more
 171 frequent communication between local representatives and citizens.

172 This proximity to institutions is accompanied by a deeper understanding of local realities by
 173 municipal officials. Unlike the central administration, which is often disconnected from local
 174 social dynamics, local officials interact within a social space they share with residents.
 175 According to J.-P. FAGUET (2014, p. 2-13), decentralization can improve the quality of
 176 public decisions when local authorities have access to detailed information on community
 177 needs. This ability to adapt is particularly crucial in environments characterized by great
 178 social, cultural, and economic diversity.

179 In economic and budgetary terms, decentralization has enabled more localized management
 180 of public resources. Beninese municipalities have autonomous budgets and the ability to
 181 direct investments toward local priorities such as infrastructure related to education, health,
 182 trade, or roads. However, as noted by P. SMOKE (2015, pp. 97-112) and J. BOEX *et al.*
 183 (2016), financial decentralization in Africa is often incomplete. Local entities are given

184 increasing responsibilities, but they do not always have sufficient or consistent financial
185 resources, thus limiting their true independence.

186 Citizen participation is another key element in the argument for decentralization. The reform
187 seeks to involve citizens in the decision-making process through public consultations, local
188 committees, and the participatory design of Municipal Development Plans. E. OSTROM
189 (2010) demonstrates that involvement can improve the effectiveness of public policies,
190 provided that it is based on truly deliberative and inclusive mechanisms. However, in Benin,
191 these mechanisms often remain formal, and citizens' involvement in them is uneven.

192 In terms of local governance, decentralization has promoted the establishment of transparency
193 criteria, accountability processes, and institutional control instruments. The Municipal
194 Development Support Fund is a structuring tool, as it makes access to resources conditional
195 on compliance with management criteria.

196 With regard to local development, various empirical studies show that decentralization has
197 contributed to improving basic infrastructure and stimulating certain local economies.
198 However, R. CROOK and J. MANOR (2018) emphasize that the benefits of decentralization
199 are neither guaranteed nor constant: they fluctuate depending on local contexts, available
200 resources, and the quality of local political leadership.

201 Decentralization has also changed power relations at the local level. It has facilitated the rise
202 of political elites at the municipal level and reshaped the relationships between the state, local
203 officials, and traditional authorities.

204 Despite this progress, the structural constraints inherent in decentralization remain significant.
205 The lack of local financial resources is a major obstacle. Financial assistance from the state
206 limits the autonomy of municipalities in their planning and actions. In addition, the shortage
207 of qualified personnel has an impact on the quality of planning, financial management, and
208 project monitoring.

209 Political interference and institutional conflicts also undermine the functioning of local
210 authorities. Partisan rivalries, tensions between elected officials and traditional authorities,
211 and ambiguities related to administrative oversight limit decision-making and the continuity
212 of public action. According to the UNDP (2020), these dynamics are common in young
213 democracies where decentralization takes place in a context of intense political competition.

214 Finally, local social practices such as clientelism, patronage, and loyalty networks continue to
215 influence municipal governance. They thus constitute a major challenge to the consolidation
216 of transparent and inclusive local governance.

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218 **2.2. Why reinvent decentralization?**

219 In practice, decentralization has proved to be partly beneficial to states long overwhelmed by
220 the crisis of the 1980s and 1990s. A generation later, the results show notable successes,
221 particularly in terms of refining the legal and institutional framework for steering the process,
222 building functional infrastructure to serve grassroots communities, and, above all, establishing
223 democratic roots that support political change and citizen participation at the local level,
224 thereby consolidating the state renewal that began in 1990. However, the poor performance
225 recorded, which tends to undermine efforts and de s the development ambitions of
226 decentralization reform, has led to a rethinking of the ideology by reinventing the basic

227 objectives. Indeed, the technical operational biases of local administrations, which for the
228 most part lead to confusion of roles, the inadequate financing of local development with an
229 incompatible financial dependence on the central government and decentralized cooperation,
230 and finally the limited economic impact of decentralization in local authorities reflect the
231 structural and operational limitations of the process, calling for a political overhaul of the
232 reform. This is confirmed by the recent work of J. T. DICKOVICK and R.B. RIEDL (2022),
233 who emphasize that decentralization in Africa has often led to the creation of formal local
234 institutions without any substantial transformation of governance practices.

235 Similarly, E. PALI, C.C. AHOLOU, and F.P. YATTA (2025, pp. 1-25), based on a study of
236 municipal elected officials in Togo, show that positive perceptions of decentralization remain
237 severely limited by financial and institutional constraints. These findings fuel a growing
238 consensus around the need to reinvent decentralization in order to adapt it to contemporary
239 realities.

240 Reinventing decentralization does not mean questioning the principle of local governance, but
241 rather recognizing the limitations of traditional models based primarily on the administrative
242 transfer of powers. It means moving beyond a political and legal approach to embed
243 decentralization in a more inclusive and effective system of territorial governance. J.-P.
244 FAGUET and C. PÖSCHL (2022) emphasize that the positive effects of decentralization
245 depend on the quality of local institutions and accountability mechanisms. Similarly, A. A.
246 TOBI and G. I. AYODEJI (2024, pp. 45-62), in the Nigerian context, have attempted to show
247 how the absence of profound institutional reforms limits the real impact of decentralization on
248 local governance. The reinvention of decentralization thus appears to be a necessary response
249 to the persistent gap between political ambitions and concrete results.

250 From this perspective, one of the main arguments justifying this reinvention is the persistence
251 of financial constraints faced by local authorities in financing local development. Despite the
252 legal recognition of their autonomy, they remain heavily dependent on transfers from the
253 central government. Analyses by the World Bank (2023) and the OECD (2023) confirm that
254 low own-source revenues reduce the capacity of local governments to plan and implement
255 sustainable policies. More empirically, M.V. FAGHA (2024) demonstrates that incomplete
256 fiscal decentralization severely limits local economic development, particularly in local
257 authorities with low economic potential. The new direction of decentralization therefore
258 requires the establishment of coordinated frameworks to strengthen local taxation, improve
259 budgetary transparency, and put in place innovative mechanisms for resource mobilization.

260 In addition to these financial constraints, there are persistent weaknesses in institutional and
261 administrative capacities. Local authorities are faced with increasingly complex
262 responsibilities, particularly in the areas of urban management, environmental crises, and
263 local economic development. According to UCLG Africa (2023), African local governments
264 still lack the human and technical resources, and sometimes the skills, to respond effectively
265 to these demands. I.YUSUF, M. DAUDA, and S. GEBEH (2025, pp. 33-52), based on the
266 case of the Kenema Local Council in Sierra Leone, show that the effectiveness of local
267 governance remains closely linked to the quality of administrative skills available at the
268 territorial level. The reinvention of decentralization therefore also requires increased
269 investment in local capacity building and administrative modernization.

270 Institutional coordination is also a major challenge for the performance of local authorities.
271 Indeed, overlapping responsibilities between the central government, decentralized services,
272 and local authorities continue to hamper the effectiveness of local public action. N.
273 STEYTLER & J. De VISSER (2021, p.312) emphasize that the lack of clarity in the
274 distribution of roles weakens local autonomy and dilutes responsibilities. These findings are
275 reinforced by the work of K. AYENAGBO (2023, p. 85), which shows that, in the Togolese
276 context, institutional confusion directly undermines the quality of local public service
277 delivery. Reinventing decentralization therefore requires an effort to clarify responsibilities
278 and strengthen multi-level coordination mechanisms.

279 On a much more top-down level, citizen participation remains one of the essential pillars of
280 productive decentralization. Although territorial proximity is supposed to encourage
281 community involvement in development actions, participation often remains limited to formal
282 mechanisms. (P. ONYALO (2024, p. 60), in his analysis of decentralized governance in
283 Kenya, shows how citizen participation remains largely symbolic when it is not accompanied
284 by solid institutional mechanisms. Similarly, J. GAVENTA & R. McGEE (2022, p.134) have
285 already pointed out that participation only has a real impact when it effectively influences
286 local public decisions. Reinventing decentralization therefore means strengthening
287 participatory mechanisms, particularly through participatory budgets, digital platforms, and
288 citizen monitoring mechanisms. This aspect of the proposed new reform highlights the links
289 with social inclusion, which is closely linked to participation. Recent analyses by the UNDP
290 (2023) indicate that decentralization can exacerbate local inequalities when it mainly benefits
291 political or economic elites. Women, young people, and marginalized groups often remain
292 underrepresented in local decision-making bodies. These findings are consistent with those of
293 N. B. ACHOR (2025, p. 52), who highlights the absence of inclusive policies as an obstacle to
294 decentralization. Reinventing decentralization therefore involves promoting inclusive local
295 governance based on equity and representativeness.

296 Furthermore, social, economic, and environmental changes reinforce the need to rethink
297 decentralization. Rapid urbanization, land pressure, and the effects of climate change are
298 profoundly transforming territories, creating an urgent need to move away from traditional
299 approaches. According to UN-Habitat (2022), local governments are on the front line of these
300 challenges, but do not always have the necessary resources. A reinvented decentralization
301 must integrate strategic territorial planning and enhanced inter-municipal cooperation in order
302 to respond effectively to these transformations.

303 Finally, the reinvention of decentralization must enable local authorities to be repositioned as
304 strategic actors in local development. (A. RODRIGUEZ-POSE & C. WILKIE (2019, p. 1205)
305 have shown that territorial development relies on the capacity of local actors to mobilize
306 endogenous resources. More recently, R. PONCE-RODRIGUEZ & C. R. HANKLA (2023, p.
307 930) confirm that local authorities with real autonomy and enhanced capacities are better able
308 to support the local economy and territorial innovation. Development-oriented
309 decentralization therefore requires moving beyond a purely administrative approach to give
310 municipalities a leading role in the economic and social transformation of territories.

311 Reinventing decentralization appears to be a necessity in view of the limitations of the
312 traditional model and the contemporary challenges of governance. This does not mean calling
313 into question its founding principles, but rather adapting them to current realities in order to

314 build more effective, more inclusive territorial governance that is resolutely oriented towards
315 sustainable development. This reinvention is an essential condition for making local
316 authorities true levers of transformation at the service of citizens.

317 **3. Discussion**

318 Decentralization involves the transfer of powers from the center to local authorities, which
319 may be decentralized local authorities, local populations, or civil society (K. ELOUNDOU,
320 2012, p. 118). Today, it is seen as a means of promoting local development, as it has helped to
321 establish democracy and good governance (A. COLY, 2017, p. 7).

322 In Benin, decentralization is the manifestation of a strong political will to bring the state
323 closer to its citizens and improve local governance. Since the National Conference of the
324 Nation's Vital Forces in 1990 and Law No. 97-029 of 1999, it has established itself as a mode
325 of governance aimed at giving municipalities more responsibilities so that they can become
326 actors of development and democracy. To amplify the power of local authorities,
327 decentralization must be accompanied by a transfer of budgetary envelopes from the state to
328 decentralized structures, enabling them to fully exercise the functions and prerogatives
329 assigned to them by law (I. LABIADH, 2016, p. 1).

330 But beyond legislative and regulatory standards, this process unfolds in practices and power
331 relations, influenced by social and customary logics that strongly affect its effectiveness, as
332 shown by C. LUND (2006, pp. 685–705) in his analysis of the hybrid logics of local
333 governance.

334 After more than twenty years of implementation, the achievements are undeniable:
335 municipalities have become accessible interlocutors, capable of providing local services such
336 as civil registration and market management; they have enabled the emergence of local elites
337 and the restructuring of power with traditional authorities; they have stimulated local
338 development through the construction of infrastructure and the mobilization of external
339 funding; and they have finally opened up spaces for citizen participation, even if their
340 application remains uneven. These advances confirm J. MANOR's (1999, pp. 42-45) idea that
341 decentralization is based on a logic of institutional empowerment and improved accountability
342 of local authorities.

343 These achievements remain fragile in the face of persistent structural limitations.
344 Municipalities are heavily dependent on the FADeC and have few resources of their own,
345 which limits their real autonomy. The legal framework leaves gray areas that lead to
346 overlapping jurisdictions and tensions with the central government. The lack of qualified
347 professional staff, political interference, and clientelism reduce transparency and efficiency.
348 Citizen participation remains limited, often dominated by local elites, with low representation
349 of women and young people. These findings are consistent with the analyses of D. A.
350 RONDINELLI, J. R. NELLIS & G. S. CHEEMA (1983, pp. 19-23), who point out that
351 reforms fail when they do not take into account the actual capacity of local actors, financial
352 constraints, and power relations between the center and the periphery.

353 At the end of this analysis, it is clear that decentralization, far from being a simple
354 administrative mechanism, is a genuine political project aimed at transforming the modalities
355 of governance, participation, and local development.

356 On another note, authors such as M. T. ALOU (2009, p. 199), who trace the history of
357 decentralization processes in Africa, paint a less flattering picture, emphasizing the faltering
358 steps and missteps of various experiments. At the same time, A. GADJI (2010, p. 42) points
359 out that the challenges of achieving local development through decentralization are due to the
360 weakness of local financing resources. M. ZAKI (2014, p. 19) has identified the same
361 financial difficulties as obstacles to decentralization in Senegal. In contrast to these authors,
362 whose approach could be described as pessimistic, there are other, more optimistic positions.
363 Indeed, according to some scholars, decentralization is a real guarantee of democracy and
364 good governance. This position is supported by Y. POULIN (2003, p. 22), for whom
365 "decentralization is the answer to the failure of central governments in terms of economic and
366 social development." Decentralization creates competition between local governments, giving
367 citizens a choice about where they live. Public spending decisions made at a level of
368 government closer to the population are more likely to reflect the demand for public services
369 than those made by the central government (Y. POULIN, 2003, p. 4). In light of the above
370 analyses, one conclusion emerges: decentralization is a conditional tool for local
371 development. It can only achieve its objectives if certain multisectoral obstacles of a
372 structural, economic, sociocultural, democratic, and environmental nature are overcome.
373 In the Beninese context, these ambitions have been translated into a structured legal
374 framework, notably Law No. 97-029, designed to give effect to the principle of proximity and
375 strengthen the autonomy of municipalities. Decentralization therefore benefits those who are
376 already advantaged, widening the gap with the poorest. E. CALDEIRA et al. (2012b)
377 establish similar results in their study of the effect of decentralization in Benin:
378 decentralization has a moderately positive impact on access to basic services but tends to
379 increase inequalities in access between and within local jurisdictions.
380 However, the effectiveness of decentralization depends less on legislation than on its
381 appropriation and operationalization. Research by P. SMOKE (2015, pp. 3-6) confirms that
382 structural limitations manifest themselves in the form of insufficient resource transfers, weak
383 technical skills, and institutional overlaps.
384 Thus, the promised benefits of increased participation, endogenous development, and
385 inclusive governance are hampered by limitations deeply rooted in the country's
386 administrative and political history. These findings are now fueling calls to "reinvent"
387 decentralization. For J.-M. KAUZYA (2005, pp. 8-11), this reinvention requires a refocusing
388 on participatory local governance, institutional innovation, and the professionalization of local
389 authorities. It requires better coordination between the central government and municipalities,
390 a clarification of responsibilities, but above all, massive investment in training, territorial
391 engineering, and citizen mobilization.
392 Ultimately, decentralization in Benin can only succeed if it becomes a real lever for social
393 transformation and not just an administrative transfer. It must embody a political and civic
394 project capable of consolidating democracy and supporting inclusive and sustainable
395 development. Authors such as J. MANOR (1999), Rondinelli and Cheema (1983), C. LUND
396 (2006, pp. 685-705), P. SMOKE (2015), and J.-M. KAUZYA (2005) converge on a central
397 idea: decentralization must be rethought in order to be truly transformative, integrating local
398 realities, citizen participation, and the requirements of sustainable development. It therefore

399 remains an open-ended, complex but essential project for the future of the territories and for
400 the reduction of mass poverty.

401 **Conclusion**

402 Decentralization in Benin, initiated as a project of proximity and democratization, has led to
403 real progress in local governance, citizen participation, and territorial development. However,
404 persistent structural limitations—financial dependence, institutional vagueness, weak human
405 resources, and the weight of political logic—show that the current model remains imperfect.
406 More than just an administrative reform, decentralization must be rethought as a real lever for
407 social transformation, capable of strengthening the legitimacy of the state while promoting
408 local initiatives. Its reinvention requires clarification of powers, investment in the financial
409 and human capacities of municipalities, and participatory governance that gives a voice to
410 citizens in all their diversity. Ultimately, the future of decentralization in Benin depends on its
411 ability to overcome its weaknesses and become a driving force for vibrant democracy and
412 inclusive development, rooted in the social and territorial realities of the country.

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