SUB-NATIONAL GOVERNMENTS IN AFRICA

Situation and Challenges
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1. Introduction

The last forty years have been characterized by the establishment of local governments in the majority of countries and who are accountable for their actions to the citizens. Thus the irresistible spread of Sub-national government of all types and of all levels has become the main feature of the institutional landscape of the countries.

This groundswell which is imposing itself, including in other parts of the world, is illustrated by the principle of self-government resulting from the socio-economic and political transformations of the last four decades. In virtually all regions of Africa, this principle of self-government translates into a transfer of competencies previously exercised by Central Governments to sub-national governments. These bodies, within the framework of the exercise of these competencies, benefit from the legal persona and the financial autonomy necessary for the good fulfillment of their public missions.

The principle of free administration is itself based on the principle of subsidiarity. It is a political and social maxim according to which the responsibility for a public action must be allocated to the smallest entity capable of solving the problem itself. Subsidiarity also goes hand in hand with the principle of substitution, which means that when the problems exceed the capacities of a small entity, the higher echelon then has the duty to support it, within the limits of the principle of subsidiarity. There is therefore a wish to make sure no to do, at a higher level, what can be effectively on a smaller scale, that is to say, the search for the relevant level of public action.

The principle of subsidiarity within the context of decentralization emphasizes the comparative advantage of the local governments, due to its proximity and better knowledge of the demand for local services, to better exercise a jurisdiction formerly exercised by central governments. By being close to the populations, thus knowing better the demand, sub-national governments ensure a better adequacy of the supply of services at the request of the populations.

Subsidiarity translates concretely into the allocation to the sub-national governments of a certain number of competencies which cover the daily life of the populations, namely basic competencies like health, education, sanitation, transport, drinking water supply. Although, however, there are often large differences between African countries in terms of local governments’ competencies, their definition has been an important aspect of decentralization policies. In some countries, the general clause of local governments’ competencies is introduced. It refers to the possibility for local governments to settle the «affairs under their jurisdiction» without a precise and limiting definition. The local governments can therefore intervene, under the control of the judge, in any field, on the basis of the local public interest and since the jurisdiction is not devolved by legislation to another public person.

While investing in the provision of local public services to people, especially the poorest, sub-national governments are involved in international cooperation at the same time. The international action of local governments has thus considerably expanded, especially since the 1990’s. Decentralized cooperation thus takes on an important dimension by engaging more and more local governments around the world in innumerable cooperation projects. By highlighting their know-how, sub-national governments have contributed through decentralized cooperation to ensure efficient and effective local service provision, thus contributing to their credibility on the national, pan-African and global levels.

But how many are these sub-national authorities in Africa? How are they distributed per region, level? What is their governance (councils and / or executive bodies elected or not)? What is the leeway that is offered to them by their central governments (quality of their institutional environment)? These are all questions to which this paper will attempt to provide precise answers.
2. Sub-national Governments in Africa: Numbers and Levels per Region

The sub-national governments created by the legislation are sixteen thousand one hundred and eighty-six (16,186), including 15,536 core (basic or grassroots) communes, 135 intermediate governments, and 515 higher level governments (Regions, Federated States, Provinces, etc.).

Core governments are the smallest scale of sub-national governments. They have various names in English-speaking countries (district councils, urban councils, municipal councils, town councils, municipalities, towns, etc.) and in francophone countries (communes urbaines ou rurales, ville, communauté urbaine, municipalités, etc.).

Higher-level government are the highest scale of governments. These are, depending on the country, Provinces, States, Regions, Islands, etc.

Mid-level governments exist in countries with three levels of governments; these are those located between the basic level and the upper level. The case of Kenya is particular because the «Counties» are in fact an intermediate level that contrasts with the previous local division. However, there are sixteen thousand eight (16,008) active decentralized units including 15,450 grassroots governments, 96 mid-level governments and 462 higher-level governments. Indeed, not all sub-national governments prescribed by legislation have been installed. In Cameroon, for example, the 10 regions have been waiting to be implemented for more than a decade. In Togo, of the 116 communes, 39 prefectures and 5 regions, prescribed by the texts, only 30 communes are installed. In Guinea, the eight (8) Regions are waiting to be operationalized. In Chad and the Central African Republic, 23 and 7 Regions respectively have never been set up as decentralized units.

The total number of sub-national governments can largely change for two main reasons. First, as we have seen, some decentralized units created by the laws have not been installed. But also and especially some countries have not decentralized the entirety of their national territory, such as Congo, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Chad, Swaziland and Mozambique as regards the cities. In Gabon, the rural local governments are still waiting to be installed.

The region with the largest number of sub-national governments is West Africa, which alone accounts for nearly 35% of this number, that is to say five thousand five hundred and thirty (5,530) decentralized units. North Africa is the second region with four thousand four hundred six (4,406) sub-national governments, all levels combined. East Africa, with 22.7%, has three thousand, five hundred and seventy-two (3,572) sub-national governments. Central Africa and Southern Africa with respectively One Thousand Five Hundred Ninety-One (1,591) and Nine Hundred and Nine (909) sub-national governments are characterized as having the lowest numbers.
The figure below shows the share of different types of sub-national authorities (basic, intermediate and higher) in the total. In Africa, there are four hundred and eighty-two Twelve (462) higher-level governments, four-twenty-six (96) mid-level governments and 15,450 grassroots governments. There is a lack of mid-level governments in North Africa, Southern Africa and Central Africa. However in East Africa, the 47 Counties of Kenya and West Africa the 49 circles of Mali do strengthen the representation of the intermediate governments in both regions. Central Africa is characterized by the highest weight of higher-level governments, nearly 7%, double the average.

The intersection between the level of urbanization and the number of sub-national governments is not very significant. Indeed, West Africa and North Africa have respectively 46% and 51.99% urbanization rates and have the highest numbers of sub-national governments, while Southern Africa which has the highest rate of urbanization only has nine hundred and nine (909) sub-national governments. The same is true for Central Africa, which has the same level of urbanization as West Africa, yet has three times fewer sub-national authorities.
Figure 3: Number of sub-national governments and level of urbanization by region

Source: Observatoire de la Décentralisation, CGLU Afrique
3. Governance of sub-national governments in Africa

The sixteen thousand and eight (16,008) sub-national governments are, for the most part, democratically governed. Indeed, councils and elected executive bodies are leading 82% of these sub-national governments in Africa. A very small minority (6%) of them are governed by councils and unelected executive bodies. Twelve percent (12%) of them combine elected councils and appointed executive bodies, with or without the agreement of the councils.

Figure 4: Governance model of sub-national governments in Africa

Source: Observatory of Decentralization, UCLG Africa

This governance of sub-national governments is analyzed (figure below) by the yardstick of the decentralized scale. It is the basic local governments that set the tone for the percentages of all the sub-national governments; 82% are governed by elected councils and executive bodies, 12% by elected councils and appointed executive bodies, and 6% by appointed councils and executive bodies. On the other hand, the intermediate level of sub-national governments is 100% governed by elected councils and executive bodies. In contrast, 12% of higher-level governments are governed by appointed boards and executive bodies, which is twice the average. A special effort must be made to make this level of governments more democratic. These higher-level governments are 78% governed by elected councils and executive bodies, and 10% by elected councils and appointed executive bodies.

Figure 5: Governance mode per level of sub-national governments in Africa

Source: Observatory of Decentralization, UCLG Africa
In East Africa, the share of sub-national governments governed by elected Councils and Executive Bodies is 20 percentage points lower than the African average; they represent only 62% of the sub-national governments in the region. This narrowing of the share of sub-national governments governed by elected councils and executive bodies does not favor those governed by elected councils having appointed executive bodies who gain 20 percentage points more than the African average of 32%. The share of decentralized units headed by appointed councils and executive bodies is the same as the African average of 5%.

Figure 6: Mode of governance in East Africa

![Pie chart showing governance modes in East Africa](image)

Source: Observatory of Decentralization, UCLG Africa

The analysis per level of sub-national governments in East Africa makes it possible to draw other lessons from it. First off all, the grassroots local governments whose share is overwhelming do set the tone for the regional average. The intermediate level is characterized by governance entirely by elected councils and executive bodies. At the higher level of sub-national governments, the share of regional governments led by elected councils and executive bodies accounts for only half of the total. Those run by appointed executive bodies and councils account for a quarter of all higher-level governments.

Figure 7: Mode of governance per level of sub-national governments in East Africa

![Bar chart showing governance modes per level](image)

Source: Observatory of Decentralization, UCLG Africa

In Central Africa, there is no half measure, which means that either the councils and executive bodies are elected, or they are both appointed. There are therefore no subnational governments headed by elected councils and appointed executive bodies. It is the peculiarity of this region where there is no association between elected and appointed bodies.
Elected Councils and Executives lead 78% of sub-national governments, while Councils and Executives lead 22% of them.

**Figure 8**: Mode of governance in Central Africa

![Pie chart showing mode of governance in Central Africa](source)

The other peculiarity of the region is the lack of mid-level governments; there are grassroots governments or higher-level governments. Core governments are 77% led by elected councils and executive bodies, while higher level governments are 83%.

**Figure 9**: Mode of governance per level of sub-national government in Central Africa

![Bar chart showing mode of governance per level in Central Africa](source)

In North Africa, elected Councils and Executive Bodies lead 84% of the sub-national governments, which is 2 percentage points higher than the African average. There is a presence of local and Sub-national government headed by appointed councils and executive bodies, even though they only account for 5% of the total. Elected councils, headed by appointed executive bodies, govern only 10.5% of the region’s sub-national governments.

**Figure 10**: Mode of governance in North Africa

![Pie chart showing mode of governance in North Africa](source)
Like Central Africa, North Africa does not have mid-level governments. Grassroots governments are 85% led by elected councils and executive bodies, while elected executive bodies and councils manage only 5% of sub-national governments. Elected councils and appointed executive bodies lead 10% of subnational governments.

**Figure 11**: Mode of governance per level of sub-national governments in North Africa

In Southern Africa, all sub-national governments are led by elected councils and executive bodies for both the grassroots and higher levels. This unanimity in the mode of appointment by an election at the decentralized level is one of the particular features of Southern Africa where decentralization seems to rest on undeniably democratic ground.

West Africa is the region with the most sub-national governments led by elected councils and executive bodies (92%), 10 percentage points higher than the African average. The same is true of sub-national governments run by appointed councils and executive bodies, whose weight (3%) is twice lower than in the African average. Elected councils and appointed executive bodies lead only 5% of sub-national governments in West Africa.

**Figure 12**: Mode of governance in West Africa

Governance per level of government in West Africa shows that middle and upper-level governments are all led by elected councils and executive bodies. In this region, only 3% and 5% of grassroots governments are headed respectively by appointed councils and executive bodies and elected councils and appointed executive bodies.
Figure 13: Mode of governance per level of sub-national government in West Africa

Source: Observatory of Decentralization, UCLG Africa
4. Governance and the room for maneuver offered

The typology and governance of sub-national governments are analyzed here in terms of the room for maneuver offered by their countries. Twelve criteria were rated (from 1 to 4), giving a summary score of 48, leading to the ranking of countries in 4 colors according to the quality of their institutional environment:

1. Green (scores of 36 or higher) : countries with the most favorable environments for the action of cities and local authorities in accordance with the standards adopted;
2. Yellow (scores of less than 36 and greater than or equal to 30): countries whose environment is rather favorable to the action of cities and local authorities, but where some improvements are needed;
3. Orange (scores of less than 30 and greater than or equal to 24) : countries whose progress towards an enabling environment for cities and local authorities would require major reform efforts;
4. and Red (scores of less than 24) : countries whose environment is generally unfavorable to the action of cities and local authorities.

The graph below, drawn from the 2018 City Enabling Environment Rating Report, shows the share of sub-national governments located in the above four country categories. Thus, only 4% of sub-national governments are located in countries that have the most favorable environment for the action of cities and local authorities. 19% of sub-national governments are in countries whose environment is rather favorable to the action of cities and sub-national authorities, but of which some elements must be improved.

Most disturbing is the fact that sub-national governments belonging to countries where deep structural reforms are needed to improve the institutional environment do account for one-third of subnational governments, while sub-national governments in countries with the environment is unfavorable weigh a little less than half of them, i.e. 44%.

In total, 78% of sub-national governments operate in an environment that is little or not favorable.

Figure 14 : Weight of sub-national governments according to the color of the countries in Africa

Source: Observatory of Decentralization, UCLG Africa

The figure below shows the room for maneuver offered to different levels of sub-national
governments. While grassroots governments behave like the African average, 51% of middle-level governments operate in an unfavorable environment and 49% of them operate in a rather favorable climate. As for the higher-level governments, 44% of them operate in an hostile environment (red), 45% in unfavorable environment (orange), 9% in a rather favorable environment (yellow), and 2% in a favorable environment (green).

**Figure 15:** Weight of sub-national governments per color and per level

![Graph showing the distribution of sub-national governments by environment and level]

Source: Observatory of Decentralization, UCLG Africa.

The figure below shows the distribution of sub-national governments in countries with the most favorable environment for cities and local authorities (green). There are two of them; South Africa and Uganda. These two countries include 579 sub-national governments, including 570 local governments and 9 higher-level governments. All have elected councils and executive bodies.

**Figure 16:** Sub-national governments of countries with the most favorable environment for cities and local authorities

![Pie chart showing the distribution of sub-national government levels]

Source: Observatory of Decentralization, UCLG Africa

Sub-national governments in countries with a favorable environment (yellow) are 2974 sub-national governments of which 47 are mid-level, 42 are higher level, and 2,885 are grassroots governments. They all have elected councils and executive bodies.
In these two categories of countries where the institutional environment is favorable to sub-national governments (green and yellow), councils and executive bodies are elected. Countries whose progress towards a favorable environment for cities and local authorities require major reform efforts include 5,401 sub-national governments including 49 mid-level, 208 high-level, and 5,144 grassroots governments. In these countries, 97% of them are governed by elected councils and executive bodies and only 3% of sub-national governments are governed by elected councils and appointed executive bodies. There are no sub-national governments headed by appointed councils and executive bodies in this category of countries (orange).

The figure below shows the intersection between levels of sub-national governments and governance in countries whose progress towards a favorable environment requires significant reform efforts. As a result, one can see that 98% of grassroots governments are led by elected councils and executive bodies, while mid-level governments are all led by elected councils and executive bodies. It is upper-level governments that are 12% headed by elected councils but appointed executive bodies. At first glance it might have been expected that the sub-national governments in this category of countries (orange) would be led by more appointed councils and / or executive bodies, but this is not the case. There is more or less the same weight in terms of governments concerned in orange countries as in yellow countries.
Countries whose environment is unfavorable to local authorities are characterized by a high percentage of sub-national governments headed by elected councils and appointed executive bodies or appointed councils and executive bodies; these countries alone account for 35% of all sub-national governments; appointed elected and executive boards lead 21% of sub-national governments while appointed councils and executive bodies lead 14% of them..

**Figure 20**: Sub-national governments in countries whose environment is generally unfavorable to cities and local authorities.

The governance analysis of core and higher governments shows a share of them led by elected councils and executive bodies of 66% and 50%, respectively. The proportion of sub-national governments headed by appointed executive bodies and councils is 27% for higher level governments and 13% for grassroots governments, respectively..

**Figure 21**: Scale of governments and Governance in countries whose environment is generally unfavorable to cities and local authorities.

Source: Observatory of Decentralization, UCLG Africa
5. The room for maneuver according to the Regions

The distribution of the sub-national governments from the four categories of countries (Green, Yellow, Orange and Red) according to the 5 regions of Africa is interesting for more than one reason. On the one hand, such distribution allows us to see the regional quality of the institutional environment offered to local authorities and, on the other hand, to characterize the different regions according to the typology of the sub-national governments they host.

The figure below shows the origin of sub-national governments in East Africa. Sub-national Governments from countries whose progress towards a favorable environment require major reform efforts account for almost half of the total, 47%. Sub-national governments from countries with an unfavorable institutional environment account for just over a third of the total, namely 37%. On the other hand, 7% of the sub-national governments benefit from a rather favorable environment and 8% of them come from countries whose environment is favorable (green).

**Figure 22 :** Categories of sub-national governments in East Africa

The figure below shows the distribution by margin of maneuver in East Africa. An overwhelming majority of grassroots governments (86%) operate in an unfavorable institutional environment or deserve significant reforms; only 14% of the them benefit from an environment that is at least rather favorable. Mid-level governments all benefit from a rather favorable environment while 60% of higher-level governments operate in a somewhat unfavorable environment.
In Central Africa, two colors do prevail, namely red and orange. This means that 70% of the sub-national governments in this region operate in an unfavorable environment and 30% in an environment that is in need of major structural reforms. There is therefore no sub-national governments benefiting from a environment that is favorable.

The distribution of the levels of sub-national governments according to the quality of their institutional environment gives similar results: for the grassroots governments, more than two-thirds of them (71%) operate in an unfavorable environment whereas this share is 55% for higher level governments.
In North Africa, only one-third of sub-national governments, all levels combined, do operate in a rather favorable environment; the remaining two-thirds (66%) operate in a rather unfavorable environment. It should be noted that no sub-national governments operates in a favorable environment.

The figure below shows the quality of the environment in which the grassroots governments and higher-level governments do operate. Grassroots governments have a distribution of the quality of their environment that is close to the regional average. For higher-level governments, the overwhelming majority (91%) operate in an unfavorable environment. Only 8% of higher-level governments operate in a rather favorable environment.
In Southern Africa, the institutional environment seems to be more favorable overall. Only 15% of sub-national authorities operate in an unfavorable environment and 20% in an environment requiring major reforms. More than two-thirds of the sub-national governments (65%) operate in an environment that is at least rather favorable (yellow). One third of them operate in a favorable environment (green).
84% of sub-national governments in West Africa operate in an institutional environment that is not favorable to local authorities. A minority of them operate in a rather favorable environment.

The analysis by level of sub-national governments shows that for the higher level, the institutional environment is unfavorable, requiring major structural reforms. For grassroots governments, 84% operate in an unfavorable environment while 17% of the governments operate in a rather favorable environment. There is no sub-national governments operating in a favorable environment in West Africa.
6. What are the strategic issues facing sub-national governments?

The generalization, as we have seen, of the decentralization processes in Africa takes place in a particular context of population growth, urbanization and of strengthening of globalization. The world’s population is expected to reach 8.1 billion in 2025, 9.6 billion in 2050 and 10.9 billion in 2100. The world’s population, now estimated at 7.2 billion, is expected to grow by one billion over the next 12 years because of changes in fertility and a drop in mortality from 30 deaths per thousand inhabitants at the beginning of the century to 13 per thousand today. It is Africa that will provide more than half of the world’s population growth, to move from 2.4 billion people in 2050 to 4.2 billion in 2100. With an average annual population growth of 2.4%, the highest in the world, the African population has doubled in the last thirty years while the European population for example has increased by only 15% during the same period. In 2018, the African population is estimated at 1.28 billion people. This means that projections of 2.4 billion inhabitants by 2050 will soon be exceeded, especially since the natural growth in many countries ranges between 2.8% and 3.1% in recent years. With seven or more children per woman, most African countries are among the twenty or so countries with the highest fertility levels in the world. Even in the event of a demographic transition, the decline in fertility levels will not prevent the total populations of African countries from rising sharply (from 50% to 100%) in the next 20 years. Today, the average birth rate in Africa is more than 35 births per thousand inhabitants, whereas it is only about 13 per thousand in France, a European country with a high birth rate. On the other hand, because of their strong demographic growth, half of the population of African countries is under 20, and depending on the more or less recent decline in fertility, the number of women of childbearing age will be doubled or increase by at least 50% in the next 20 years.

This heavy trend of population growth will induce a significant demand for various services to populations, the overwhelming majority of which being the responsibility of sub-national governments.

The second structural change is urbanization. This process is almost complete in many parts of the world; it is only at its beginnings in Africa because today only 4% of the population lives in urban settings. With the exception of Africa and South Asia, all other regions of the world have completed their settlement process; they are more than 70% urban. From a very low base, the growth of Africa’s urban population in the next 20 years will be close to double the growth of the world’s urban population in general, making the continent the one that experiences and will experience the most sustained settlement process. These data show once again the significant rate of growth of the urban population in all regions for the next decades. Africa is therefore at the heart of a rapid demographic transition that is changing the continent from predominantly rural to predominantly urban. In most African countries, the natural growth of the population and the rural-urban exodus have combined to give an increasing rate of urbanization. The growth rates of the most dynamic cities have frequently reached and exceeded 10%, i.e. three times the growth of European cities at the height of the Industrial Revolution. Over the next three decades, the total urban population and the
urbanized area will have to triple again. Today, all projections show that this urban population will be 1.2 billion in 2050. This sustained urbanization will lead to high risks of fragility, explosion of social and spatial disparities, and emergence of increasingly large and numerous islands of exclusion. In addition to the quantity of public services to be provided (see population growth), sub-national governments will have to curb the growing informalization of labor and its corollaries, which will lead to marginalization and impoverishment.

The third structural change under way is globalization as a factor that structures space; this change is explained by the new relationship between the economy and the space and the new strategy of businesses. The first change is the new context of economic development at the national level. The post-independence years (in the 1960s) experienced positive and sustained economic growth, and the territory was a passive factor in national development. Territories hosted activities as part of a national strategy of deconcentration of economic activities and were by no means a factor of development. With the increased competition induced by globalization, the territory becomes the place of competition; it begins to take an increasingly important place in national strategies. Therefore, its characteristics, comparative advantages and competitiveness, to name just a few, become objects of attention for national decision-makers. Central governments are thus faced with a dilemma; to support national growth by unlocking the potential of the territories or to balance the national presence of economic activities with the risk of undermining national growth. The second change is related to the strategy of firms at the world level, and to the logics of localization of productive systems.

After a first period marked by deterritorialization, the new trends in the organization of productive systems and their relation to space show that localization choices place the territory and its comparative advantages at the center. Globalization paradoxically puts on the agenda territories as a hard point in the virtual space which is now that of multinational companies and of the globalized society. Sub-national governments are therefore at the forefront of job creation and income generation. They develop differentiated strategies adapted to the many local contexts in order to provide jobs for the large cohorts of young people who join the labor market every year.

To meet all these challenges, while dealing with global agendas (on climate, Sustainable Development Goals, New Urban Agenda, etc.), sub-national governments need to develop strategies in four directions.

The first direction is that local and Sub-national government are facing, more than African central governments, in their local policies and strategies, some paradigm shifts, because that is what it is all about. Indeed, in this period of sudden and total change in all fields, subnational governments are the first concerned. It is therefore at the spatial level that the sudden and total changes do occur and that materialize, both concerning the question of local public services and the governance and the way in which are addressed the main global agendas of the fight against climate change, the New Urban Agenda, Sustainable Development Goals, etc.

Sub-national governments are responding to this situation of sudden and total change and transition by multiplying innovative practices. Thus, in the areas of housing, transport, food, local public services, health, education, etc., new local strategies, breaking with previous practices, take place at the level of sub-national governments.
ground are poorly documented for two main reasons. First of all, in the different countries, local strategies are rarely integrated into national strategies for employment, growth and access to services. On the other hand, local strategies are wrongly considered irrelevant by national decision-makers, while they are more suitable, and therefore more sustainable. Africities is the place where sub-national governments will present the innovations they develop in their territories on the different aspects of the cultural, political, social and economic transition.

The increased visibility to be given to the innovations of the subnational governments will allow not only the national stakeholders and the international community to draw all the lessons for the national policies of support to decentralization and to decentralized units, but especially for their taking into account in the global agendas.

The definition of an overall reference framework of sub-national governments could crosscut the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and therefore Agenda 2030. The SDGs defined by the international community are for more than 90% of them under the direct responsibility of the decentralized units. In other words, the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals will depend on the room for maneuver offered to sub-national governments.

The same is true for the African Union’s Agenda 2063, which advocates: (1) legitimacy, (2) the response to people’s needs, and (3) democracy and participation, which require sub-national governments to bring a significant contribution. These cross-cutting challenges, that are crucial to achieving Vision 2063, and which African central governments are facing, will be addressed at the local level or not at all.

In terms of legitimacy, the establishment of sub-national authorities has provided an institutional framework for the self-organizing initiatives that abound at the local level and has, at the same time, renegotiated a new national pact, thus reinforcing the legitimacy of the Central governments.

Decentralization by putting in place strategies based on the demands from the populations and the specificity of the territories has strengthened the allocative efficiency of the public policies. Local public services are now more responsive to the demands of the population, thus contributing to improving local public services coverage for the population, including the poorest.

In Africa the sixteen thousand and eight (16,008) sub-national governments are headed by four hundred thousand (400,000) local elected officials. Decentralization is seen as an important element of democratization, which progressively concerns all African countries. Local democracy, because of a greater “proximity” between elected officials and voters, is considered as the “basic brick” of democracy in general. It is from these local elected officials that the political leaders of tomorrow will emerge.

Relations between sub-national governments and the institutions of the African Union have developed as a complement to relations between local governments on the one hand, and central governments institutions, on the other.

Indeed, under the leadership of UCLG Africa, the Heads of State and Government of the African Union made two major decisions at their June 2014 conference in Malabo, Equatorial
Principles of Decentralization, Local Governance and Local Development on the one hand; and the creation of the High Council of Local Authorities as an advisory body of the African Union, on the other hand. Since then, sub-national governments have strengthened their collaboration with the African Union to implement these decisions. To this end, the UCLG-A presidency and secretariat took part in several meetings organized by the African Union in Dakar, Senegal, and in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. On the other hand, close contacts have been established with the African Development Bank (AfDB) and the Regional Economic Communities, particularly WAEMU and ECOWAS in West Africa, and the East Africa Community in East Africa.

In 2017, the dialogue with the African Union and the European Union was reinforced with the contribution of African and European sub-national governments to the 5th AU-EU Summit of Heads of State held in Abidjan, Côte d’Ivoire (29-30 November 2017), whose aim was to redefine the strategic orientations of the AU-EU Partnership for the years to come. Indeed, on the eve of this event, the leaders of local and regional governments of Africa and Europe met on the occasion of the first ever AU-EU Forum of Local and Regional Governments, in Abidjan on November 27, 2017, in order to bring their message and the perspective of local governments to the agenda of the AU-EU Summit.
African decentralization is plural, with as many types, sizes and modes of governance of sub-national governments as there are countries. The analyses carried out show clear cut-off lines, particularly at the regional level.

The democratic nature of decentralized governance is variously dealt with in the regions of Africa. This is how Southern Africa stands out for its democratic specificity; it is the only region where all councils and executive bodies are elected. On the other hand, East Africa has the largest deficit of democratic legitimacy of sub-national governments with a percentage of unelected councils and / or executive bodies that is above the African average. This analysis of governance shows, for an institution like UCLG Africa, the importance of emphasizing in its plea on the fact that decentralization is now inseparable from the democratic legitimacy of local authorities. In all countries, the establishment of elected councils and executive bodies should be the rule. This is because, beyond the election of local authorities, the quality of the decentralization process results improved as a consequence. Indeed, from the moment the local authorities are elected, this implies a form of accountability of these local elected officials in relation to their constituents. Decentralization shifts the sense of accountability that was previously toward the central governments is now focused on the voters. Democratic election strengthens the quality and quantity of services offered to people because local authorities are more prone not only to increase people’s participation in local management, but also to report on the effectiveness and efficiency actions carried out. The modern idea of decentralization is therefore inseparable from the democratic principle.

On the other hand, it is important to adopt differentiated strategies towards the regions in order to better support the decentralization process. While on average in Africa, 78% of sub-national governments operate in an environment that requires at least major structural reforms, the analyses carried out above show that special emphasis needs to be placed on certain regions such as Central Africa and North Africa, where a large majority of subnational governments (70% and 52% respectively) operate in an environment that is unfavorable to local authorities. This restriction of the leeway offered to subnational governments is likely to jeopardize the decentralization process. These analyzes show once again the importance of a strategic watch to be established in order to irrevocably anchor the decentralization process in the institutional landscape of the countries.

From the strategic standpoint, local and Sub-national government are confronted in their local policies and strategies with the paradigm shift. The paradigm shift, the change in the way of thinking the world, is the consequence of fundamental upheavals. People start realizing that awareness of ecology and climate makes it impossible to continue thinking about development in the same way. The same is true of geopolitical upheavals. Not to mention the sudden and total changes in mentalities and cultures, and the revolutions brought by the digital world and the biotechnologies. Which brings us to the question of transition; that societies react to this situation by multiplying practices that are innovative but which are not very visible and that the Summit should make it possible to start doing so; that if we were to define an overall reference framework for communities, we could propose that the SDGs, and therefore Agenda 2030, should appear as an implicit reference; that the relationship between African communities and the institutions of the African Union must evolve as a complement to the relationship between local and Sub-national government and central governments institutions.
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