



Q & A Unanswered Questions

Webinar on "Decentralisation and Local Governance in Authoritarian Contexts"

Questions for Melina Papageorgiou (SDC)

- 1) *How does the SDC framework take into account country situations where liberalization and democracy are fine de jure but freedoms are limited in practice for example through threats on civil society leaders?*

The SDC uses V-DEM indices to place countries in its framework. For Democratisation (x axis) it uses the V-DEM Electoral democracy index and for liberalization (y axis) it uses the V-Dem Equality before the law and individual liberty Index. In its methodological explanation of the indices, V-Dem writes, "Some [indicators] refer to de jure aspects of a polity –which is stipulated by statute or constitutional law. Others refer to de facto aspects of a polity –which is true in practice (....) Furthermore, whenever we have measures of both the de jure and the de facto situation our indices build primarily on the de facto indicators based on the justification that we want the measures to portray the "real situation on the ground" as far as possible." (p.8, V-Dem Methodology v.4 2015).

The list of indicators building up these indices are available in the appendix of the same methodology document. You will notice that threats on civil society leaders are not part of those indicators. You may note that V-Dem maintains another index called Core Civil Society index, a measure of the robustness of civil society, using indicators from the Varieties of Democracy battery on civil society.

- 2) *Melina has mentioned that Somalia is under autocracy. Why? I have been working in Somalia for the last 14 years and I haven't seen that type of governance in Somalia even though Somalia is a fragile state where states and federal governments have conflicting constitutions and policies.*

The SDC uses V-DEM indices to place countries in its framework. For Democratisation (x axis) it uses the V-DEM Electoral democracy index and for liberalization (y axis) it uses the V-Dem Equality before the law and individual liberty Index. Detailed indicators used to build these indices are available in the appendix of the methodology document by V-Dem, version 4, 2015. You can access country data sets for Somalia up to 2019 for free on the V-Dem website.

The OECD State of Fragility Report 2018 also refers to The Economist Intelligence Unit Democracy Index according to which most fragile contexts are classified as authoritarian regimes. We thus observe a strong overlap between fragility and authoritarianism, the political dimension being one of the key dimensions of fragility.

Questions for Volkert Doop (VNGi)

- 1) *Mr Doop, which target groups take ABELO into consideration e.g. in community planning in Burundi?*

Local administration and planning should work for every citizen. Therefore, besides the technical assistance for the development of local planning and budgeting tools, the programme delivers trainings on ensuring the inclusion of minority groups and other groups which have difficulties making their voice heard. Examples of these are women and youth. These trainings should then result in more inclusive consultation sessions, where participants are not only heard, but their concerns are also translated into actual planning documents and budgetary priorities. Therefore, the results of the planning is discussed with administration



officials, not only on the local level, but also on the national level.

2) *How is fiscal decentralization implemented in Burundi?*

How does the local government association in Burundi help with the implementation of fiscal decentralization and what role does it play?

The topic of the fiscal decentralization process is a very broad topic and though relevant to our ongoing projects, not a principal focus of it. The LGA ABELO plays a major role as the principal interlocutor on behalf of local administrations while engaging with the central government on this process. Please reach out for a further, more detailed discussion.

Questions for Channisai Muong (SDC)

1) *What is the status of local governments in Cambodia?*

The local governments in Cambodia refer to the district/municipality (DM) and commune and Sangkat (CS) governments. The CS governments are administered by the (directly) elected councilors; the first election was conducted 2002 and continued every 5-year interval; the DM governments are administered by the (indirectly) elected councilors and administratively appointed board of governors). The election of DM councils was firstly organized in 2009 and continued in every 5-year interval.

Since the first election, CS governments have improved their capacity to deliver public services to citizen and local development management. Financially, CS governments are entitled for fund transfer from the national level, and currently accounting for 3.8% of GDP or around USD 120'000 per CS on average with ca. USD 70,000 allocated for development projects. This development fund is mainly invested into physical infrastructure projects while the investment in social development is quite limited. The capacity and financial resources have become a longstanding question for the local governments both at the CS and DM levels. In 2020, the government transferred a significant number of functions from the national and provincial administrations to the DM governments. Both CS and DM governments are not authorized over local tax collection but benefited from tax-revenue sharing arrangement collected by the provincial government.

2) *Do the District Municipalities have adequate funds to implement their mandate?*

Financially, DM governments are entitled for fund transfer from the national level, and currently accounting for 1.1% of GDP or around USD 300'000 per DM on average with ca. USD 75% spent on salary and administration. The 25% of fund for development is quite small to implement their mandate. Overall DM fund is expected to increase further along with the functional transfers but the fund for development would not increase. It must be noted that an (increased) proportion of fund transfer will depend entirely on the GDP, which is unforeseeable for this year for 2021 or probably until 2022 as a consequence of COVID-19 pandemic.

3) *Is there any mechanism to maintain financial accountability in local level in Cambodia?*

Financial accountability at the local level in Cambodia is somehow maintained with proper accounting record. The inspection system has also been put in place with minimal implemented. At the CS, the annual budget and expenditures are made available for the



public (information board). Local citizens are allowed to question the CS government anytime or can convey their questions through the Community Accountability Facilitators – the community volunteers who are recruited by and facilitated interaction between citizens and service providers in the Social Accountability Programme.

4) *How to maintain transparency in local level in Cambodia?*

Maintaining transparency at the local level is still challenging in Cambodia. As aforementioned, although the annual budget and expenditures are made available for the public (information board), the local citizen are not always readable and understandable. Some local governments have implemented the mobile information dissemination, especially information or decision related prevention of COVID-19 pandemic. The monthly meeting of CS council are also open for the public but the citizens generally lack or no interest to participate.

5) *Without opposition leader in local council, how to improve and create competition for grassroots democracy in Cambodia?*

Competition for grassroots democracy is generally challenging without the opposition leaders (i.e. the dissolved CNRP) in local councils. The ruling party (CPP) also allowed the completion for grassroots democracy in the last elections but the political parties participated were small and weak (compared to the CNRP). Only option to improve it is to work through the civil society organizations with innovative approaches, especially those who are carrying out the civic education projects and social accountability programme. Promoting meaningful participation of citizens including especially youth in local governance and development processes would improve grassroots democracy but realizing a fairly completion of grassroots democracy is still challenging in the current context of shrinking or limited space for civil society.

Comments

- SDC is more interested in effectiveness than efficiency; meaning change processes putting the actors and not ourselves is our vision. This needs however also a big change in the way INGO work - rather as facilitator of change than executor; this impacts however the fund flows.
- It's about using economic or other entry points to internalize governance processes; its about how we work to internalize governance in the broad sense; thus acting as facilitator (not as executor) putting the actors in the centre of their processes.
- Convincing is required not for the need but for the possibility of change.
- On the issue of economic development vs. democratisation: The examples of China, Asian tigers and European countries pre-WWII all seem to contradict the necessity of democracy to foster economic growth. Maybe, participation and democratisation can be viewed as being of intrinsic value rather than as a means to an end.