Although it is still a relatively new process, decentralization in Burkina Faso has become an essential element of the country’s political system. A large body of legislation underpins it and provides for several layers of new local institutions, at the core of which lies the commune. Every five years Burkina Faso’s 351 communes elect their municipal councils, which in turn choose their mayors. The communes are legally responsible for a wide swath of public policy and administration, including primary education, health care, water and sanitation, and local economic development, and have the authority to raise taxes.

Despite these achievements, Burkina Faso’s decentralization suffers from several significant weaknesses that undermine its transformative and democratic potential. First, its achievements are much less sweeping in reality than they are on paper. Because of a top-down gradual approach, it was not until 2006 that communes were finally installed throughout the territory and not until 2009 that they were transferred effective authority. Second, decentralization in Burkina Faso has an urban bias. Urban communes were created more than ten years before the rural ones, and they monopolize between 70 percent and 90 percent of available resources. As such, decentralization benefits mainly the more centralized urban areas. Third, the lack of financial means and autonomy dramatically reduces the effective scope of decentralization. Outside of the large urban areas, communal taxes have low yields. Because municipal councillors are unpaid, their duties compete with their need for income and suffer as a result. Most communes do not have the means to launch their development plans. Fourth, decentralized structures have little effective authority. They remain under the tutelage of numerous layers of deconcentrated authority, including regional governors, provincial high-commissioners, and departmental prefects. Despite recent transfers of
authority, the communes continue to rely on centralized administrative services for the daily performance of their duties. Finally, capacity is low, many councillors are illiterate, there are few professionally trained staff at local levels, basic equipment is lacking, and understanding of decentralization is limited. All of these features conspire to undermine the degree to which Burkina Faso’s decentralization is capable of promoting democratic deepening or the state’s developmental capacity.

Some of the above limitations derive from the nature of the country’s regime. Although it has a capable administration apparently dedicated to decentralization, Burkina Faso remains an authoritarian regime that is based on personal rule, patron-client relationships, and the domination of the ruling party—the Congrès pour la Démocratie et le Progrès (Congress for Democracy and Progress, CDP). It is expecting too much of decentralization to believe that it can provide good governance and democracy in such a context. More often, it serves as the vector through which the ruling coalition spreads its influence throughout the country. Yet the work of institutional creation that accompanies decentralization no doubt is laying the foundation for a more participatory future, contingent on an eventual transformation of the Burkinabe national political system.

History and Overview of the Political System

Decentralization in Burkina Faso is an ongoing and incremental process marked by the principle of gradualism. Aside from a brief experiment with urban communes from 1960 to 1963, Burkina Faso, like most francophone African countries (except Senegal), had no experience with decentralization until the 1990s. Instead, its political history was characterized by recurrent attempts by its central governments to further centralize and concentrate powers. In this respect, territorial reforms in 1970, 1974, 1984, and 1989 all involved deconcentration rather than devolution and promoted the territorial expansion of the state rather than autonomy for local populations. This was particularly true of the revolutionary years of the mid-1980s, during which the number of administrative circumscriptions and territorial collectivities multiplied, but remained under tight control of the central government (Sawadogo and Sebahara 2004: 68).

The original impetus to decentralize arose in the early 1990s, largely as a result of pressure from donors who pushed for a new paradigm of decentralized governance, and in the wake of some retrenchment of state centralization demanded by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund as part of Burkina Faso’s first structural adjustment program in 1991. Burkina Faso adopted a new constitution (it had not had one since 1980) on June 2, 1991, which not only ushered in an era of multiparty competitive elec-
tions and guaranteed individual civil liberties and political rights, but also organized the country into territorial collectivities (Article 143) and provided for the democratic management of these collectivities by local populations (Article 145). Yet it was not until 1993 that the first decentralization laws were adopted for implementation, and they fell well short of the ambitions of the constitution (and the donor community), being largely limited to a mere administrative reorganization of the territory.

Lacking a clear idea of what decentralized governance should look like, the government established the National Commission for Decentralization (CND) in 1994, attached to the prime minister’s office, and charged it with “considering what Burkinabe decentralization might be” (Ouedraogo 2003: 99). The commission’s work led to the adoption of a series of decentralization guidelines in 1998, and a succession of four laws that allocated responsibilities and powers between central and local governments. The laws established two levels of decentralization. The most local was the commune (also known as the municipality), divided into urban and rural communes. Between the communes and the central state lay the provinces. Municipal authorities at the commune level and the councils at the provincial level were to be elected by universal suffrage.

Donors joined efforts with the government and among themselves to facilitate the process and established a common basket of funds to accompany this first phase of decentralization. While some donors were in favor of a rapid transition to municipal rule at the local level, the government resisted and maintained its gradual approach, based in part on experimenting first in urban areas and then expanding to rural communes. The government organized municipal elections in thirty-three urban municipalities in 1995 for some 1,760 municipal council seats. These councillors elected thirty-three mayors. The ruling Organisation pour la Démocratie et le Progrès–Mouvement du Travail (Organization for Popular Democracy–Labour Movement, ODP-MT) won 65 percent of the votes. In 1996, the number of provinces was increased from thirty to forty-five, which led to new towns being designated as provincial capitals and recognized as municipalities. Several others were also granted municipal status because of their size and, by the time of the municipal elections in September 2000, the number of urban communes had increased to forty-nine (forty-two of which were won by the CDP, the successor party to the ODP-MT).

The apparent implication in 1988 of President Blaise Compaoré’s entourage in the assassination of Norbert Zongo, an independent journalist, prevented the adoption of significant reform (as detailed below), including a deepening of decentralization. It was not until 2003 that the regime, having made some concessions to the opposition by adopting some of the political reforms recommended by a Council of Wise Men, was able to resume progress on decentralization. A series of new laws adopted on August 6,
2003 extended decentralization to rural areas for the first time. In the April 2006 municipal elections (in which the ODP-MT won 12,854 seats out of 17,786), rural voters elected councillors in 302 new rural communes, in addition to the 49 existing urban ones. In the meantime, a 2004 decree created thirteen regions and regional councils, which replaced the forty-five provinces in the 1998 legislation as the intermediate decentralized institutions. The provinces continue to exist as units of deconcentration of government services, but not as organs of democratic decentralization. Representatives to regional councils are elected by the urban and rural municipal councillors of their region.

Although the elections of 2006 suggested a certain degree of political decentralization, the process suffered from a lack of effective transfer of administrative and professional competence to the communes. Thus, urban and rural communities had both the formal tools of self-rule and the elected officials to carry it out, but the decrees transferring effective authority to them in the domains legally under their control were still largely missing. Instead, the government set up a new centralized structure of interministerial coordination to facilitate the decentralization. In March 2007, it adopted the Cadre Stratégique pour la Mise en Oeuvre de la Décentralisation (Strategic Compact for the Implementation of Decentralization, CSMOD), with the goal to increase coordination among all the branches of government and donors, and to establish specific goals for continued progress. This process led to the creation of yet another centralized institution in July 2007, the National Conference on Decentralization (CONAD), which was placed under the prime minister with the minister of territorial administration and decentralization (MATD) and the minister of economy and finance (MEF) as vice-presidents. CONAD adopted its first three-year plan for the implementation of the decentralization compact in 2008.

Under CONAD’s purview, the government adopted five decrees in March 2009 that transferred competences and resources to rural and urban communes in the fields of health, primary education, water, youth, culture, and sports (see the subsection Authority). However, there remain several fields covered by the 1998 decentralization laws for which communes do not have effective authority.

As of June 2012 Burkina Faso had a total of 351 communes, with 359 mayors because the main cities of Ouagadougou and Bobo-Dioulasso together have eight arrondissements (subsectors), each with its own municipal council and mayor. Of these, 57 are urban communes, which correspond to cities and neighboring villages, and 302 are rural communes that include all the villages belonging to a department (a unit of territorial administration previously administered by a prefect delegated from the central government). Since 2006 all of these communes have elected municipal councillors who in turn elect among themselves the commune’s mayor, his or her two deputies, and the chairs of two permanent commissions (Econ-
omy and Finance, and General Affairs). They join with other municipal councillors in their region (of which there are thirteen) to elect regional councillors. After the 2006 elections, there were 17,976 municipal and regional councillors, 6,435 of whom were women. The municipal councils are elected for five years. However, the 2011 elections were rescheduled for December 2012, to be held jointly with legislative ones, allegedly to better prepare voter rolls and adopt biometric voter cards. The government passed a decree extending the term of the municipal councils accordingly.

**Dimensions of Decentralization**

The following is our assessment of Burkina Faso’s decentralization along four dimensions used throughout this volume: authority, autonomy, accountability, and capacity. We found that, although the legal framework has advanced, there are significant limitations to the process in all four areas.

**Authority**

De jure, Burkina Faso’s decentralization is impressive. The responsibilities of municipalities fall into several broad categories that include multiple competences. They are responsible for land management, territorial management, and urbanism, which include dividing land into parcels and attributing them for residency; delivering land titles; authorizing construction; creating, maintaining, and managing roads; and enforcing public safety and traffic regulations. Municipalities are also responsible for the environment and management of natural resources, such as public parks; basic sanitation and trash removal; and management of animal and forestry resources. In economic development and planning, municipalities are in charge of developing communal development plans. Additional responsibilities include: construction and maintenance of primary health care centers and adoption of public health and public hygiene measures; provision of preschools and the construction, acquisition, and management of primary and secondary schools; promotion of tourism and culture; protection of human rights; organization of assistance to vulnerable populations; provision of firefighting, funeral and mortuary services, energy infrastructure, wells and public fountains, and public lighting; and participation in the design of the regional electricity network. Finally, municipalities build, maintain, and manage markets and slaughterhouses.

The regions have considerably less power; they are conceived of more as subsidiaries or support to the communes. Their responsibilities are the same except for funeral services and cemeteries, but in each case they tend to be consultative (in support of the central state or the communes) or subsidiary (in activities such as clearing bush paths, delivering wood-cutting permits in regional forests, and designing regional development plans).
Although the law provides for substantial devolution of authority to the municipalities, in reality this process has been slowed considerably for two reasons. First, it has taken much time to translate the decentralization laws into practical decrees and to transfer effective authority to communes and regions. Although there has been progress recently, the latter obstacle is structural and might represent a permanent hurdle to full-fledged decentralization. It is the simultaneous process of deconcentration of the state which, while supposed to assist devolution, represents in practice a parallel and centralized process creating authority structures that may supersede the communes in cases of conflict.

Until 2009, the powers of the communes were severely limited by the absence of transfers of authority from the central government, whose agencies remained by default in charge of formally devolved responsibilities. As a result, communes have limited themselves to activities they can manage without legal transfer. In practice, allocation of land parcels, management of markets, and delivery of permits have probably become the communes’ most important and visible activities because these are also ones where they can generate local revenue. These actions can be controversial since they involve allocating scarce resources, collecting fees, and imposing regulations. The communes have begun testing the practical limits of these powers. For instance, in 2006 the Ouagadougou Municipal Council was forced to backtrack on regulations requiring riders of motorcycles to wear safety helmets because of widespread popular resistance (Harsch 2009: 282).

Beyond this, the communes have had little authority, with an occasional bump from the participation of donors in specific projects such as school construction. With the decrees of 2009, communes are now legally and practically in charge of four of the eleven fields legally devolved to them: health care; preschools, primary schools, and literacy; water and sanitation; and culture, youth, sports, and leisure. In order to facilitate the transfer, the government delegated civil servants from the respective ministries to the communes. But so far only a few communes have signed the necessary operation protocols with the governors, and the accompanying financial transfers have been limited to urban communes (Republic of Burkina Faso 2009: 33). In other words, rural communes are not yet actually in charge of these questions. Thus, much remains to be done.

A second limitation to the authority of decentralized structures lies in the parallel deconcentrated institutions of governance. While the elected municipal and regional organs of devolution are the territorial collectivities, the organs of deconcentration are known as administrative circumscriptions: the regions and their appointed governors, the provinces administered by high-commissioners, the departments run by prefects (whose territories are identical to those of the communes), and the villages (where authority is diffuse). Table 3.1 summarizes these overlapping layers of decentralized and deconcentrated authority.
This overlap is not necessarily problematic since many of the deconcentrated organs were set up recently with the goal to facilitate and support devolution. Yet the parallel existence of these two sets of institutions produces unwelcome complexity. In addition, a different side of the law provides for the oversight and tutelage of state officials (governors, high-commissioners, and prefects) over the communes. A 2004 decree, for example, stipulates that administrative circumscriptions “represent the state” and “insure the unity of the representation of the state.” As such they enforce the law and exercise the tutelage of the state over the local collectivities. This situation is compounded by the incomplete nature of devolution. Moreover, because municipal councillors are not paid, their mandate does not amount to employment and they must therefore pursue separate careers (farming for the majority of rural ones). Thus, communes often have no permanent administration, which puts them at a considerable disadvantage compared to administrative circumscriptions. The 2009 transfer decrees provided for the delegation of secretaries general from the MATD to 169 of the 302 rural communes (Republic of Burkina Faso 2009: 34), but the actual transfer of these civil servants was only beginning in 2010 and even this delegation may represent an extension of state authority. From the village to the region, the superimposition of these different institutions creates a significant potential for conflict and a considerable budgetary burden.

### Autonomy

Autonomy issues parallel the problems of authority. There is first a lack of administrative autonomy because of the oversight of deconcentrated institutions. More fundamentally, however, communes (particularly rural ones) suffer from a significant lack of financial autonomy for which there seem to be few credible fixes.

Although the law defines a broad authority for communes, it also limits their political and administrative autonomy. Indeed, *la tutelle de l’Etat* (state tutelage) is an essential principle of Burkina Faso’s decentralization
inherited from the colonial period. This tutelage manifests itself first and foremost through administrative control: many communal decisions must be submitted for the approval or authorization of the state representative for the local collectivity (usually the prefect at the department level). This tutelage holds especially for local decisions that have a financial component, such that the central state keeps control over the overall budgetary implications of the actions of the communes. Moreover, the MATD has oversight over almost all delegated and deconcentrated local personnel who it recruits, assigns, and pays.

Nontransferred competences also continue to be managed by their respective national ministries at the local level with the consequence that the lines between devolved and deconcentrated authority are blurred for many citizens. In Ziniaré in the country’s central region, for example, it was the Provincial Service of Domain and Taxes that managed the operations of lotissemement (parcelization) of land for private residence (which raised the essential part of the commune’s budget) in the late 1990s. The collection of taxes from informal market traders is also managed by this service. The national police and gendarmerie provide public safety as the commune does not yet have its own municipal police. As Pamphile Sebahara puts it, “deconcentrated services intervene in the management of most municipal policies, either through technical assistance or through the exercise of tutelage and control . . . they play a non-negligible role in the production of rules and norms for the communal space, the implementation, and control” (2004: 334–335). In addition, the autonomy of deconcentrated services is limited since they usually take their orders from headquarters in Ouagadougou. Decentralization has brought about no noticeable change in this respect. Even when there has been transfer (in primary education, health, water, and sports and culture), the only full-time personnel in communes are the secretaries general who are administrators delegated by the central government and appointed by the MATD to assist with the establishment and functioning of local administrations.

The communes’ lack of financial autonomy has been even more fundamental. Although communes adopt their budgets on their own, these budgets still must be approved jointly by the MATD and MEF. In practice, the two ministries can delegate this authority to the prefects. More importantly, the local revenue base of communes remains exceedingly limited and they are therefore dependent on subsidies from the central government. In general, they are significantly underfunded and understaffed relative to their vast legal responsibilities.

Table 3.2 makes clear the dearth of local fiscal resources for the majority of communes. Although the amount of local revenues, at CFA15 billion seems to approximate the amount of government transfers (at some CFA21 billion), this comparison is highly misleading because it includes the local
revenues generated in Ouagadougou and Bobo-Dioulasso, which account for 64 percent of the total for all communes. The local revenues of the other urban communes combined is only 11.81 percent. In contrast, all 302 rural communes are able to generate only 13.11 percent of the total, on average CFA6,930,475 (or about US$14,143) per rural commune. Little can be achieved with such paltry resources.

In fact, for the majority of communes, locally generated resources are insufficient to cover functioning expenses and minimal investment. Of 351 communes in 2008, 86 had no investment based on their own resources, and 121 of those remaining had less than CFA5 million ($10,204) for public investments. As a result, 207 of 351 communes were unable to launch their communal development plan (Republic of Burkina Faso 2010b).

Clearly, the prevailing level of poverty and the lack of sufficient local economic fabric outside the main urban areas undermine the autonomy and functioning of the communes. The communes have tried to increase their rate of local revenue, but there is little to extract and there have been political consequences. Communes may raise taxes, charge service fees, and obtain receipts from administration of their domains (e.g., use of forests). Yet the taxes that they are allowed to raise generate little income: a tax on the informal sector (which is, almost by definition, hard to administer), a residency tax (which applies only to people living in parcelized zones and thus benefits mostly urban areas), a parcel tax for all persons being allocated a parcel (which thus is a one-time tax), a corporation tax (which effectively is limited to urban communes), a market tax, and a tax on weapons. Ironically, although the communes derive little revenue from these taxes, citizens feel their burden and tend to perceive decentralization as an increase in taxation (Sawadogo 2001). Increases in market taxes have

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**Table 3.2 Revenues of Territorial Collectivities, 2008 (CFA490 = US$1)**

| Notes: a. Of this amount, about CFA1.2 billion was transferred from the communes to the regional councils. |
| b. Loans, grants, and resources from decentralized cooperation from international non-governmental organizations (INGOs). |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local revenues</td>
<td>15,969,215,465a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ouagadougou</td>
<td>8,417,445,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bobo-Dioulasso</td>
<td>1,831,792,586</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other urban communes (47)</td>
<td>3,626,973,841</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural communes (302)</td>
<td>2,093,003,535</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transfers from national budget</td>
<td>20,660,748,407</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External resourcesb</td>
<td>10,721,841,315</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Of which, portion to urban communes</td>
<td>10,292,968,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
been a frequent complaint in demonstrations and riots since 1995, according to Ernest Harsch (2009).

The national government tried to alleviate this problem by suggesting in 2010 a new tax for communal development to be levied at the national level, with an annual expected revenue of CFA3 billion. The tentative announcement of such a tax met with a barrage of popular opposition, however. Nationwide demonstrations were held against its perceived injustice, which called attention to how little is known about how communes manage their current tax revenues. While the government relented, the commune of Ouagadougou did adopt such a tax in 2010, despite considerable opposition, limiting its application to vehicle owners.

As a result, with the exceptions of the two largest cities of Ouagadougou and Bobo-Dioulasso, communes remain dependent on the national budget and donors for their finance (see Table 3.3), which hampers their autonomy. Allocations from the national budget have grown steadily over the years, however, and with some CFA25 billion in 2010 amounted to about 2.3 percent of the country’s entire budget (CFA1.083 trillion). These figures are, however, somewhat misleading because they include the financing of deconcentrated authorities and hide an overwhelming bias in favor of urban communes. For example, more than 90 percent of the resources for transferred competences in the 2009 and 2010 budgets (some CFA10 billion in 2010) were directed at urban communes, a bias the government declares is part of decentralization gradualism. The only rural expenses in this category were for the rehabilitation of wells. In addition, CFA5 billion was allocated both years for specific antipoverty programs in six urban communes. These two entries alone accounted for 15 billion of the 25 billion in the 2010 budget. Another 1.5 billion went to deconcentrated units, about 1 billion to the current expenses of urban communes, and about 0.5 billion to several intermediary institutions. Only 7 billion was left to be shared by all communes for other purposes, most of which are the purchase of equipment. This amounted to $40,700 per commune. The urban bias is even more pronounced in external financing, most of which is accounted for by donor grants and decentralized cooperation or direct aid arrangements with communes, mostly by foreign nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). Of the CFA10.7 billion of external financing in 2008, 96 percent went to the urban communes (Republic of Burkina Faso 2010b). Thus, underfinancing probably constitutes the most significant problem in Burkina Faso’s decentralization.

**Accountability**

The main mechanism of political accountability at the local level is the municipal election. Elections were held in 1995 and 2000 for urban communes, and in 2006 for all communes. Communal elections scheduled for
2011 were postponed to December 2012. For elections, communes are divided into sectors, each of which elects three councillors. All of the elected councillors form the municipal council. Elections are held in a single proportional round with closed lists, without preferential voting or the option to vote across lists. In other words voters vote for a party, not for specific candidates, and parties determine the rank order of their candidates on the list.\textsuperscript{3}

From an electoral perspective, decentralization has favored the spread of democratic values. But there are two important features of the political system that considerably undermine its accountability to local populations.

### Table 3.3 National Budget: Allocations to Decentralization, 2007–2010 (in thousands of CFAs)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010\textsuperscript{a}</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General subsidies</td>
<td>6,849,873</td>
<td>6,850,000</td>
<td>6,819,991</td>
<td>6,819,991</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current expenses</td>
<td>1,240,229</td>
<td>1,529,471</td>
<td>1,529,471</td>
<td>1,529,471</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equipment</td>
<td>5,116,979</td>
<td>5,120,528</td>
<td>5,120,528</td>
<td>5,120,528</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deconcentrated structures</td>
<td>492,664</td>
<td>200,000</td>
<td>170,000</td>
<td>170,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transfers to institutions</td>
<td>77,500</td>
<td>224,665</td>
<td>288,500</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONAD\textsuperscript{b}</td>
<td>15,465</td>
<td>31,000</td>
<td>50,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AMBF\textsuperscript{c}</td>
<td>30,000</td>
<td>50,000</td>
<td>50,000</td>
<td>50,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FPDCT\textsuperscript{d}</td>
<td>90,700</td>
<td>85,000</td>
<td>270,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support for construction</td>
<td>5,988,732</td>
<td>2,200,000</td>
<td>2,370,456</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Governor’s office</td>
<td>1,114,332</td>
<td>1,000,000</td>
<td>669,996</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Governor’s residence</td>
<td>1,576,417</td>
<td>200,000</td>
<td>770,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secretaries general’s residence</td>
<td>125,000</td>
<td>140,000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commune headquarters</td>
<td>3,144,982</td>
<td>1,000,000</td>
<td>669,996</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resources for transferred competences</td>
<td>3,951,382</td>
<td>10,775,395</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary education</td>
<td>3,751,382</td>
<td>9,100,315</td>
<td>804,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water supply\textsuperscript{e}</td>
<td>200,000</td>
<td>871,079</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>871,079</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subsidies from petroleum tax</td>
<td>2,341,841</td>
<td>2,597,351</td>
<td>2,590,723</td>
<td>2,590,723</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Budgets of urban communes\textsuperscript{f}</td>
<td>777,567</td>
<td>925,615</td>
<td>925,615</td>
<td>925,615</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commune headquarters</td>
<td>1,000,000</td>
<td>1,000,000</td>
<td>1,000,000</td>
<td>1,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salaries of former provincial agents</td>
<td>310,000</td>
<td>305,219</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Priority investments in six communes\textsuperscript{g}</td>
<td>5,000,000</td>
<td>5,000,000</td>
<td>5,000,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>9,269,214</td>
<td>20,660,748</td>
<td>21,160,596</td>
<td>25,749,561</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** Republic of Burkina Faso (2010a).

**Notes:**

a. Forecast.

b. CONAD is the National Conference on Decentralization.

c. AMBF is the Association of Municipalities of Burkina Faso, the communes’ lobbying arm.

d. FPDCT is the Permanent Fund for the Development of Territorial Collectivities.

e. Rehabilitation of wells.

f. Support to current expenses.

g. Limited to Banfora, Bobo-Dioulasso, Kaya, Koudougou, Ouagadougou, and Ouahigouya.
The first is the patronage nature of Burkina Faso’s political system, which has been exported to the communes. The second is the domination of national political parties, particularly the ruling CDP, which is reproduced at the local level and reduces the degree to which municipal elections address local issues and concerns.

Because of these factors, “popular participation” is more of a slogan than reality, and tends to refer to the payment of local taxes or to the reliance on NGOs for primary schools or health clinics. As Pamphile Sebahara and Flore Sindogo suggest regarding Ziniaré (the president’s hometown), “participation in decision making or in selecting priorities does not seem to be recognized as a possible form of participation for the population” (2004: 386).

Moreover, because the law does not allow independent candidacies in municipal elections, candidates must belong to political parties. As a result, national politics plays a significant role in local elections. In fact, ruling party control over communes is overwhelming. In the 2006 elections, the CDP won in 320 communes out of 359, 49 out of 57 urban ones, and 271 out of 302 rural ones. The CDP tightly controls the nomination of candidates, to the extent that most of its nominees win. Hence, nominations have become one of the main tools in the distribution of state patronage. Mathieu Hilgers and Jean-Pierre Jacob (2008) note, however, that these nominations are careful not to upset local equilibria. As such, rather than opening the political space, decentralization reproduces the established order at the local level. In its selection of candidates, the CDP is first cognizant of the ethnicity of local candidates, which must correspond to the dominant local group (most communes, especially in the West, are multiethnic). Then it considers “local historical and political equilibria” (Hilgers and Jacob 2008: 174). Thus, leading candidates typically are heads of local dominant lineages. In practice, longtime members of the ruling party are prioritized in nominations. Many of them, however, although they originally come from the commune, actually live in Ouagadougou and typically work for the government or state enterprises (Hilgers and Jacob 2008: 177).

The second stage of central state intervention is in the election of mayors and their deputies by the municipal councils. Considerable jockeying takes place, with delegates from party headquarters coming to adjudicate disputes among contenders. The election of the mayor takes place with secret balloting and under the supervision of the department’s prefect, also usually a member of the CDP. It is the CDP’s explicit goal to exercise a monopoly on the positions of mayors, first and second deputies, presidents of important commissions, and delegates to regional councils. Hence, the modal mayor would be a member of the CDP, head of an important local lineage, and a resident of Ouagadougou. As summarized by Hilgers and Jacob, “All the efforts
of the party in power tend to neutralize the potentially devastating effects [of decentralization] on the established social order” (2008: 180).

Because of these features, local accountability of local governance structures is severely limited. The democratic nature of Burkina Faso’s decentralization is thus weakened. The extent to which decentralization has failed to empower local citizens outside the established local structures of power, especially in rural areas, might be reflected in the decline in participation rates in municipal elections over time. Turnout declined from 69.61 percent participation in 1995 (when only urban communes voted) to 49.12 percent in 2006 (after rural communes were included in the electoral process).

There is also an interesting phenomenon by which decentralization may undermine or displace village governance and accountability. A 2004 decree created the Comités Villageois de Développement (Village Development Committee, CVD). Each village held a constitutive assembly under the authority of the municipal council of all voting-age inhabitants to elect members of the CVD. The CVD helps prepare the communal development plan, mobilize village resources, and animate village development. Each CVD has a bureau with a president, vice-president, and so forth, and is elected for five years. Although they are elected, these officers are not considered part of the decentralized state. The CVDs’ authority is limited to development and they do not directly control the affairs of the village.

Despite their elected status, the CVDs have less legitimacy than the previous village structures, which had grown from the self-organization of rural communities. CVDs now represent villages in higher-up structures instead of the preexisting youth, women’s, or socioprofessional associations. This has triggered conflicts for leadership between these associations and the CVDs. There also are frequent conflicts between the CVDs and the municipal councillors from the same village as to who can best represent the interests of the villagers. The fact that they remain an agency of the centralized state, despite their locally elected nature, makes the CVDs more a case of delegation than devolution. Thus, they end up partly complicating and weakening the local structure of governance, thereby undermining decentralized local institutions. The CVD problem hints at the extent to which decentralization has potentially reduced institutional accountability to associative structures. Local civil society associations and NGOs seem to be marginalized to the benefit of new institutional actors established to implement decentralization. Before decentralization, the providers of different local services (often nonstate actors) were by-and-large accountable to the local populations for which they existed. But citizens are more reticent to demand accountability from perceived sovereign structures, whether because of cultural norms or fear of reprisal.
Capacity

In general the fiscal, administrative, and political capacity of communes and regions is minimal. The lack of local revenue is the main cause of weak fiscal capacity, as discussed above regarding financial autonomy. In this section, we focus on administrative capacity.

There is a significant imbalance between the administrative capacity and managerial competence of the central government, which is rather high by West African standards (Englebert 1996: 109), and the institutional weakness of the communes and regions. One factor of low capacity among communes, especially rural ones, is the lack of permanent salaried staff. Communal councils meet once every three months and delegate executive authority to the mayor and his or her deputies. Being unpaid, the latter frequently experience conflicts between their municipal obligations and their work. As a result, there is absenteeism at work among councillors in rural areas. In addition, although they are not salaried, municipal councillors are de facto local “big men” and must therefore allocate large amounts of their time to social functions. For example, they must attend funerals in their commune and, at each occasion, they are expected to make some financial donation (Sebahare and Sindogo 2004: 384). Despite the commitment of many councillors to public service, their lack of payment (while understandable in Burkina Faso’s budgetary environment) reduces their capacity and can create incentives for corruption.

Low literacy levels and low levels of education among municipal councillors are also a serious problem. According to Richard Gerster (n.d.), “Many elected individuals are lacking a basic understanding of a community’s tasks as well as their own role. Technical capacities needed for project planning and implementation hardly exist.” Although the number seems high, Gerster reports four out of five municipal councillors cannot read or write. Even in a relatively large city like Koudougou, Pamphile Sebahara (2000) indicates that ten out of thirty municipal councillors were illiterate. CONAD’s Programme d’Action Triennal for 2008–2010 acknowledges that more than half the municipal councillors in rural communes cannot read or write and that their rather advanced age likely precludes them from making much progress in this (Republic of Burkina Faso 2009: 26). Thus, the most effective administration, when it exists, is performed by the secretaries general delegated to the communes by the MATD.

These issues affect the quality of local governance. For example, the determination and distribution of land parcels has been one of the most important municipal activities; in part because it represents the greatest opportunity for local revenue, which is crucial both for the functioning of the communes and for the fulfillment of clientelistic obligations. To be eligible to get a parcel, one needs to purchase a card. In many communes,
however, more cards are sold than the parcels available because of mismanage-
ment, incompetence, and, sometimes, corruption.

More positively, municipal economic development planning has regis-
tered certain successes, with the design of 191 rural communal develop-
ment plans as of 2009 and the initiation of the remaining 111. Three regions
had also already completed their regional development plans by mid-2009
(Republic of Burkina Faso 2009: 17). However, lack of financing and
administrative capacity prevents many communes from beginning to imple-
ment their plans.

The Political Economy

Understanding the causes behind Burkina Faso’s limited decentralization
requires an appreciation of its political economy, with particular attention to
the political incentives facing the actors responsible for decentralization. In
this section, we outline these incentives and how they have resulted in con-
straints on the process.

Political Incentives and Constraints

Burkina Faso’s authorities embarked on decentralization in 1991 because
donors wanted it. Of course, there was a continent-wide movement toward
democracy and decentralization at the time, but it was primarily the donors’
agenda that exported these ideas to Africa where many governments
responded out of political realism. In this context, it is not surprising that
there initially was resistance among some powerholders. Many politicians
in the ruling party were anxious about the potential of decentralization to
create new loci of power and to strengthen the opposition. They dragged
their feet accordingly in designing the necessary legal architecture. Simi-
larly, Burkina Faso’s central administrative services also dragged their feet
because they were suspicious of the capacity of local devolved authorities
to carry out their task. According to Augustin Loada and René Otayek
(1995: 142), staff at the Ministry for Territorial Administration experienced
decentralized devolution as a “dispossession.” This situation partly explains
why it took fifteen years from the adoption of decentralization in the con-
stitution of 1991 to the first nationwide municipal elections of 2006.

None of this is surprising, however, nor did it represent an insurmount-
able obstacle as subsequent developments have illustrated. Nonetheless,
some administrative resistance continues. A more significant and more
political reason for the slow pace of decentralization came instead from the
upheaval that was unleashed on the national stage with the assassination of
journalist Norbert Zongo in 1998, and the subsequent *trop, c’est trop*
(“enough is enough”) opposition movement that coalesced in response. The crisis seriously undermined the legitimacy of the Compaoré regime, which was widely believed responsible for the assassination, and put it on the defensive for a few years. Most major political initiatives were suspended while the government focused on staying in power and containing public outrage. As a result, progress on decentralization stalled until 2003.

However, while initial resistance to decentralization eased, there is a more insidious constraint to decentralization that has so far largely succeeded in preventing it from being effective and democratic. This fundamental constraint is the neopatrimonial nature of the regime and the monopolistic domination of the ruling CDP party over all organs of the state. The Compaoré-CDP regime is an authoritarian system at its core, opposed to democratic competition and decentralization of power. It is unwilling to share power and authority with nonclients and to surrender control of the political process. By using communes and regions as instruments of patronage and penetration into the countryside, the CDP has reinforced this. Ironically, although the decentralization sequence was slowed by the Zongo crisis, decentralization in the end might have saved the government and restored its social foundations.

National-Level Actors and National Politics

There is a certain symbiosis between politics at the national and decentralized levels. The domination of the 2006 local elections by the CDP mimics its domination of national politics. As a result, and with the understanding that decentralization does not represent a redistribution of power away from the national incumbents, it is not a particularly controversial national political topic.

Simon Ouédraogo, the mayor of Ouagadougou, nicely illustrates the connection between national and decentralized politics. For a long time, he was the chairman of the ODP-MT, the ancestor to the CDP. He was appointed as the ODP-MT candidate for Ouagadougou mayor as a reward for political loyalty. Similar appointments of party barons and other important patrons have occurred throughout the country at different levels of authority. Such practices help explain why there is general support for decentralization within the party. The neopatrimonial nature of the regime, predicated on the handing out of parcels of sovereignty to big clients of the president, who are in turn patrons of their own followers, has found in decentralization a wonderful opportunity to create additional patronage opportunities. It is hard to win in an urban commune against a representative of the ruling regime. And in rural communes, loyal chiefs are in turn rewarded. Hence, there is little resistance to decentralization from within the ranks of power but, at the same time, there is relatively little democrati-
zation taking place through decentralization. It reproduces and spreads the domination of the ruling party through the country more than it opens new avenues for local governance. The influence of national political parties on local politics prevents the emergence of local parties that might better represent the concerns of the local inhabitants. This pattern undermines the potential of decentralization to promote local democracy.

While there is limited political opposition to decentralization at the national level, there remains a certain though not critical amount of administrative opposition, mainly in the form of passive resistance. For example, the different ministries involved in the implementation of decentralization in the CONAD three-year plan failed to budget for their planned interventions, thereby guaranteeing that they would not be implemented. The plan’s appraisal report also notes that deconcentrated personnel worked with limited enthusiasm and had little commitment to the success of decentralization. The report notes a Jacobinist reluctance to adapt to the new institutional environment (Republic of Burkina Faso 2009: 24). As such the report also notes that decentralized ministries, like health and education, continued to display organizational structures (e.g., health districts and circumscriptions for basic education) that did not match the new territorial collectivities. Moreover, the deconcentrated structures had little local accountability, little local authority, and amounted to little more than relay stations for centralized decisionmaking (Republic of Burkina Faso 2009: 24).

Finally, CONAD, together with the strategic compact for the implementation of decentralization (CSMOD), marked a significant yet ambiguous push by the national government toward decentralization. After endless conversations on the question of effective transfer of competence, the CSMOD finally set the momentum for the passing of the 2009 decrees on health care, education, water, and sports and culture. Yet at the same time, both CONAD and the CSMOD marked a recentralization of the decentralization process. By reinforcing the leading role of centralized structures (under the direct authority of the prime minister) over the local dynamics of communes and regions, they represent a certain dispossession of these local structures (albeit not an intentional one). As such, they embody the strong centralized tradition of the Burkinabe state and its propensity for top-down approaches. Decentralization has so far done little to erode this.

Local-Level Actors and Local Politics

Aside from the deconcentrated and delegated state agencies mentioned above, the other local-level actors that communes interact with are customary authorities. Traditional chiefs are a complex institution in Burkina Faso, and chieftaincy varies across regions. It is common, however, for villages to have a political/administrative chief and a land chief, who typically come
from different lineages (Laurent 1995: 34–43). Some interesting dynamics with these indigenous authorities have unfolded since the beginning of decentralization. Historically, before the Compaoré regime, chiefs were frequently repressed by the central government, and some appear to have seen in decentralization a possibility to add a legal dimension to their traditional legitimacy to prevent this in the future (Ouedraogo 2003: 101). Thus, some traditional chiefs have run successfully for local office. While this may seem to provide some indigenous representation to the state, it can also result in problems since communes are in charge of people of different ethnic groups whereas the authority of chiefs might be more conscribed to certain communities or domains such as the distribution of land for agriculture and livestock. As a result, local elected officials who are also traditional chiefs have at times found themselves on shaky legal grounds (Ouedraogo 2003: 101).

Since many chiefs are co-opted by the ruling party, it is not surprising that they tend to run on the government’s list, and their elections represent as much the local extension of national neopatrimonial politics as the representation of local interests. For example, the Larlé Naba, a top-ranking Mossi chief, was also elected municipal counselor of Ouagadougou in 1995, in addition to his post as member of the National Assembly (Loada and Otayek 1995: 137). The holding of multiple offices (as also occurs in France) is not uncommon in Burkina Faso.

Sometimes, however, decentralization perturbs the established way of things at the local level and can undermine or reshuffle existing structures of authority and social relations. This is essentially due to the fact that decentralization empowers communes, which are aggregations of several villages, whereas indigenous authority typically resides at the village level. From this perspective, decentralization itself means in fact a certain degree of centralization. This displacement of authority to the communes involves a loss of control by village hierarchies and populations. This relocation of authority can sometimes clash with local social dynamics. In the west, for example, cultural hamlets formed by migrants from the Mossi Plateau are typically in a subordinate position in the indigenous villages from whom they borrow land. Ye the aggregation of their votes at the commune level dissolves this relationship and reduces accountability among these groups, which can trigger grievances from indigenous communities increasingly couched in a language of autochthony (Hilgers and Jacob 2008: 182–183). If such trends generalize, decentralization may end up being associated with increased social polarization.

There is no widespread evidence that this is a large trend so far, but there is new evidence that decentralization has promoted the rise of localized political contention. Harsch has documented 207 reported instances of demonstrations, mass rallies, marches, sit-ins, strikes, and riots in more than
thirty of Burkina Faso’s forty-nine urban communes. Harsch argues that many of these events contest the “goals and process of decentralization” (2009: 265), particularly in the allocation of urban land titles, corruption, “rivalries among local elites,” and limited democratization. Some of these also pitched indigenous communities against perceived newcomers and challenged the results of the elections or subsequent manipulation in the installation of mayors and their deputies by municipal councillors. As we have seen, much politics (and occasional corruption) takes place at this stage, with the frequent intervention by national political figures and representatives of the CDP to adjudicate disputes among candidates and promote certain individuals. More worryingly, perhaps, Harsch’s (2009) data show that instances of contention have increased over time and peak in years following municipal elections (thirty-two instances in 2001 and forty-nine in 2007).

Civil Society Actors and Identity Politics

Burkina Faso has a comparatively weak civil society and has had limited civil society involvement in decentralization (Ouédraogo 2003). But this is not to say that civil society is irrelevant. In fact, the president of the CND, Antoine Raogo Sawadogo, began his public career as president of a large agricultural CSO network called Naam. Nevertheless, it is quite possible that the decentralization process, which was initiated and implemented with little involvement by civil society organizations, may in fact be hurting the interests of CSOs and weakening local civil society. As discussed earlier, decentralization has allowed for the emergence of new political actors (e.g., CVDs and political parties) that might have less capacity than CSOs to promote local interests. These new actors become local institutions without necessarily benefiting from any particular social capital and social trust. There is particularly a certain degree of the competition between CSOs and political parties.

The penetration into local development by the new decentralized and deconcentrated institutions of the state has pushed back NGOs. One might expect that decentralization would have multiplied their influence but, in some areas, the opposite seems to have happened. The penetration of political parties at the local level, through municipal elections, has brought politics to the communes and the villages and squeezed out associative life. NGOs shy away from participating in structures that replicate locally the national political game. As such, they might have lost some local influence (Sebahara and Sindogo 2004: 388).

In addition to civil society, it is important to note the effects of decentralization on identity. Decentralization can reshape local public arenas in which struggles for power, resources, and influences are waged. Such reshuffles have positive or negative consequences regarding the goals of
decentralization. One important consequence is that decentralization, by changing the local institutional context, also contributes to reshaping and altering the salience of identity. Although ethnic politics is not as dominant in Burkina Faso as in other African countries, tensions do exist among some ethnic groups, particularly in the west, where recent migratory patterns have pitted indigenous communities like the Bobo, Dioula, and Senoufo against newcomers like the Fulbe (who are seminomadic) and the Mossi, many of whom have acquired land in the west in response to demographic pressures.

The increased prerogatives of local authorities under decentralized rule have made the notion of who is indigenous and who is not more important than before, and thus have somewhat increased social polarization among ethnic groups. The Senoufo, in particular, have claimed autochthonous status in some districts. Sten Hagberg suggests that “through decentralized political institutions and structures, politicians have come to use local collective identities in rallying electoral campaigns, leading to situations in which first-comers (or ‘autochthons’) are opposed to latecomers (or ‘strangers’)” (2004: 52).

This social dynamic challenges the idea that decentralized political structures are necessarily closer to the people. In multiethnic environments, where ethnicity can represent a powerful factor of mobilization, the decentralization of authority increases the stakes of social competition and allows latent divisions to surface. It can also lead to discourses of autochthony and allochthony (indigenous vs. nonindigenous) through which established elites try to reduce competition for office and resources by declaring some groups legally ineligible. Nigeria’s concept of what it calls “indigeneity” provides a worrisome example of what can lie ahead for countries that follow this trajectory. Hence, it is the liberal notion of citizenship, the very foundation of democracy, that can find itself challenged through decentralization.

Conclusion

Despite the problems associated with decentralization, particularly the extent to which it is in fact a centralized process, there is nevertheless a remarkable national momentum in favor of it. For better or worse, decentralization is now fully part of the Burkinabe institutional and political landscape. Yet although it is now well established and heavily legislated, Burkina Faso’s decentralization is also rather limited in scope and effectiveness. The extent to which it promotes democracy, development, or state capacity is unclear. There is little doubt that it has contributed to placating donors and to reducing domestic political tensions, thereby contributing to domestic stability. But such stability might have come at the expense of genuine democratic decentralized governance.
It is somewhat unreasonable to expect good and democratic local governance in a political system characterized by authoritarianism, patronage, corruption, and factional politics. To a large extent, local governance reflects national politics. As Jean-Pierre Olivier de Sardan once wrote in the context of Senegal, decentralization brings politics into the village, but lets power seep out of it. While politics is indeed closer to the citizen than it used to be, it is unclear whether this corresponds to any improvement in actual governance in the aggregate. Finally, the link between decentralization and development is at best tenuous in Burkina Faso. Decentralization might actually have disempowered local village development associations, and the lack of local resources makes communal development plans more theoretical than practical. It thus is far from certain whether Burkina Faso’s decentralization balance sheet will come out in favor of democracy and development.

An important dimension of Burkina Faso’s decentralization, and one of its main liabilities, remains the imbalance of power between deconcentrated and devolved units. The salience of deconcentration probably reflects a commitment problem by central authority. Decentralization is alright as long as it does not effectively displace power. In practice, the significant parallel structure of deconcentrated institutions is redundant and undermines the substance of devolution.

The problem of the effective transfer of power is related to the sequencing of the administrative, fiscal, and political dimensions of decentralization in Burkina Faso. Tulia Falleti (2005) suggests that implementing political and fiscal decentralization first tends to increase the power of local governance structures while early administrative decentralization, which transfers administration and delivery of social services without changing the rule of selection of local authorities and without giving them fiscal autonomy, tends to have the opposite effect. In Burkina Faso, the lack of effective decentralization of power is linked to the effective limits on all three types of decentralization, none of which is complete. But it also derives from the fact that the government has tended to privilege administrative decentralization at the expense of the two other dimensions until recently. The principle of delegation of authority regarding provision of public goods was established as early as 1993. Yet the first nationwide municipal elections (which still do not fully provide for political decentralization) did not take place until 2006, and a serious (albeit partial) step toward fiscal decentralization was not achieved until the adoption of the March 2009 decrees.

In addition, the decision to use administrative circumscriptions, such as the department and the region, as units of decentralization is unfortunate because it promotes a dual system that undermines the autonomy of the communes and regions. It probably was well intentioned to have deconcen-
trated and devolved units at the same level, for the state is supposed to pro-
vide support to the communes. But in practice, this has led to a lack of clar-
ity with respect to what each institution is in charge of (reinforced by the
lack of financial means of the communes and regions) and a dilution of
communes as organs of local governance.

At the same time, the most basic unit of social, political, and economic
life—the village—finds itself largely excluded from decentralization. Com-
munes include several villages in a top-down process, according to whether
they belong to the same department. Contrast this with the experience of
Mali where villages were given the opportunity to come together on a vol-
untary basis to form communes. Villages in Burkina Faso are not without
institutions, but they are either traditional (chiefs) or largely deconcentrated
(like the CVDs). Thus, the essential building block for development finds
itself excluded from the decentralization process, one of the aims of which
was to increase local ownership of development.

Variations over time in the institutional and legal landscape are also
somewhat problematic, as they reduce local ownership of the process and
signal wavering government commitment and unpredictability, all of which
reduce the incentives to participate. For example, provinces were first terri-
torial collectivities, but then this designation was removed. Villages first
had their delegates, then they had CDVs. Communes were first supposed to
take over eleven domains of competence, then they effectively got none,
and finally received four. It appears the instability of this process is ongo-
ing rather than abating. The entrenched urban bias of Burkina Faso’s decen-
tralization is another major problem. For practical purposes, effective
decentralization is largely limited to Ouagadougou and Bobo-Dioulasso,
whether in terms of institutional innovations or finances. Other urban com-
munes, while not as advantaged as the two large cities, also benefit dispro-
portionally from decentralization. Meanwhile, the 302 rural communes and
their populations continue to be neglected. This bias largely deprives decen-
tralization of its purpose of bringing government closer to the people
because the people of Ouagadougou and Bobo-Dioulasso were already
closest to government and its services and more influential as well.

A few lessons arise from Burkina Faso’s decentralization experience.
First, top-down decentralization is probably not an ideal process; neither is
gradualism. A more radical transition to decentralized governance earlier in
the process, as several donors unsuccessfully pushed for, might have had bet-
ter effects. A more endogenous process, like Mali’s, also appears more capa-
bale of effectively transferring power and accountability to local communities.

A second crucial lesson is that decentralization can be only as demo-
ocratic as the regime that presides over it. The penetration of authoritarian
neopatrimonialism into the villages and the hegemony of the CDP in
municipal elections have emptied much of the process of its democratic
potential. The law should allow for local candidates unrelated to national
parties or even ban explicit party affiliations in communal elections in order to increase local ownership of governance institutions. Mayors should be elected by universal suffrage rather than by municipal councillors, which is a process that is excessively liable to manipulation. In general, donors should think hard about the usefulness of their efforts toward decentralization if they are unable to encourage or constrain the national regime to democratize.

Third, there might be a threshold of income below which decentralization is practically unfeasible. Burkina Faso tests these limits. It might be possible for a country to be too poor to decentralize. If there is insufficient creation of wealth in the villages to offer some basis for taxation, communes will remain underfinanced and at the mercy of the national government. Similarly, local villagers will not develop a sense of ownership of their commune if they do not participate significantly in its financing. At the national level, decentralization also represents a fiscal burden, particularly in the transition period when there might be considerable overlap among old and new agencies. In a country as poor as Burkina Faso, such fiscal burdens imply difficult trade-offs.

Finally, it is important to keep in mind the relationship between decentralization and development. Only under certain conditions will decentralization promote development. In Burkina Faso before decentralization, there were provincial (cadres de concertation technique provinciaux (technical exchange committees) that brought together all the actors in local development such as technical services from ministries, public administration, and CSOs. With the decline of the province, these committees have disappeared and governors thus far have not successfully recreated these institutions at the regional level. The governor of the Sahel region reported that he deplored the difficulties in bringing together these different actors. He mentioned existing conflicts between mayors and department prefects, whose roles in development are not adequately differentiated by law. In this case, decentralization might have undermined local state capacity because previous institutions were disassembled and new and potentially competing ones were created. In short, the problem lies in the fact that the new institutional architecture does not put local development—and local ownership of development—at its core. Consequently, ad hoc solutions are invented, and thus far these do not perform as well as the structures that existed beforehand.

Notes

1. The succession of small steps implied by gradualism reflects in part a desire to learn and adapt on the part of implementing authorities. However, it can also be a convenient excuse for a tepid rate of implementation and an occasional lack of commitment.
2. The following lists are not exhaustive and include only the most or important responsibilities of communes.


4. The CDP’s domination is probably greater even at the communal level. With some 70 percent of the votes in 2006, the CDP won almost 90 percent of the mayorships.