

The Politics of Decentralization, Local Revenue Generation and Social Equity in Basic Services Delivery in African Countries.

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The lack of adequate basic services and public infrastructure is one of the biggest obstacles to development in African countries. To ensure that economic growth reduces poverty and improves environmental quality, public utilities, public works, and functioning transportation networks are crucial. Government fiscal deficits and rapid urban population growth have placed a high burden on local governments in Africa to meet the service delivery and infrastructure needs of growing populations. The privatization rush of the 1990s did not bring huge flows of finance into high-risk low-revenue basic services sectors such as water supply, sanitation, sewerage or waste management, areas with some of the most critical gaps in meeting basic needs. This paper brings together a discussion of trends in African decentralization and local revenue generation strategies with an examination of affordability and social equity in basic services delivery in these areas and resulting policy implications. Key issues include the authority of local authorities to independently generate revenue, insufficient intergovernmental transfers linked to power conflicts between multiple levels of government, and conflicting sets of institutional structures at the local level such as the multiple tiers of local government and the presence of independent water and sewerage authorities not fully subject to local government control. Detailed case study information will come from household survey data on satisfaction with basic services and attitudes about government from two countries providing different models of federalism, Ethiopia and Nigeria.