

ABSTRACT

Decentralization, The Local Government System and National Development : Trinidad, 1952-1990.

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This dissertation examines the contention that decentralization positively impacts upon the processes of national development. Specifically, the study analyzes the connection between Local Government and the economic, social and political development of Trinidad over the period 1952 to 1990. In operationalizing the study, three forms of data collection were employed, each with specific goals. These were as follows :

1. A review of official documents and policies. This review identified the role and functions of Local Government in the developmental process in Trinidad. Also, data collected from this review were used to assess some aspects of Local Governments' contribution to the national development process.
2. Interviews with politicians and officials who influence decision-making and policy-implementation at the local level. This aspect of the research facilitated the collection of data with respect to the actual functioning of the various local authorities.
3. Administration of a questionnaire, sampling 150 adult persons, in six selected districts. These districts were selected so as to ensure that race, class and space (i.e. urban/rural) criteria, depicting variances within the Trinidadian society, were accommodated and

represented. This survey elucidated the perceived developmental needs of the grassroots, their opinions of how those needs could be met, along with their assessment of Local Government in satisfying their needs and promoting national development.

From the data collected, it was found that Local Government has played a limited though positive role in Trinidad's development. Specifically, gains were recorded mainly with respect to the promotion of economic development. The contribution of Local Government in promoting social and political development however left much to be desired. In analyzing this contribution, two deficiencies were identified. They are :

1. The structure and system of Local Government is in itself deficient, which in turn limits the abilities of the local authorities from optimizing their contribution to development.
2. With central government advocating centralization, Local Government as a decentralization mechanism was emasculated and made impotent in promoting development.

The thesis concludes with an assessment of the capability of a proposed Local Government system, as dictated by Act 21 of 1990. It contends that with proper administration, avoiding the problems which plague the existing structure, as outlined in the thesis, the reformed Local Government can play a greater part in promoting national development. Moreover, the thesis makes a contribution to the sphere of knowledge by refining and restating the connections between decentralization and development, offering theoretical and empirical insights to the role of decentralization in the transformation process.