ledgement of the need for joint decision-making by all races but added that they could be only a "Short-term palliative" to the economic and political problems facing black local government[19].

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Like several previous government reforms, RSCs are a recognition of the failure of key apartheid policies — as noted earlier, they recognise that black communities require both a greater share of "white" economic resources and a greater say in decision-making. But, like those other reforms, they are constrained by the fact that they seek also to contain change — in this case, by insisting that the

redistribution of wealth and power be channelled through segregated, white controlled, structures. This not only limits their ability to achieve their stated aims — in this case, township development and joint decision-making — but also their ability to "co-opt" black elites by offering them real control over resources or decisions.

RSCs are, therefore, an acknowledgement that local wealth and power must be shared, but one which is likely to demonstrate that this cannot be achieved by instruments which reflect key apartheid assumptions. Their introduction, and the likely limits on their success, may therefore, do far more to strengthen pressures for non-racial local government than to deflect them.□

1. Sowetan 19/8/87.
2. The Star 11/8/87.
3. The Star 3/8/87.
4. The Star 18/11/87.
5. The Star 4/11/87.
6. The Star 18/9/87.
7. Business Day 16/6/87.
8. The Star 4/8/87.
9. Financial Mail 4/12/87.
10. Business Day 8/10/87.
11. Business Day 21/6/87, 25/8/87, 29/8/87.
12. Business Day 14/9/87.
13. White Paper on National Transport Policy, Department of Transport, 1987.
14. Interview with East Rand councillor.
15. The Star 17/9/87.
16. See for example The Star 10/7/87.
17. The Star 20/10/87.
18. Financial Mail 3/7/87.
19. Business Day 13/10/87.

— by Fanie Cloete —

LOCAL OPTION PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

"The Government has accepted the principle of maximum devolution of power and decentralisation of administration at local government level and minimum administrative control over local authorities. . . ." (Prime Minister P. W. Botha on 30 July 1982 in Bloemfontein.)

(. . . The Government has accepted) ". . . that government functions be executed at the lowest possible level of government and that higher levels of government should as far as possible only be policy making and monitoring levels of government. . . ." (Minister Chris Heunis in the House of Assembly, 6 May 1985, col. 4907.)

The Government's acceptance of the principle of a maximum decentralisation of functions in the public sector, has set the stage for potentially far reaching changes in South Africa. It is aimed at achieving a large degree of local option not only in constitutional and administrative **structures and processes** in the country but also in the nature of South African society: in other words, in its **value system.**

Until 1982 control over the processes of government was to a large extent concentrated in central state departments. The relative autonomy of provincial legislative and executive authorities had systematically been eroded between 1910 and 1980 while most local authorities were effectively controlled by provincial bureaucracies and were allowed only restricted and well circumscribed powers.

Creeping centralisation is, however, a normal feature of any bureaucracy unless it is purposefully, explicitly and continually countered by measures to achieve the opposite effect. This has been proved time and again in Western democracies.

Since 1982 the Government, as part of a more comprehensive programme of social and political reform in South Africa, embarked on a deliberate course of decentralisation of powers to the lowest possible level. This has consistently been found to be the most appropriate instrument to implement government policies effectively and efficiently in developed as well as developing countries all over the world.

There are normally three main reasons for decentralisation:

Political reasons

Decentralisation promotes grassroots democracy in that local and/or regional interest groups can participate more directly in decision-making and distributive processes of government regarding matters pertaining to them.

Economic and administrative reasons

Decentralisation can also promote more effective and efficient government. This is done by utilising existing local and/or regional administrative, technical and economic infrastructures (or creating them) to provide a wider range of services fulfilling the specific needs of the community concerned, instead of providing and controlling uniform services directly from the central governmental level. In this way decentralisation can stimulate economic development in all regions of a country. This is especially relevant in developing societies.

Ethnic or cultural reasons

Economy of scale further does not always imply a centralisation of services, especially with regard to socio-cultural services. Decentralisation can play a very important role in satisfying the distinctive needs of different ethnic or cultural communities. Demands by such interest groups for self-determination can partially or fully be met by granting the appropriate degree of autonomy on a local and/or regional basis, depending on the circumstances in each case. In many cases such autonomy is the best or only way to achieve social stability in multi-cultural democracies.

In developing countries decentralisation is used primarily to distribute the socio-economic benefits of growth more evenly and use scarce resources more efficiently for society as a whole on the one hand. It also involves the less developed communities in the planning, decision-making and implementation of policy in order to stimulate responsibility and self-help attitudes as tools and capabilities for further development. In a developing society it is sometimes difficult to decentralise government functions because those basic socio-economic and administrative structures and processes within which development must take place normally still have to be created.

Scholarly research has found that the ability of governments to implement decentralisation programmes successfully depends on the existence of or the ability to create a variety of attitudinal and instrumental conditions to carry out decentralised functions.

The conditions are the following:

Attitudinal conditions

● Strong political commitment and support from national and community leaders for the transfer of planning, decision-making and managerial authority to lower levels of government and to organisations that are outside the direct control of the central government;

● general support of and commitment to decentralisation within central and local bureaucracies, especially the willingness of central government officials to transfer functions previously performed by them to local communities (i.e. changes in the attitudes and behaviour of central and lower level government officials away from those that are centrist, control-orientated and paternalistic, toward those that support and facilitate decentralised planning and administration);

● creation of a minimum level of trust and respect between citizens and government officials and a mutual recognition that each is capable of performing certain functions and participating effectively in various aspects of development planning and management.

Instrumental conditions

● Appropriate allocation of planning and administrative functions among levels of government suited to the decision-making capabilities, existing or potential resources and performance capabiities of each level of organisation;

● concise and definite decentralisation laws, regulations and directives that clearly outline the relationships among and functions of the different levels of government and administration, and the roles and duties of officials at each level;

● flexible arrangements, based on performance criteria, for reallocating functions as the resources and capabilities of local governments change over time;

● clearly defined and relatively uncomplicated planning and management procedures for eliciting participation of local leaders and citizens in the formulation, appraisal, organisation, implementation and evaluation of development programmes;

● strong administrative and technical capacity at higher government levels to carry out national development functions and to support — with adequate resources — lower levels of government in performing decentralised functions;

● communication linkages among local units of government and between them and higher levels that facilitate exchange of information, co-operative activity and conflict resolution;

● effective channels of political participation and representation for rural residents that reinforce and support decentralised planning and administration and that allow them to express their needs and demands;

● adequate financial resources to acquire the equipment, supplies, personnel and facilities needed to carry out decentralised responsibilities;

● adequate physical infrastructure in local communities and transportation and communications linkages among local government units to facilitate the mobilisation of resources and delivery of public services.

The fewer of these conditions that exist, or the greater the obstacles to creating them, the greater will be the difficulty to successfully implement decentralisation programmes. Developing societies lack many of these prerequisites, especially the instrumental conditions for success. This also complicates decentralisation attempts in a developing society like South Africa. If these obstacles can be overcome, decentralisation can succeed.

in the South African case a process of socialisation and change in the direction of local option has been started but the road ahead is long, steep and treacherous. The Government is, however, already publicly committed in principle to decentralisation. This already meets a very crucial attitudinal prerequisite for success.
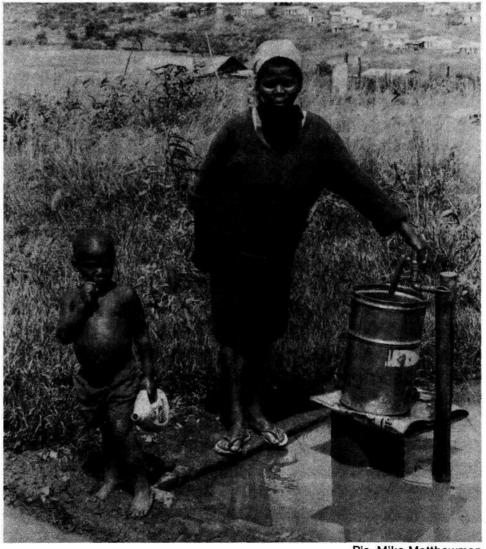
The respective provincial administrations are furthermore presently engaged in explicit programmes to decentralise functions to and diminish control over local authorities in line with the Government's stated policy objectives in this regard. Simultaneously the Council for the Co-ordination of Local Government Affairs has initiated a similar process at central state department level in co-operation with the Commission for Administration. These processes are taking place on the request, with the active support and under pressure of the United Municipal Executive. The Central Government is also giving priority to the physical development of communities in order to increase the viability and resources of local authorities to prepare them for their new roles. This is unfortunately still hampered by differences among political leaders in various communities about the implementation of political objectives and a lack of funds.

It is, however, becoming increasingly clear that in order to maximise effective minority protection in South Africa, political power has to be diffused as far as possible to the respective communities and interest groups concerned. If power remains concentrated at the national level it will aggravate and increase the intensity and frequency of political conflict at that level.

A diffusion of power can only alleviate such pressures. An increasing political vested interest of the Government in decentralising as much power and functions as possible to the local level, is therefore apparent. This may dramatically increase the probability of success of attempts at decentralisation. The decision of the National Party to contest local government elections on a party political ticket illustrates this trend and confirms the increasing interest of the Government in local politics.

When judging the success or failure of the eventual outcome of these programmes, one must take into account that decentralisation is at best a medium to long term process. It cannot be completed in a year or two. The outcome of the present decentralisation attempts of the Government will only really be clear after the process has had some more time to come to fruition.□

Pic. Mike Matthewman