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Introduction

This paper presents the planning and institutional arrangements for managing the decentralisation process in Ghana. It critically examines the four tier (national, regional, district and town/area/unit) structure of government and how the institutions are arranged at the various levels for implementing the decentralisation drive of the country.

Ghana's Decentralisation System

Following political independence in 1957, governance in Ghana was over centralized. The consequence of this over centralization is the distortion of the national development process, that is, serious disparities in regional development. The search for a more equity-oriented and participatory system became the concern of successive governments. The 1992 Constitution of the Republic of Ghana provides for the setting up of a decentralised local government and administration system that would afford people within the localities adequate resources and opportunities to effectively participate in local and national governance.

Specifically, chapter twenty of the 1992 of the Republic of Ghana, Article 240 (1) states "Ghana shall have a system of local government and administration which shall, as far as practicable, be decentralized". Article 240 provides the transfer of functions, powers, responsibilities and resources from the central government to local government units in a co-ordinated manner. The District Assemblies concept is also provided in Article 241. For instance, section (1) of the article in the Constitution states 'for the purpose of local government, Ghana shall be deemed to have been divided into districts.

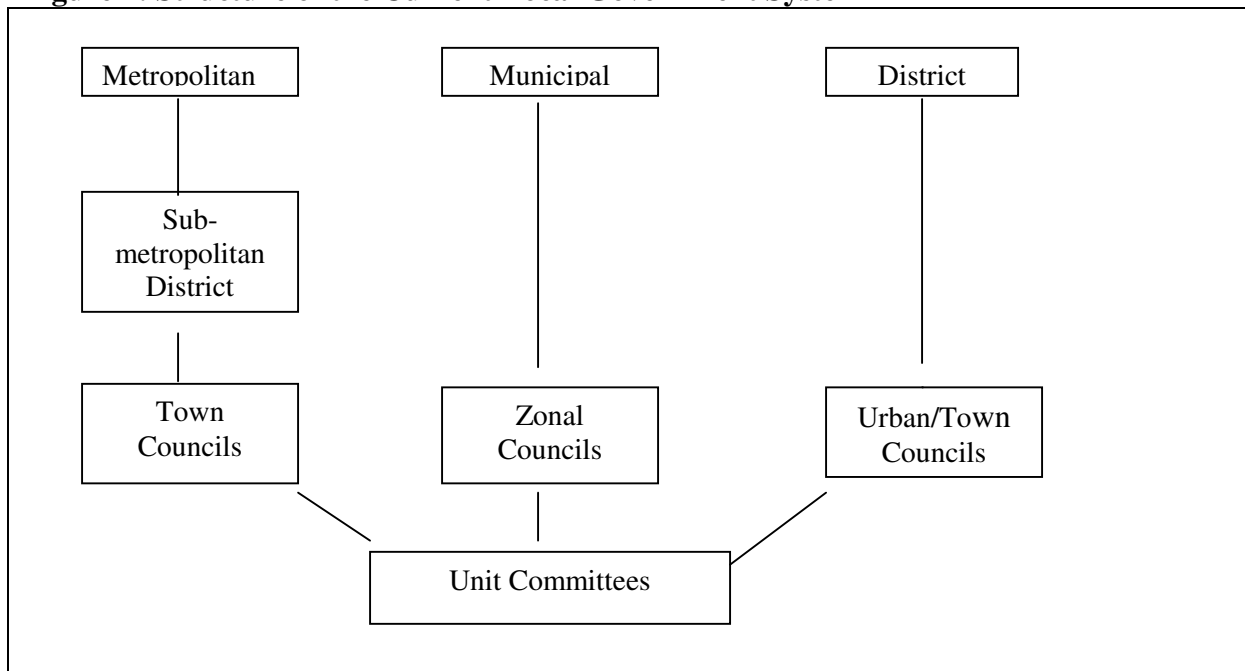
In addition to the 1992 constitution, the following legal instruments provide the basis for decentralization and good governance in Ghana.

- The Local Government Service Act (2003)
- The National Development Planning Systems Act, 1994, (480)
- The National Development Planning Commission Act, 1994, (Act 479).
- The Local Government (Urban, Zonal, Area and Town Councils and Unit Committees) Establishment Instrument, 1994, (L.I. 1589).
- The Civil Service Law, 1993, (PNDC Law 327).
- The Local Government Act, 1992 (Act 462)

The Structure of the Current Local Government System

The current local government system, as enshrined in the Local Government Act, 1993 (Act 462) is a four-tier structure consisting of 10 Regional Coordinating Councils (RCCs) at the regional level; Metropolitan (Accra, Kumasi, Shama Ahanta East, Tamale); Municipal and District Assemblies, at the sub-regional level. The structure of the current local government system is illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Structure of the Current Local Government System



Source: Ministry of Local Government (1994:7)

The Regional Coordinating Council (RCC)

According to Section 141 of Act 462, the RCC is composed of the Regional Minister as Chairman, his deputy, Presiding Members and District Chief Executives (DCEs) of the District Assemblies within a region, two chiefs from the Regional House of Chiefs, and regional heads of decentralised ministries in the region, but without a vote. Some regions such as the Upper West Region have expanded the Council to include the regional representative of the NDPC. The primary duties of the RCC, as stipulated by Act 462, include:

- Monitoring, coordinating and evaluating performance of District Assemblies in the region;
- Monitoring the use of all monies allocated to the DAs by any agency of central government;
- Reviewing and coordinating public services generally in the region.

To be able to perform these functions a Regional Planning and Coordinating Unit (RPCU) is established as a secretariat for the RCC.

District Assemblies

District Assemblies in Ghana are either Metropolitan (population over 250,000), Municipal (one-town Assemblies, with population over 95,000) or District (population 75,000 and above). Section 5 of Act 462 states that, the District Assembly shall compose of the District Chief Executive (DCE), seventy percent of elected members, member(s) of Parliament from the district (but without a vote), and not more than thirty percent of the members nominated by the President, in consultation with chiefs and organized groups in the district. The District Assembly is the highest administrative and political authority in the district and is non-partisan. The District Assemblies are thus regarded as the pillars upon which people's power is erected; the focal points of development at the village and town levels; the solid foundations for participatory democracy in Ghana.

Broadly, District Assemblies are:

- Created as the pivot of administrative and developmental decision-making in the district and therefore the basic unit of government administration assigned with deliberative, legislative as well as executive functions.
- Established as a monolithic structure to which is assigned the responsibility of the totality of government to bring about integration of political, administrative and development support needed to achieve a more equitable allocation of power, wealth and geographically dispersed development in Ghana; and
- Constituted as the Planning Authority for the district.

The Local Government Act, 1993 (Act 462), PNDCL 207 and the National Development Planning (System) Law, 1994 (Act 480) specify the functions of the District Assemblies. The Local Government Act provides details of the functions of the District Assemblies as follows:

- Responsible for the overall development of the district;
- Formulate and execute plans, programmes and strategies for the effective mobilisation of the resources necessary for the overall development of the district;
- Promote and support productive activity and social development in the district and remove any obstacles to initiative and development;
- Initiate programmes for the development of basic infrastructure and provide municipal works and services in the district;
- Be responsible for the development, improvement and management of human settlements and the environment in the district;
- In co-operation with the appropriate national and local security agencies be responsible for the maintenance of security and public safety in the district;
- Ensure ready access to courts in the district for the promotion of justice;

- Initiate, sponsor or carry out such studies as may be necessary for the discharge of any of the functions conferred by this Act or any other enactment;
- Guide, encourage and support sub-district bodies, public agencies and local government communities to perform their planned roles;
- Initiate and encourage joint participation with other persons or bodies to execute development plans;
- Promote or encourage other persons or bodies to undertake projects under approved development plans;
- Co-ordinate, integrate and harmonise the execution of projects and programmes of ministries, departments, corporations and non-governmental organisations as approved by the district development plans; and
- Monitor, assess/evaluate projects as they impact on people's development at the local, district and national levels.

The Legislative Instrument that established each District Assembly specifies the detailed functions that the District Assembly should perform. Eighty-four (84) functions have been specified in the Legislative Instruments (more for Municipal and Metropolitan Assemblies). These can be categorised under six (6) main headings as follows:

- (i) Physical Environment;
- (ii) Education, Social Welfare and Culture;
- (iii) Transport and Communication;
- (iv) Health and Hygiene;
- (v) General Administration; and
- (vi) Security and Public Safety.

Sub-District Level Structures

Legislative Instrument 1589 established and defined the operations and functions of sub-district structures including Urban, Area and Town Councils and Unit Committees. At the sub-district level are established 34 Urban Councils, 108 Zonal Councils, 250 Town Councils, 826 Area Councils and 16,000 Unit Committees.

Sub-Metropolitan Councils: These structures are immediately below the Metropolitan Assemblies.

Urban Councils: They are peculiar to settlements of 'ordinary' District Assemblies. They are created for settlements with population above 15,000 and which are cosmopolitan character, with urbanization and management problems, though not of the scale associated with metropolitan areas. Thirty-four (34) of such councils are created/established by law.

Zonal Councils: These are in the 'one-town' Municipal Assemblies for which the establishment of Town/Area Councils will raise problems of parallel administrative structures. They are based on the National Commission for Democracy criteria of commonality interest, population of 3000 and identifiable streets, land marks, etc.

Town/Area Councils: These are also found in the Metropolitan and District Assemblies. In the District Assemblies, Town Councils are established for settlements with population between 5,000 and 1500 and Area Councils for a number of settlements/villages which are grouped together but whose individual settlements have population of less than 5,000. They cover areas with predominantly rural population and in some cases can be identified with spheres of influence of a particular authority. They are essentially rallying points of local enthusiasm in support of the development objectives of the District Assemblies. Town Councils in Metropolitan Assemblies are markedly different in sizes, sometimes exceeding 50,000.

The functions of the Urban, Zonal, Area and Town councils include the following:

- To take over as appropriate all the functions previously performed by the Town/Village Development Committees.
- To enumerate and keep records of all rateable persons and properties in the Urban, Zonal, Area or Town;
- To assist any person authorized by the Assembly in the collection of revenue due to the Assembly;
- To be responsible for the day-to-day administration of the Urban, Area, Zone and Town;
- To organize with any other relevant organization, annual congresses of the people for the purposes of discussing the development of the Urban, Zone, Area or Town, including the raising of voluntary or other contributions to fund such development.

In terms of planning, the Area Councils are the channels through which plans, data, inputs, proposals, etc. from the Unit Committees are channelled to the central administration. They serve as the administrative units of the Unit Committees under them. They administer correspondence from the Units and serve as a liaison between the Assembly and the Unit Committees.

Unit Committees: The Unit Committees form the base structure of the new Local Government System. A unit is normally a settlement or group of settlements with a population of between 500–1,000 in the rural areas, and a higher population (1500) for the urban areas. Unit Committees being in close touch with the people, have the important roles to play. These include but not limited to community sensitization and education, organisation of communal labour, revenue mobilisation and ensuring environmental cleanliness, registration of births and deaths, implementation and monitoring of self-help projects.

Specifically, Unit Committees are mandated to:

- Take over as appropriate all the functions previously performed by the Town Development Committees.
- Provide a focal point for the discussion of local problems and take remedial measures where necessary, or make recommendations to the Assembly, where appropriate;
- Organise communal and voluntary work especially with respect to sanitation;

- make proposals to the Assembly for the levying and collection of special rates for special projects and programmes;
- monitor the implementation of self-help development projects;
- oversee the performance of staff of the District Assembly assigned to work in the unit;
- assist the Town Councils to enumerate and keep records of all rateable persons and properties;
- assist in the collection of revenues to the Assembly; and
- perform any other functions as may be delegated by the Assembly or the Town Council.

From the functions defined for the various tiers, it is evident that through the process of decentralization, all implementation functions have been transferred from the national and regional levels to the district level. The national level is concerned mainly with policy issues, monitoring and evaluation and human resource development, while the regional level has administrative, coordinating, monitoring and evaluation and human resource development functions.

Planning Within the Context of Decentralisation

The traditional approach to development planning in Ghana has been national in scope and sectoral in nature. Described as top-down and highly centralized, the planning approach sought to define national goals and objectives and therefore formulate national development plans from the perspectives of a few technocrats at the ministries and other central government agencies, without any consultations with or participation of people who were the ultimate beneficiaries of the Plan. This system has a number of drawbacks, including the following:

- Insensitivity to community aspirations and opportunities for local level development initiatives
- Difficult to integrate analysis, synthesis and action and represents a limited and partial approach to solving development problems
- Difficulties in exploring the interactive nature of development.
- Lack of participation of the local people in the planning process

The public administration reforms sought among other things to integrate local government and central government at the regional, district and sub-district levels as well as decentralize and integrate the development planning process and its supporting central budgetary system.

The Current Planning System in Ghana

The PNDC Law 207 and the National Development Planning System Act 1993, (Act 480) seek to address the defects of the centralized planning approach by creating and clearly identifying political and bureaucratic bodies and assigning them with authority, responsibility and roles in ways that promote partnership in planning, decentralize the planning system and effect integration and effectiveness in the formulation and implementation of development policies and programmes at the national, regional, district and sectoral levels.

Under the reformed system as stipulated under the National Development Planning System Act 1994, (Act 480) the ‘top-down’ planning approach was to give way to ‘bottom-up’ approach. By this Act as well as PNDCL 207 the District/Municipal/ Metropolitan Assemblies are designated as the planning authorities with power to ensure participation, coordination and integration in the preparation of district plans. The new planning process has the following as its essential features:

- Planning at the district level starts with communities’ problems, goals and objectives from Unit Committee level through the Town/Area/Urban/ Zonal Councils to the District Assembly. Outputs at this level include Community Action Plans (CAPs) and Area Level Plans (ALPs)
- The Sub-Committees of the Executive Committee of the District Assembly consider the problems and opportunities, define and priorities and submit these to the Executive Committee.
- The Departments of the District/Municipal/Metropolitan Assembly, sectoral specialist, non-governmental organizations and other functional agencies confer and collaborate to hammer out the ingredients of District Plan.
- The District Development Planning and Budgeting Unit integrates and co-ordinates district sectoral plans into long term, medium term and short term plans and annual plans and budget for consideration by the Executive Committee and debate by the whole Assembly.
- The approved plan is submitted to the Regional Co-ordinating Council for co-ordination and harmonization with the plans of the other District Assemblies in the region.

The NDPC Act 479 of 1994 gives the NDPC responsibility for co-ordinating all national development plans. It is mandated to provide the framework and direction for national development planning and implementation. It provides guidelines for the preparation of the district development plans which it then harmonises with sectoral plans to produce a broad national development plan.

The NDPC observes with regret that this process is circumvented by most Assemblies, with some even engaging ‘consultants’ to prepare their Plans.

Performance of the Substructures

Though there is every indication that the substructures, that is, the Area Councils and Unit Committees are desirous to influence decisions and development within their localities their performance so far is very much below expectation. Their performance is examined in terms of the formulation of relevant development plans.

Community Action Planning

Community Action Plans are basic planning documents prepared and owned by communities to guide their development process over a period of time. The CAPs are expected to feed through the Area Level Plans (ALPs) into the District Medium Term Development Plans (DMTDPs). With CAPs, communities can also advocate for development support from development collaborators such as the DA, external donors and NGOs.

Though most communities particularly in Northern Ghana have demonstrable experience in indigenous planning (identifying shopping lists), conventional community planning practice is absent and where practiced the outputs do not meet the requirements of the NDPC (most 'plans' reflect the interests of supporting development agencies and are thus not holistic). Over the last five years though, a number of key NGOs (UNICEF) and donor-funded projects (CIFS and NORPREP) have supported the preparation of CAPs for a few communities in their operational districts.

Area Level Planning

Area Level Plans are outputs of the harmonization of the CAPs of communities within an Area Council. The ALPs are expected to feed into the District Medium Term Development Plans (DMTDPs). Like Community planning, Area Level planning is not a common phenomenon in the country. Only Area Councils enjoying support from donor-supported projects in some Districts particularly in the Northern Region have had the privilege of formulating ALPs.

District Level Planning

Under the National Development Planning System (Act 480, 1994), District Assemblies constitute the planning authorities at the district level with responsibility for promoting grassroots participation in development planning. The Act seeks to provide opportunities for greater participation of local people in the development planning process. It is thus incumbent on the DA to facilitate the preparation of CAPs to be harmonized into ALPs that will directly feed into the District Medium Term Development Plan.

All the District Assemblies in the country prepared MTDPs for the period 2006-2009. Some DAs in Northern Ghana particularly those supported by CIFS and UNICEF utilized ALPs but this was limited in scope. Support for the formulation of ALPs by DAs was very limited. Similarly, the required consultations with Area Councils by DAs, through Public Hearing were equally limited. Most of the districts held centralized public hearing at the district capitals. This implies that the priority needs of most communities in the districts are not reflected in the districts' MTDPs.

Challenges to Planning at the Sub-district level

- Both Area Councils and Unit Committees are in place in the districts but these are functionally dormant. They are presently ineffective in the performance of their

mandated functions including, community mobilisation for planning decision-making and advocacy. In some communities the members of the local Unit committees do not even meet to plan community activities and have never taken responsibility for organizing community-wide consultative meetings.

- Though efforts have been made to provide physical structures for the ACs in the districts, the structures are redundant in some districts. In a district in the Northern Region, one of the AC offices has been converted into a temporary residential facility. The situation inhibits the effective mobilisation of communities for community actions including the production of CAPs and ALPs
- The level of accessibility of a community to other communities and the district center influences information flow and support to the community. Very accessible communities are more likely to be exposed to information and access to development agents and opportunities than those that are relatively more remote. Many districts particularly in the Northern Region have a large number and sparsely located Area Councils and communities such that monitoring and support to the substructures is a major challenge.
- Another major challenge to effective community level planning among communities and Area Councils in Northern Ghana is the high incidence of ignorance about the relevance of CAPs and ALPs. Though most community members understand that planning is for development, they are unable to articulate the relevance of a CAPs and ALPs. Similarly, there is a limited understanding and awareness of the roles and responsibilities of local development institutions such as Area Councillors and Unit Committee members.
- The absence of CAPs and ALPs in the districts is partly attributed to the limited knowledge and skills available in the districts to facilitate the planning process. Conventional planning requires some basic skills including the identification of development challenges, analysis, priority setting and standard documentation. These skills are limited at the DA level and lacking at both the Area Council and Unit Committee levels.
- Poverty is a major challenge to community development to the extent that people's preoccupation with addressing their poverty overshadow all interests in discussing and identifying community development needs.
- Support from the elected members in community mobilisation is very limited. For example, many Assembly members, who are also members of the Unit Committees and Area Councils, are not in regular contact with their constituent communities. Most of them actually reside outside their electoral areas. This limits their influence on local level development.
- The large size of some Unit Committees and Area Councils also limits interactions among their members. For example, some Unit Committees involve more than 5

communities whilst some Area Councils particularly in the Northern Region consist of more than 30 communities.

- Inadequate number and membership of the substructures. The relevant legislations stipulate the composition and membership of the structures. However, many of them lack the full complement of membership to ensure effective deliberation and decision making for local development. The reason being largely lack of motivation. The voluntary nature of Unit Committees is a disincentive for commitment and dedication to duty.
- Lack of or ineffective supervision and support for the substructures by the DAs. Some DAs unduly delay or refuse to give the substructures their 50% share of revenues generated from their localities. Most DPCUs of the DAs have limited participatory planning skills to support planning at both the district and substructure levels. Due to limited capacity most districts have defaulted in submitting their DMTDPs to the RCCs and the NDPC.

There is also a dichotomy between communities' development priorities and the Assemblies' priorities. For example, in the Sissala district for example a study found out that whilst the people's three most preferred projects were identified as water, dam construction, and education, the Sissala District Assembly had over the period under review, focussed on education, local government as its priority development sectors. The variation between the priorities of the communities and those of the District Assemblies may have arisen from the following reasons:

- The Assembly members' inadequate consultation with the people on the people's real needs and preferences.
- The Assemblies' strict compliance with guidelines on the utilisation of nationally allocated resources such as the DACF, which are periodically issued by the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development.

The Way Forward

- The sub-district structures should be strengthened in terms of financial, human and other resources. Members of these structures should also be given training so that they perform their assigned functions effectively and efficiently. Community mobilization, the formulation of projects, their implementation, monitoring and evaluation should be the areas of concentration during the training.
- Staffing levels of the DAs need to be increased, given the expanded functions transferred to the District Assemblies including support to the substructures. To ensure effective development planning and management, the DPCUs should be fully equipped with all the necessary equipment (computers, printers and photocopiers). The heavy schedules of the Planning Officers also make them unable to devote time to development planning and management. Efforts should therefore be made to provide the full complement of staff for the DPCUs to make them more effective.

- To ensure that the substructures are effective, the DA should ensure that they have the full complement of their staff requirements, who are reasonably motivated. Their skill base should also be enhanced particularly in essential areas such as development planning and management, advocacy etc.
- To advance the process of local level development, there is the need to involve all stakeholders including civil society and non-governmental organizations in the development process. This is because the contribution of NGOs/Donors to local level development is significant especially in Northern Ghana. For example, in a study carried out in the Upper West, 65.5% and 81.8% of community members interviewed in the Sissala and Nadowli districts respectively indicated that NGOs and donors were the most instrumental in the promotion of local development in the districts.

Good Practices

- Though there are no standard CAPs in place, community members were able to identify and implement local priority development projects
- Some communities also advocating for development support from donor projects and NGOs
- External Support Agencies influence the development process in the communities in most communities in Northern Ghana. The support ranges from assisting communities to identify their priority development needs to supporting with the implementation of local priority projects
- All communities do initiate and successfully implement local projects. Though some of the projects are implemented with support from external agencies such as the DA they are able to demonstrate a commitment to facing the challenges of promoting self-initiated development.
- Besides intra–community consultations, inter-community consultations take place in the districts and discussions focus on mutual development issues.

Conclusion

Decentralisation has come with it, decentralized development planning. However, the practice of planning by the substructures is presently weak. Its link to the national planning system is equally weak or non-existent. Nonetheless it has increased awareness and prompted local development initiatives in rural communities.

The benefits of decentralisation are perceived by its advocates to include the enhancement of political participation by local actors and the provision of local government that is more responsive to the needs of the citizenry. The new decentralised planning system is not yet

sufficiently robust to ensure sustainable development and secure livelihoods in the rural districts. There is, therefore, a need to strengthen the capability of DAs, district planning coordinating units and the substructures to design, implement and monitor district development plans with active and full local community participation. Again, political authorities must have the will and commitment, national bureaucrats must accept to cede power and control, and sub-national governments must also develop capacity to govern.

The future is bright for the process of decentralization in Ghana. A strong foundation has already been laid for consolidating and accelerating the process. The process of decentralisation is a continuum and therefore there is the need to monitor the process to promptly identify challenges and provide appropriate responses to address and redress them as they unfold.

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ACHIEVEMENT OF DECENTRALISATION IN GHANA

To start with the achievement of decentralisation, I wish to quote the Honourable Minister for Local Government in his speech during the 10th Anniversary of Ghana's decentralisation policy, "the halting of trips by chiefs and opinion leaders to Accra and ministries to lobby for development projects is an indication that development decision at the local level lies more with the district than the in offices in Accra".

Decentralisation in Ghana is indeed bringing decision making close to the beneficiaries. District and sub district structures can now identify their problems, discuss and establish programmes and projects and mobilize resources to implement them. This has facilitated the implementation and sustenance of development projects in the local communities.

The decentralisation process has also provided the local communities and individual with a formal process through which they can influence decision making both at the local and national level through the electoral process of Assembly persons. This provides them the opportunity to influence district level decisions.

The resource mobilization scope has also expanded nationally and locally as a result of the decentralisation process. Once development projects emanate from the communities, the citizens are more willing to pay and contribute to development.

The establishment of 138 district assemblies has injected an atmosphere for competition and challenge among the District Assemblies. This has led to local initiatives and voluntarism in undertaking development projects and responding to their own problems without recourse to the national level.

From the foregoing discussion on the achievement of decentralisation, it is quite obvious that decentralized system in Ghana is making headway in promoting good governance and socio-economic development in the sense of inclusiveness, resource mobilization and easy implementation of projects. However, there are a series of bottlenecks in the decentralization system.

CHALLENGES OF DECENTRALISATION IN GHANA

Accountability

A major challenge in the decentralisation process is accountability. Who are officers in the district assemblies accountable to? This remains a bane since many of the officers in the district including the District Chief Executive are appointed and accountable to the central government. In many cases the allegiance is to the central government directives without any reflection on local needs and priorities. The weak local structures and the indifferent roles of civil society organizations in local governance set a fertile ground for the abuse of power.

Policy Gaps in the Decentralisation Process

1. Incomplete devolution of power. Study carried out by Richard Kambootah (2006) indicates that, devolution of power ends at the MMDA level.
2. Both the Local Government Act, 1993 (Act 462) and the LI 1589 which established the DASSs failed to come out clearly on possible
3. Another bottleneck is the lack of clearly defined roles of the Civil Society Organizations as well as the Traditional Authorities. For instance, the Government is enjoined by the Provisions in Act 462 to consult with traditional authorities in the

appointment of 30 per cent of District members. The lack of specificity in the nature of the consultations and the inherent weakness in the institutional anchoring of the traditional authorities inevitably constrains the achievement of the laudable objectives in the clause.

4. Inability of the DAs to hire and fire staff as when and necessary has again put pressure on the districts in terms of presence and quality of human resource.

Dichotomy between Community Needs and DA Priorities

The criteria used for the disbursement of the DACF, or in project selection and location at the district level were observed not to be formalised. While Planning Officers in the study districts indicated that projects implemented were in conformity with the districts' Five-Year Medium-Term Development Plans, most Assembly Members indicated that the DCEs were very influential in determining project types and location. For example an Assembly member in Nadowli District indicated that the DCEs discriminated against or favoured electoral areas depending on the loyalty of the Assembly member or his/her electoral area to the ruling party of the DCE

Gender imbalance continues to dominate in the various DASSs. Statistics from the DAs indicate that only the typists in the case of the Area Councils staff are females whilst only a few among the Area Council councilors are entire staff. This implies that public participation in local governance and development is highly skewed towards the men, further implying that capacity building and training programme and for that matter empowerment is virtually limited to the men.

Political Influence

The direct control and influence of the central government over the local government system. The fact that the President exerting influence and pressure on the districts activities emanates from the fact that most of the DCEs have been toeing party lines in fulfilling their master's call. There have been instances where the members of the Assembly have been vehemently protesting against the behaviours of DCEs but because of having their actions in consonance with the party agenda they were retained by any means. This is the clear case of effect of partisan national government over the so called non-partisan district administration. Limitations on downward accountability to sub-district levels were discussed immediately above. These are compounded by other democratic deficits, notably the system of presidential appointments, inclusive of a significant proportion of Assembly members and the District Chief Executive, the most powerful individual at district level. The appointment system encourages upward accountability, given that appointees owe their position and their allegiance to central government, rather than downward accountability to the local electorate. Clearly this is a mechanism for limiting local government autonomy and maintaining central government influence.

Financial Challenges

In terms of fiscal decentralisation, the over-dependence of the districts on the DACF for development projects also has serious implications for designing, planning and implementing development projects. This is because the Fund is not always released on time to the District Assemblies and this affects project implementation.

Policy Shifts

For effective local level development-oriented decentralisation, it is very important that the District Assemblies are given greater autonomy in the long run. This policy shift will ensure that the anticipated benefits of the approach do not become an illusion. Specifically;

- (i) Central Government should end its direct participation in the financial resource allocation decisions by the District Assemblies in functions devolved to the districts. The decision to use the DACF by DAs should be limited only by broad national policy guidelines, the general legal framework, the financial, human and material resources they possess, and the physical and cultural environment within which they operate.
- (i) The institutional framework for decentralization in Ghana has created problems for the effective realization of the benefits of instituting the DACF for development. This is because the Assemblies have limited discretionary power to decide their own expenditure patterns.

CHALLENGES OF THE SUB STRUCTURES

Like any new concept the new planning process is beset with a number of problems. These problems may be due to financial constraints, political influences, lack of knowledge, apathy, staffing problems and the scarcity of logistics in the implementation process. These difficulties are discussed at the various levels of local governance.

Challenges at the Area Council Level

The woes and inefficiencies of the Unit Committee are probably due to defunct Area Councils. As stated earlier, the Area Councils are expected to serve as the link between the Unit Committees and the General Assembly. They are also to coordinate the activities of a number of Unit Committees within a specified jurisdiction so that the general planning of the Area in question would be harmonised.

It is encouraging however that the Ministry of Local Government has indicated its intention to finance the Councils. This has however not materialised.

There are instances in the Northern Region where these structures have been converted to residential units. This has implications for the operation of the ACs.

Many Town/Area Councils are inactive. For example, in Kworli Area Council in Zabzugu-Tatale district, Assemblypersons were elected in 2002. However, the Area Council has not been constituted by the DA and for this reason, the AC has not met since 2002. It has only a secretary, no chairperson, and the treasurer has left and joined the National Health Insurance Service (NHIS).

EMERGING QUESTIONS

1. The first question is whether the non-partisan local politics within today's complex society is realistic and sustainable.
2. Should the President continue to appoint District Chief Executives (DCEs) and 30 per cent of the members of the DAs?
3. Why should not the DAs hire and fire staff when necessary?
4. Again, what role should the traditional authorities play at the local government since they serve as local spiritual and moral authorities.
5. What level of participation should the system exist between DAs on one side and the traditional authorities and the civil society organizations on the other side.