

Rethinking Three Decades Of Decentralisation In Ghana's Local Government Administration Under The Fourth Republic

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to investigate the successes and challenges facing Ghana's decentralisation programme. Within the thirty years of the implementation of decentralisation in Ghana, there have been some major changes, successes, and challenges that are worth investigating to determine whether successive governments in the Fourth Republic have made significant progress in the three decades or whether there is a need to do more to strengthen the country's decentralisation programme. The study examined different decentralisation literature to assess the performance of the country's decentralisation programme. The methodology used is based on the qualitative approach and the descriptive method. Our findings show that regardless of the in-roads made since in the thirty years Ghana's decentralisation programme, a myriad of challenges make its implementation complex, and its full potential impact on citizens and the local communities not realized. The significance of the study is that the outlined challenges and recommendations will inform national policy makers and the local government administrators to take Ghana's decentralisation reforms a step further towards realizing the ultimate goals of the programme. This study further contributes toward academic discussions on decentraliaation in Ghana and Africa in general.

Key words: Decentralisation; Ghana's Fourth Republic; Local Government Administration; Three Decades.

INTRODUCTION

One of the most striking global developments during the last two decades of the 20th Century was the significant shift in the authority of national governments to decentralised local governments. This led to substantial reduction in the scope of centralised administration in Ghana and many African countries. Following the introduction of economic and administrative reforms in the 1980s, and as a prelude to the 1992 democratic transition was the introduction of decentralisation of Ghana's local government system. Decentralisation is a broad term, which occurs in many forms and has many definitions. Edge & Lekorwe (1998), define decentralisation as the transfer of authority or responsibility for decision making, planning, management, and resource allocation from the central government to the local governments and its field units, district administrative units, regional or functional authority, semi-autonomous public organisations, parastatal organisations, private entities, and non-governmental or voluntary organisations. It is also the

process of transferring autonomy and assigning decision making authority from higher levels to lower levels of an organisational or administrative hierarchy. In terms of governance at the societal level, it involves giving power to local governments to exercise some level of political, administrative, fiscal and economic autonomy, which include the involvement of citizens in decision-making through consultation, participation and empowerment.

From the managerialism and new public management perspectives, decentralisation involves disaggregating and downsizing of public services. Ahwoi (2010), also defines decentralisation as the transfer of functions and powers, skills, competence, means and resources from the central government to local government authorities. Another contemporary definition by the World Bank (1988), defines decentralisation as the assignment of fiscal, political administrative responsibilities to lower levels of government. In line with the World Bank's definition, the United Nations Development Programme (1998), perceived decentralising governance as the restructuring or re-organisation of authority to create a system of co-responsibility between institutions of governance at the central, regional and local levels according to the principle of subsidiarity, thus increasing the overall quality and effectiveness of the system of governance, while increasing the authority and capacities of sub-national levels. From the above definitions, we can summarise the definition of decentralisation as promoting good governance, such as increasing citizens' opportunities for participation in economic, social and political decisions, developing their capacities, enhancing government responsiveness through transparent and accountable governance, empowerment of government institutions and agencies and interacting with civil society for effective governance at the local level. These could shape public affairs and help citizens articulate their interests, mediate their differences and exercise their political, economic and social rights.

HISTORY OF DECENTRALISATION IN GHANA

As noted earlier, decentralisation is a complex multifaceted concept. Countries' decentralisation policies may differ based on the system of government or governance model, and the fundamental political structure of a country that is, democracy or authoritarian, federal or unitary, and presidential or parliamentary, could determine its model of decentralisation. As Smoke (2001), noted decentralisation reforms can take place in democratic and authoritarian regimes. The difference between them lies in the purpose for which decentralisation is promoted and the features that each regime is likely to favour. For example, undemocratic regimes may prefer certain forms of administrative decentralisation that allow improving service delivery while at the same time keeping strong central control. Different constitutions in many countries deal with issues such as constitutional protection, promotion and improvement of democracy and accountability, defining the concept and scope of local self-government, protection of local authorities' boundaries, redistribution of logistics and financial resources, conditions for an effective exercise of powers, effective administrative management and supervision, right of association and legal protection.

In Ghana, local governments were introduced during the period of colonisation to manage and develop the local communities, which was continued in the post-colonial era. It is imperative to note that following Ghana's independence in 1957, various attempts have been made by successive governments under the four republics under the 1957, 1969, 1979 and the 1992 Constitutions to establish decentralised administrative structures in Ghana's local government system in order to complement the centralized system of governance, and augment efficiency and effectiveness in the local government system. It was also intended to relieve the central government of its

administrative and financial burden. The advancement of local government has since been associated with the following:

- The Municipal Ordinance of 1859 which established municipalities in the coastal towns of the country, such as Cape Coast and Accra consisted of bodies whose members were nominated.
- A new ordinance in 1943 setting up elected town councils for Accra, Kumasi, Sekondi-Takoradi and Cape Coast.
- The passing of the Municipal Councils Ordinance in 1953.
- The passing of the Local Government Act, Act 54 of 1961 after independence. The Local Government Act (Act 54), enshrined in the 1961 constitution, was geared towards decentralising the local government.

For the purpose of this study, the discussion will focus on the decentralisation programme that was introduced prior to the 1992 constitution under the current Fourth Republic. In 1987/88, a new form of decentralisation was introduced in Ghana under Rawlings' Provisional National Defense Council (PNDC) military government to transfer some of the functions, powers, responsibilities and resources of the central government to the local governments. The PNDC government's concept of decentralisation was more based on political and administrative decentralisation. The decentralisation policy was intended to boost the capacity of local government authorities to enable them plan, initiate, coordinate, manage and execute policies to address issues affecting the local people more effectively at the grassroots level to enhance what the government termed as "grassroots participation" in decision-making processes. The objectives of decentralising sub-national governments are laid out in Chapter 20 of Ghana's 1992 Constitution.

Article 35 of the 1992 Constitution states that the state shall make democracy a reality by decentralising the administrative and functional machinery of government to regions and districts. The independent role of the local governments with discretionary powers at the grassroots level was also enacted under article 240(b), which recommends measures to be taken to boost the capacity of local government authorities to plan, initiate, coordinate, manage and execute policies with regards to matters affecting the local people. Article 240 (Acts 1 and 2e), further states that the country's local government administration be decentralised as far as practicable and that the functions, powers, responsibilities and resources be transferred from the central government to the local government. With respect to the principle of participation and accountability, article 240 (2e) clearly states that to ensure accountability of local government authorities, people in the various local government areas shall as far as practicable offer opportunities to the people to participate effectively in decision-making at every level in national life and governance. Other legal instruments that seek to strengthen Ghana's administrative and fiscal decentralisation policies include:

- Local Government Act, 1993 (Act 462),
- Local Government Service Act, 2003 (Act 656),
- National Development Planning (Systems Act) 1994 (Act 480),
- District Assemblies Common Fund Act, 2003 (Act 455),
- Public Procurement Act, 2003 (Act 663),
- Audit Service Act, 2000 (Act 584),
- Internal Audit Agency Act, 2003 (Act 658),
- Financial Administration Act, 2003 (Act 654),

- Financial Administration Regulations, 2004 (LI 1802).

It is worth noting that besides Ghana's constitutional provisions facilitating its decentralisation programme, the influence of international organisations and regional bodies such as the International Monetary Fund and World Bank conditionalities and policies greatly contributed towards the enactment of Ghana's decentralisation policies. Besides, Ghana's commitment to regional treaties endorsed by the government across the African continent such as the African Union; the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS); the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA); the Victoria Falls Declaration (1999) on African Vision on Decentralisation; the Kigali Declaration (2005) on Leadership Capacity Building for Decentralized Governance and Poverty Reduction in Sub-Saharan Africa; the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD); and commitments under the Commonwealth Local Governance Forum declarations/affirmations (Ghana, 2010), also compelled the government to promote decentralisation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In reviewing the literature on decentralisation, different schools of thought are examined as yardstick for measuring the success, or otherwise of Ghana's decentralisation reforms. In the literature on public sector reform, Awortwi and Siteo (2006), argue that the administrative changes involve a shift from Weber's bureaucratic model of the old public administration to the new public management (NPM) with emphasis on efficiency, effectiveness, cost reduction, and value for money, and decentralisation.

Political decentralisation is analysed in terms of democratic principles of consultation, empowerment and the right to participation in decision making, and administrative decentralisation is examined in terms of the theories of managerialism and new public management (Hughes, 1998; Alford, 1993). Fiscal and economic/market aspects of decentralisation are also analyzed through the theory of federalism and neoliberalism respectively, which are in line with the rational choice view or the Tiebout model. The rational choice view or the Tiebout's theory/model on local public goods propounded in his work in 1956, focused on fiscal decentralisation, which called for a large number of municipalities, and districts to offer a unique bundle of non-rival goods and services to citizens because transfer payments from the centre to the local level expands the capacity of local government in order to provide the needed public goods and services to citizens. Therefore the allocation of power to local and regional governments in decentralised system is a way to motivate local governments to act in the interest of citizens, and eliminate accountability deficit common with centralised systems of government.

Tiebout's theory also attempted to find a market type of decentralisation and is premised on the fact that citizens' preferences or choices of public goods can be captured through a competitive market of local governance. Fiscal decentralisation is also expected to meet citizens' preferences and increase allocative efficiency by providing goods and services that best satisfies citizens' needs and shift the balance of power towards citizen-centred leadership. Another view expressed by Tiebout is that decentralisation can reduce rural urban migration by predicting that differences in service provision and tax rates across regions would lead to citizen's migration to urban areas.

Another influential contribution to decentralisation and federalism is Oates' theory (1972, 1985, 1999 & 2005). In his works, Oates argued that decentralisation occurred in response to the growing

legitimacy and popularity of sub-national governments in the 1980s and 1990s to solve the trade-off between centralised and decentralised provision of public goods since decentralised provision maximizes social welfare. While centralisation provides uniform provision of public goods, Tiebout's model hinges on the assumption that governments desire to maximize social welfare to promote local government efficiency and effectiveness. Whereas Oates and Tiebout offer a theoretical framework in which fiscal decentralisation can guarantee an efficient provision of public goods because local preferences are better satisfied than in centralised systems of government, the Leviathan hypothesis is based on opposite assumption whereby decentralisation is a means to reduce government size in order to stem its inefficient behaviour. This view reinforces the neoliberal view as indicated in the rational choice perspective of fiscal decentralisation advocated by Brenman and Buchanan (1980).

The authors also used the leviathan hypothesis, where they described fiscal decentralisation as a mechanism for constraining the expansionary tendencies of central governments. Under this approach, central governments do not maximize social welfare, but operate like monopolies (or leviathans) in order to increase their control over the economy's resources. Thus, splitting the central government responsibilities into many local governments and introducing fiscal competition among them through a decentralised fiscal system could empower them to meet the needs of citizens more effectively than the central governments. Smoke (2001), also identified critical concerns on fiscal decentralisation and argued that assigned revenues are almost never adequate to meet local expenditure requirements in most developing countries as revenues from most local governments are unable to cover the needed expenditure. The principal-agent theory of decentralisation also argue that in centralised systems, the central government acts as principals and agents simultaneously in the network of governmental coordination and argues that the central government should be the agent of the principal.

That is, the local governments must be the agents of the people or the actual principals. This principal-agent dilemma consists in devising a set of rules like incentives and disincentives that ensure that the agent (government) follows the rules in intergovernmental relations and acts on behalf of, and in accordance with the interests and preferences of the principals or citizens through the local government bodies. The divergent views on decentralisation demonstrate the fact that whereas the normative theories and the principle of subsidiarity argue that public services should be provided at the lowest level of government that can do so efficiently, the sequential theory looks at the effect decentralisation has on intergovernmental balance of power, the relations between central and local governments in terms of self-government and local self-determination, checks and balances and separation of powers.

RESEARCH METHOD

The research design is based on the qualitative study method, and a combination of primary data and secondary data. Primary data was collected and interpreted through interviews and the administration of questions. Secondary data was also gathered from facts on Ghana's decentralisation programme from the government's published records and reports. The study also used the descriptive survey. According to Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill (2019), descriptive study design portrays an accurate profile of persons, events or situation, and directed towards determining the nature of a situation as it exists at the time of the study and provide an understanding of a phenomenon. In this case, the study is able to portray the political and socio-

economic impact of Ghana's decentralisation programme and its challenges. A research population entails the collection of all the possible elements of interest or items with the characteristic one wish to understand. As Creswell (2013), noted a study population is a group of individuals with some common defining characteristic that the research can identify and study. For the purpose of this study, the population used includes public officials, organisations and citizens within selected regions in Ghana.

Choosing a sample size is an important feature of any empirical study in which the goal is to make inferences about a population. A sample refers to a set of people or objects chosen from a larger population in order to represent that population, and sample size determination is the act of choosing the number of participants in the research. It is determined based on the expense of data collection, and the need to have sufficient statistical power (Forson and Morgan, 2008). As a fair representation, the study used a sample size of two hundred and eighty eight (288) respondents consisting one hundred (100) Metropolitan, Municipal and District Chief Executives (MMDCEs) from the Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies (MMDAs), twenty officials from the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development, and thirty (30), fifty (50) members of the Central, Greater Accra and Western Regional Coordinating Councils and one hundred (100) opinion leaders in selected communities across the country. Sampling procedures used involved all the methods in sampling respondents from the selected population. The purposive sampling techniques was the most appropriate to select the participants in order to achieve objective and broad-based responses. With respect to the community leaders, to eliminate biases, random sampling technique was considered, which gave a fair chance to all the respondents.

The survey method was used in collecting data from respondents, which is a method of data collection where information is gathered through questionnaires and interviews as major instruments to elicit information from the respondents. A combination of individual and focused group interviews were used to gather information from participants, with structured and unstructured interviews consisting of open-ended and closed-ended questions. However, the administration of questionnaires was another research instrument used to gather data for this study, which made the respondents easily accessible to the researcher. As Punch (2000), noted questionnaire is regarded as a series of questions, each one providing a number of alternative answers from which the respondents can choose. A series of structured and semi-structured questionnaire based on open-ended and close-ended questions were employed to obtain information from the respondents. This offered sufficient flexibility to approach different respondents differently while still covering the same areas of data collection. The Likert scale was used in both the interviews and questionnaires. Questions were outlined from one to five, where one represents the lowest score and five represents the highest score based on strongly agree -5, agree-4, somewhat agree or indifferent -3, disagree -2 and strongly disagree-1.

Completed questionnaires from the fieldwork was edited and coded appropriately to make effective meaning out of the data. Editing was done to correct errors, check for nonresponses, accuracy and correct answers. Coding was also done to facilitate comprehensive analysis of the data. The use of computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) helped the study in research management, data organisation, data exploration, coding and retrieval of data as well as searching and interrogation. The study also followed ethical guidelines and full disclosure of the purpose of the study, and by ensuring the confidentiality and anonymity of all participants.

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Key changes in Ghana's decentralisation programme

The main focus of Ghana's decentralisation system is to create opportunities for citizens to participate in local governance and to enhance social and economic development at the local level. In its thirty-one years of implementation, the decentralisation of the local government system in Ghana have witnessed a lot of changes. The foundation to Ghana's decentralisation policy as stated in Act 462 of the 1992 Constitution focuses on six main aspects of decentralisation. These are political, administrative, planning and programme implementation, management of public/private partnerships, economic/market and fiscal decentralisation. Most of these policy aspects of Ghana's decentralisation programme have made tremendous strides in promoting efficient and effective service delivery in the MMDAs over the years. For the purpose of this study, and in line with Ahwoi's (2010) view, we have compressed the six aspects into four main concepts namely, political, administrative, fiscal and market or economic decentralisation. Drawing distinctions between these concepts is useful for highlighting the many dimensions to successful decentralisation as discussed below:

Administrative decentralisation

One important manifestation of these reforms is the administrative decentralisation of government functions. This is a set of policies that creates or transfers local bureaucratic procedures and functions from the central government (CG) to the local governments (LGs). The bureaucratic procedures relate to laws and regulations governing the local administrations, while functional areas fall under planning and delivery of services. One major aim of Ghana's administrative decentralisation policies was to enhance performance at the local level, which involved changing the culture of government employees to provide an efficient and effective service delivery system. Some key changes that have been implemented in Ghana's administrative decentralisation are as follows: In 1987/88, the then local councils were further decentralised into MMDAs and given additional responsibilities and powers, with the creation of the Regional Consultative Councils in all the regional capitals. In December 2009, the Minister of Local Government released the local government instruments, which is a legislation that outlines the new rules and responsibilities for local governments. The legal instrument lists the administrative areas that are to become the responsibilities of MMDAs. Other changes introduced include facilitating the restructuring of the public administration system for effective local governance; provision of physical infrastructure for the newly established District Assemblies; and strengthening the Institute of Local Government Studies (ILGS) to perform its statutory role of training practitioners and policy makers at the local government level.

The three major forms of administrative decentralisation implemented in Ghana, which are also termed as the modes of decentralisation are delegation, de-concentration, and devolution, but each of these has unique characteristics. Some of the key changes implemented under administrative decentralisation are the institutionalisation of a fused system of public administration by integrating the local government systems with the central government district administration system; and the establishment of structures and mechanisms to enhance probity, accountability and transparency in public administration at all levels of government; as well as the introduction of a decentralised planning system. Through delegation, the central government was able to transfer responsibility for decision-making and administration of public functions to semi-autonomous bodies such as public enterprises, public corporations, housing authorities, transportation

authorities, semi-autonomous school districts, regional development corporations etc. with a great deal of discretion in decision-making. Though not wholly controlled by the central government, but they are still ultimately accountable to it.

The government has also implemented devolution policies by transferring some authority for decision-making, finance, and management to quasi-autonomous units of local government with corporate status. The devolution policies also include transferring responsibilities for service to the MMDAs that elect their own assembly members, raise their own revenues, and have independent authority to make some investment decisions. The government's deconcentration policy has also led to the transfer of some functions, powers and resources to local governments and shifted responsibilities from central government to local governments, although without full autonomy for the local governments. It is often considered to be the weakest form of Ghana's administrative decentralisation since it creates local administrative capacity under the supervision of central government ministries. This type of administrative deconcentration is used most frequently in unitary states to redistribute decision-making authority and financial and management responsibilities among different levels of the central government.

Fiscal decentralisation

Fiscal decentralisation is the distribution of public finance and responsibilities to the various levels of government, and constitutes one of the key components of Ghana's decentralisation programme. Since financial responsibility is a core component of any decentralisation programme, fiscal decentralisation has been supported by the international financial institutions (IFIs), namely the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank and other global governance bodies such as the United Nations in the last three decades. It is for this reason that Ghana has also made great strides in its fiscal decentralisation policies under the guidance of the IFIs. In terms of making financial resources available to the district assemblies, a legislative instrument enacted in 1993, introducing the constitutionally binding transfer payments from the central government to the local governments in the form of the District Assemblies Common Fund (DACF) as a major instrument for income redistribution. Under this enactment, not less than 5 per cent of the total central government revenues are made available to the district assemblies for local development. As Kazentet, (2011), noted decentralisation and for that matter fiscal decentralisation has a strong legal environment that seek to promote and ensure its success over the years. Ghana's fiscal decentralisation has widened the number of areas where MMDAs can tax, and formally increased DACF transfers from at least 5% of total revenues to at least 7.5%, and reduced the amount of conditionality to those transfers. Such changes have increased the level of discretionary revenues for the MMDAs.

Other fiscal changes introduced include the implementation of the district composite budgeting system, which facilitates revenue assignments so that the composition of revenues depends on the type of expenditure assignments at each level of government and the implementation of the inter-governmental fiscal framework. Fiscal decentralisation has provided a framework which facilitates and stimulates local sustainable development throughout all regions of the country. Fiscal decentralisation has also reversed current practice which extracts resources from the periphery and concentrates these at the centre. Thus, to enhance or stimulate the local economies, local governments receive royalties and taxes from their resources for their development initiatives. More functions are now performed at the local level, thereby creating opportunities for the locals

with technical, managerial and leadership skills to remain in the regions, municipalities and districts. This policy has to a greater extent, reduced the pace of rural/urban migration, and enhanced the local capacity to manage local development. Other key aspects of Ghana's fiscal decentralisation implemented include the empowerment of MMDAs as legislative, administrative, development planning, service delivery, budgeting and rating authorities; transfer of responsibility for statutory functions of the state to local government bodies; restructuring of resource allocation and the establishment of a resource-sharing mechanism between central and local governments; capacity building programmes for local governments using district assemblies as vehicles for implementation of district focused, externally funded credit projects; and downsizing of local government administrative staff to reduce staff, and the government's financial burden from spending on salaries and benefits.

Political decentralisation

Political decentralisation is the set of constitutional amendments and electoral reforms designed to open new or activate existing, but ineffective political spaces for local governments and citizens at the grassroots level. Some key features of Ghana's political decentralisation implemented in Ghana include the establishment of human resource directorates, the hiring of qualified human resource managers at the municipal and district assemblies to direct its strategic planning and implementation for human resource development to meet their manpower requirements. The decentralisation programme has also facilitated greater popular participation in governance, because it has brought government closer to the people, and thus enabled citizens to be better informed and to better understand the conduct of public business. This facilitates the forging of a strong relationship between the government representatives and the governed, and identification of the people with their government, which helps to reduce alienation from the political process. Other key features of Ghana's political decentralisation include the election of MMDAs representatives; re-demarcation of districts to create more manageable and viable local government units; the establishment of metropolitan, municipal and district assemblies (MMDAs) as non-partisan local government bodies; the establishment of sub-district councils and unit committees to create greater access to political authority; reservation of 30 per cent of the membership of MMDAs as government appointees to ensure the representation of certain local interest groups and to create access to skills and expertise; and redefinition of the roles, functions and structures of government institutions at the national, regional and local levels by making the national level responsible for policy formulation, the regional level responsible for co-ordination and the district level responsible for planning and implementation. These political decentralisation policies have enhanced local consultation, participation and empowerment at the grassroots level by giving citizens and their locally elected representatives more power in the formulation, decision-making and implementation of policies. Its policies are also designed to devolve managerial capacities to sub-national units and actors. Such autonomy maybe enshrined in a country's constitution or be legislated. Local governments in Ghana have clear and legally recognised geographical boundaries over which they exercise authority and within which they perform public functions.

Economic or market decentralisation

In a decentralised participatory system, citizens can influence decisions about service provision through mechanisms, which enable them to indicate the type, level, quality and mix of services they desire, and the cost they are willing to pay for such services. This constitutes a type of market

mechanism for determining service provision in a manner which responds to the wishes of citizens, and is sensitive to their willingness/ability to pay. The implementation of market decentralisation policies has optimised citizen satisfaction and created an excellent mechanism for reconciling citizens' expectations to the resources available and/or the price which they are prepared to pay for the services desired. Policies implemented in the market or economic decentralisation also involve the privatisation and contracting out of public services to the private sector at the local level; the introduction of public/private partnerships at the local level; and divestiture of state-owned enterprises in some local communities. These political, administrative, fiscal and market decentralisation initiatives have greatly contributed towards increasing efficiency and effectiveness in service provision/delivery in the MMDAs.

SOME MAJOR CHALLENGES FACING GHANA'S DECENTRALISATION PROGRAMME

The scope for effective and accountable decentralised governance varies greatly between countries, depending on the historical, economic and political conditions. Like many countries in the developing world, Ghana's decentralisation programme faces a number of challenges. Critics such as Crook and Sverrisson (2001), identified the length of time that decentralisation reforms must be implemented as one of the factors influencing the performance of a decentralised system. Among the identified challenges are:

Appointment of MMDCEs by the president

For political decentralisation to move beyond its piecemeal reforms, a set of constitutional amendments, legal instruments, and electoral reforms must be designed to open new or reactivate existing, but dormant spaces for representation of the local government politics. It is imperative to implement the 2010 Constitutional Review for democratic and governance reforms. One of the major challenges to Ghana's ongoing political decentralisation programme is the appointment of MMDCEs by the president rather than allowing the local communities more autonomy to choose their leaders. For the decentralisation programme to fully realize its potential in terms of self-governance, the central government must give up its role in the appointment of MMDCEs. This will make the local leaders more accountable and responsible to the people. Ironically, while 216 (81.94%) of respondent mainly citizens in selected communities were in support of the election of MMDCEs, just 96 (33.33%) of MMDCEs were in favour of the idea and regard the local election process as waste of resources. Despite promises from successive presidents since the 1992 democratic transition, there has been no eminent action and it is unlikely that there will be any action on this more contentious aspect of Ghana's decentralisation programme. These reforms could result in:

- enabling of citizens to elect their MMDCEs instead of appointment of mayors and district/municipal chief executives;
- empowering local assemblies to make laws and authorize the use of budgeted finance by executives; and
- ensuring autonomy of local assemblies to hire senior administrative staff to manage the local government and fire local bureaucrats without any central government interference.

Lack of financial resources

Local governments in Ghana have limited local taxing powers from which to finance the services and other responsibilities assigned to them. As a result, service levels fall far short of what is

required. Local revenues are often limited to a few visible taxes that are difficult and expensive to collect, inequitable in impact and economically distorting. Whilst major urban centres may be able to generate significant revenues from property taxes and levies on businesses, in rural areas there may be little to tax. As Fjeldstad, (2001), noted increased local revenue mobilisation often involves coercive extraction from the poor. As a result, many local governments depend heavily on transfers from the centre, which are often allocated in inequitable and non-transparent ways. In this study, 264 (91.67%) respondents were of the view that the central government must provide adequate funds to the local governments. Furthermore, 154 (53.47%) respondents consisting of MMDCEs MPs and local government staff blamed lack of resources for their inability to meet their communities' needs appropriately. Transfer payments from the central government is often delayed and key revenues from resources and taxes from the local government go to central government chest before disbursement of funds to the MMDAs.

Lack of effective leadership, weak institutional capacity and constrained role of sub-national governments

Typically, the performance and accountability of sub-national or local governments are constrained by a number of factors such as weak institutional capacity and limited availability of information. The lack of capacity and systems to strengthen Ghana's decentralisation programme and the power of the central government and local elite interests are some of the major obstacles to the sustainability and success of the decentralisation programme. In this research, 170 (59.03%) of respondents complained about poor leadership at the local government level as some of the local government's policies lack proper direction, service delivery is lacking or slow to deliver at best, and often do not address the needs of the local people adequately. In addition, decision-making processes are unsystematic, mechanisms of accountability between officials and elected representatives are inadequate, and there is a shortage of officials with the necessary technical, managerial and financial skills.

Corruption, abuse of power, conflict of interest and partisanship at the central and local government levels

The study found out that abuse of power, conflict of interest, corruption and bribery are prevalent in all the MDAs and MMDAs and at all levels of Ghana's public sector especially, in contract allocation, use of resources, hiring, etc. For example, Ghana scored only 41 points out of 100 on the 2019 Corruption Perceptions Index reported by the Transparency International. Corruption is prevalent in the police, judicial system, public utility service agencies, public procurement, natural resources sector, legislation, tax administration, land administration, customs administration and even among civil society. Public administrators at all levels are perceived as corrupt since bribes and irregular payments are often exchanged in return for public service contracts. Kaufmann and Gray (1998), argued that among the most commonly mentioned factors that influence the development of corruption are: political and economic environment, professional ethics and legislation, as well as purely ethnological factors, such as customs, habits and traditions Very low wages also mean that staff are preoccupied with searching for other income opportunities, often through corrupt means. Corruption destroys the legitimacy of the state and local governments, thus weakening their ability to increase revenue and provide enough public goods and services, including promoting democratic principles, human rights and the rule of law in the society. Corruption and bribery at both the local and national levels of government increases transaction costs and leads to ineffective economic results, foreign and domestic investments, distorts sectorial

priorities and technology choices. It also places heavy burdens on commercial and service activities performed by small and medium-scale enterprises. The partisan nature of Ghana's national and local governments promotes a winner-takes-all attitude both at the central government level and the MMDAs. As a result, members and supporters of opposition parties are often excluded from participating in key governance decision making processes at both national and the local levels. In terms of power relations and partisanship, 118 (40.97%) of respondents admitted that Ghana's unitary state system promotes unequal power relations and partisanship at the local government level, which is a bane to Ghana's democracy and decentralisation programme thus affecting its national and local development.

Accountability challenges, lack of access to information and civic participation

Accountability, both of officials to elected representatives and of elected local governments to citizens, requires effective systems of accounting and auditing that create trust in the information about how much resources are collected and how resources have been used. Leaders are less accountable to citizens and do not to check the details of the use of resources. Accounting systems are often extremely weak in local government and are open to all manner of disputes. 164 (56.8%) respondents mostly MMDAs officials noted that annual accounts are often finalized long after the end of the financial year, but very often, the central government rarely have the capacity to perform comprehensive external audits on all local governments. Strengthening accountability also depends on information being available to citizens, in a sufficiently comprehensible form, about how resources are being used (Goetz, 2001). Accountability, participation and access to information are relatively difficult without the passing of the Freedom of Access to Information Act. It also creates the following problems:

- the costs and practical difficulties of obtaining information from remote localities, and the lack of central resources to undertake this;
- information asymmetries, which make it difficult for central officials to really know the position at the local level, since reports from local officials may not reveal the true situation;
- the capacity of the centre to interpret correctly the information it receives, and thereby to know whether the situation is satisfactory or not
- incentives for local officials to manipulate data to show what the centre wants or to indicate that central conditions have been met; including perverse incentives, such as claiming exaggerated levels of school enrolment in order to increase grant allocations;
- rent-seeking behaviour by central officials, including auditors charged with verifying data, such that sometimes even "verified" information cannot be relied on.
- There is also inadequate accounting and accountability mechanisms to ensure accountability of local officials.

Power relationships and lack of autonomy from the central government

Regardless of the fact that Ghana's decentralisation programme spans over three decades, the local government authorities and institutions are controlled by, and subordinated to the central government, thus all key decisions emanate from the central government. Building institutional capacity at the local government level takes time to develop and require consistent support from the center, which is often lacking. Unlike in federal government systems, Ghana's decentralisation is influenced by its unitary system, hence there is lack of autonomy and independence from the central government, especially in the election of key local representatives in decision making,

raising of funds, allocation of resources and project implementation. These challenges have contributed towards crippling the decentralisation programme from successfully growing at a fast pace. In this set-up, local agencies of the central government are not body corporate; the employees are staff of the central government and under the central-level agency's direction and control, even though they work at the local level. As Crook and Manor (1998), noted administrative decentralisation may be in the form of deconcentration where sub-offices are established in various localities, local officials have some level of decision-making power, and delegation where local officials may be empowered to take certain decisions or have minor decision-making powers. Since the administrative power of local governments is limited, although the Local Government Service Act places many civil servants in the Local Government Service, at the moment, this is still a central government agency, and is part of the Ministry of Local Government. In addition, it excludes the majority of local-level civil servants, such as teachers, police, and judicial officials at the local level who still remain employees of the central government ministries.

Issues with transfer payments – District Assemblies Common Fund (DACF) and internally generated funds (IGFs)

The financing of local governments represents one of the core challenges for decentralisation in Ghana. Decentralised functions and responsibilities are often not fully accompanied by transfer of financial resources, leading to a situation where implementation of the District Development Plans are sometimes partial and unsystematic in many areas. In spite of the fact that most of the local revenues go to the central government, payment of the DACF is often unduly delayed, and sometimes politicized. In this study, 184 (63.88%) respondents affirmed that the DACF allocations are often delayed both at the central and local government levels. Many MPs who do not have good relations with the MMDCEs or are from opposition parties find it difficult to receive their disbursed funds from the MMDCEs with the motive of crippling their political careers. This power struggle also affect development in the local communities. Fiscal decentralisation requires high citizen participation in decision-making, but this is a challenge in Ghana since many MMDAs are unable to implement the participatory budgeting system, which is a key component of fiscal decentralisation.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVING GHANA'S DECENTRALISATION PROGRAMME

Having considered some of the challenges to decentralisation in Ghana, there is a need to consider ways of improving them. Based on the findings, the following recommendations are offered:

- In designing and implementing decentralisation policies, some critical questions must be addressed such as; to what extent will the decentralisation policies be implemented? What responsibilities are to be decentralised? Who is to assign power? What are the roles and responsibilities of both central and local governments? And what measures are set in place to check accountability and responsibility of local government officials? These questions show the divergent views on decentralisation in terms of issues such as purpose, responsibility and accountability for determining its relevance, effectiveness and efficiency in service delivery as well as in intergovernmental relations.
- The election of MMDCEs is key to the success of Ghana's decentralisation programme. This will promote accountability and responsibility to the local people. It is also important to address the power relations and informal networks of patronage at the local level that can undermine local accountability.

- There is a need to design robust systems of central monitoring systems and the dissemination of information that are capable of effective implementation in fragile situations. Developing effective institutions to strengthen local governance with new instruments to promote local accountability is paramount.
- Creating an enabling environment for fiscal decentralisation can begin with constitutional or legal mandates with some level of autonomy, rights and responsibilities for local governments. As Smoke (2001), noted key elements that should be included in a good decentralisation programme are: an adequate enabling environment; assignment of an appropriate set of functions to local governments; assignment of an appropriate set of locally owned-source revenues to local governments; the establishment of an adequate intergovernmental fiscal transfer system; and the establishment of adequate access of local governments to development capital. These steps, if well-implemented will help to make Ghana's decentralisation programme more effective and efficient.
- An equitable fiscal decentralisation policies must be implemented in Ghana to bridge the gap between rich and poor MMDAs. Since many local communities are unable to generate adequate funds for development, for the purpose of equity, less endowed districts with high populations must be given more support from the central government.
- For decentralised units to carry out their responsibilities effectively, they need to be financially sound by having adequate level of revenues either raised locally from internally generated funds (IGFs) and/or transferred from the central government with autonomy to make decisions about expenditures, regardless of where the source of the revenue.
- Introducing further decentralisation reforms will facilitate inter-governmental relations and set out the general framework for improving central-local relations to help subnational governments to bargain their discretionary powers.

CONCLUSION

While it is apparent that Ghana's decentralisation programme has provided new opportunities at the local level, there are existing challenges, especially in the fight against corruption and lack of local self-autonomy. The paper concludes with the view that in the four typologies of decentralisation presented above on Ghana's decentralisation programme, political decentralisation is the strongest and administrative deconcentration represents the weakest form of decentralisation because it provides the fewest direct links between decision makers and the local population. If the organisational capacity of the local bureaucracy is not improved, with matching transfer of funds and empowerment of local governments to make and implement decisions, the degree of local governments' autonomy will continue to be constrained and the goals of Ghana's decentralisation programme will not be realised. In deducing from the identified challenges facing Ghana's decentralisation programme and the recommended suggestions offered to both the central and local governments, the paper argues that it would be more prudent to carry out a comparative research on decentralisation programmes introduced in countries within the sub-region and/or other parts of the African continent in the near future to determine their successes and identify any challenges facing them to help address them more appropriately so that both the central and local governments can meet the needs of the people more efficiently and effectively.

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