

*Review*

# Public administration: Local government and decentralization in Ghana

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**Public administration as an art is defined in the Ghanaian context regarding decentralization and public officials' accountability. It examines decentralization, local elections and empowerment. While the paper advocates for regional and district level elections, it uses the literature to argue that local representatives are more accessible to their locals. It questions the current appointment practices by the central government, which has become more partisan than originally intended in the Local Government Act. To affirm the democratic environment of politics in Ghana, it calls for constitutional amendment regarding decentralization and local government elections.**

**Key words:** Public administration, decentralization, public officials, accountability, local government elections.

## INTRODUCTION

As the first sub-Saharan African country to attain political independence since 1957 from Great Britain, the Ghanaian proclivity for experimentation on issues including social, economic and political initiatives, according to Pellow and Chazan (1986) and Ayee (2008), has turned the country "into a veritable laboratory for the investigation of different approaches to endemic African problems" (Pellow and Chazan, 1986: 210). One of these problems is local participation in political decision making in the country's democratic process (Antwi-Boasiako and Bonna, 2009).

Local accountability becomes effective where local leaders are elected by their own people hence the importance of decentralization. "Ghana's decentralization policy from 1988 to date combines elements of political, administrative and fiscal decentralization," among other things that seek to promote effective governance at the local level (Ayee, 2008: 234).

This paper provides an overview of theoretical considerations and ambiguity underlying the argument for decentralization followed by a brief history of Ghana's political system. It then addresses the issues of effective public administrators (leaders) and decentralization. It concludes by making a case for local government elections in the various electoral constituencies: districts and regions, while recommendations are made for constitutional amendments to allow locals to elect their own public officials. To understand the role of public

officials in the Ghanaian political environment, an attempt is made here to define public administration.

## DEFINING PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION IN GHANA

The Ghanaian political heads of state, from the first president, Kwame Nkrumah (1957) to John Evans Atta-Mills (2009) have different leadership skills that affirm the diverse administrative styles of public administrators. This non-surprisingly diverse nature in public administration is normative in its definition focusing mainly on public interest (King and Chilton, 2009). Each one of the leaders, including those not mentioned in this paper, has had his fair share of public criticisms of maladministration given their administrative styles, yet all of them are more likely to vow that their actions were in the interest of the public. Ghana, a country of only 54 years of political freedom, gaining political independence from the British colonial rule, has had four different constitutions; however, 21 out of the 54 years of the country was ruled under military decrees<sup>1</sup> leaving only 33 years of constitutional administration in Ghana.

The literature on public administration and its definition has different interpretations of the field (Stillman, 2010;

<sup>1</sup> The first military administration in Ghana was from 1966-1969, second military administration 1972-1979, and the third and longest was from 1981-1992.

King and Chilton, 2009). Public administrators are engaged in technicalities but unfortunately, some Ghanaians, if not most of them, lack the knowledge to fully comprehend the role of public administrators. Moreover, Ghanaians are not alone as “empirical descriptions from an external perspective,” studies have shown that “no one really sees the big picture” in its definition (King and Chilton, 2009: 29, 1). One can therefore argue that a lot of the citizens do not understand the details of the legal duties of their leaders operations. In addition to budgetary preparations and job classifications, public administrators are equally concerned with the development of human resources and achieving the goals of the people.

Public administration, like any other academic discipline, is not isolated but intertwined “with the critical dilemmas confronting an entire society”. Its diverse nature makes it difficult for ordinary Ghanaians who are not part of an administration to focus on the goals of that administration if those goals are not clearly defined. Many studies including, but not limited to, King and Chilton (2009), Grover Starling (2001), McSuite (2002), William (1995), Robert (1995) and James and Donald (1996), for decades have offered different definitions of public administration (Stillman, 2010: 2 - 4). Cropf (2008: 8), citing Dwight Waldo, also agrees “no single, and authoritative definition of public administration is possible”.

For example, Grover (1998: 10) stated that public administration is the process by which resources are marshaled and then used to cope with the problems facing a political community, but David (1986: 6) sees it as “the use of managerial, political and legal theories and processes to fulfill legislative, executive and judicial governmental mandates for the provision of regulatory and service functions for the society as a whole or for some segments of it”.

Leonard (1955: 3), considered as one of the pioneers in the field, has a broader definition. He defines it as “consisting of all those operations having for their purpose the fulfillment or enforcement of public policy”. Given the complexities of leadership and public administration in Ghana, it becomes more confusing if the administration of local communities is laid only on the shoulders of the central government. The logical definition of public administration, the author argues, is derived from differing understanding of sagacity or different premises. To the Ghanaians, despite how ill-defined the field is, public administration must be seen in the areas including transparency, accountability and decentralization.

Public administration should be a collective effort to manage the human resources for effective implementation of public policies within the budgetary constraints of that community. It is, therefore, important that public administrators are elected to serve the people within a given community.

Drawing from the literature, public administration is the management of the scarce resources, that is, financial,

human and material of a community by elected and unelected public officials to benefit the said community, region or district. Public administration is an art, which strategically combines these resources to maximize their utilization in the interest of the citizens within a governed jurisdiction. Contrary to the scientific<sup>2</sup> argument for public administration, the field, some have argued, only provides a focus and not a locus (Henry, 1975). For public administrators to be seen as effective and productive, their area of administration must be politically and clearly defined hence the importance of decentralization.

One of the essential components of democratic societies, which has being adopted in emerging democracies is decentralization to make their administrative systems more efficient (Dillinger, 1994). In Ghana, as Aye (2008: 233) noted, since independence, succeeding governments in Ghana have preoccupied themselves with decentralization because they regarded it as a necessary condition for not only the socio-economic development of the country, but also as a way of achieving their political objectives such as the recentralization of power and legitimacy”.

The large body of scholarly literature on decentralization provides conflicting analyses on effective public administration (Faguet, 2008; Kim et al., 2005). In Ghana, politicians who advocate for decentralization are sometimes skeptical of giving or sharing power with their subordinates as the concept is either not well defined or understood in the Ghanaian context.

As Gyimah-Boadi<sup>3</sup> observed that even though local governments are given autonomy over finance, control from the central government had taken away that power from the local people. He maintains that the districts do not have the capacity to manage their finance, and even the District Assembly Common Fund is controlled by the central government. Gyimah-Boadi noted that local government policy in Ghana had brought developments since its inception in 1988, but the situation was aggravated by the total hegemony exercised by the central government.

In fact, the literature on decentralization, according to constitutional law specialists, tries to avoid the problem of confining decentralization to legal models of government relations (Cohen and Peterson, 1999: I, 19). The authors define it along the principal distinction between unitary and federal based systems like federation, confederation, unions and leagues. Decentralization, according to this

<sup>2</sup> The author strongly argues that public administration is an art and not science. This argument is not the focus of the paper and hopes to discuss this extensively in another article but for now this argument is beyond the scope of this paper. To have an idea of the scientific argument for public administration see Nicholas Henry, 1975, *Public Administration Review*. 35 (4) 378-386.

<sup>3</sup> Professor Gyimah-Boadi discussed the conflicting gains of decentralization at a symposium in 2009 in Ghana. See <http://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/artikel.php?ID=162875> Retrieved on July 25, 2010. He also noted the lack of smooth implementation of decentralization policies.

school of thought, is a community having legally specified sovereignty over the identified public sector tasks in a well-defined territorial jurisdiction (Cohen and Peterson, 1999: 19 - 22).

Ghana's political structure falls into the unitary political category, where the executive holds the power of nominating district and regional leaders. Hence, the governed in these units have no choice but to live with the selection of the executive. The practice of public administration comes in many shades as the literature struggles to identify a universal acceptable definition.

Since the Fourth Republic of Ghana (1992 - present), despite the accusations of electoral frauds by the two leading political parties (New Patriotic Party [NPP] and National Democratic Congress [NDC]) in the country, Ghana, as a country, has enjoyed five successful general elections. This feat, undeniably, makes Ghana a more politically and economically stable country compared to some of its neighbors over the same period (Callmachi, 2008).

The irony of Ghana's political system is that notwithstanding the form of government of the country (military or democratic), the role of the executive remains the same regarding the appointments of the heads of local governments. This practice, arguably, provides little or no local power to the grassroots. It therefore, minimizes the otherwise political difference between a military and democratic regime.

This paper argues for a constitutional amendment to allow a stronger local government empowerment through local government elections. It maintains that by continuing the current process where regional and district administrators are appointed by the central government, the locals are deprived of the opportunity to elect leaders of their choice. For example, the original intent of decentralization and the appointment of local public officials have given way to intense partisan politics. Gyimah-Boadi<sup>4</sup> recently admitted that the non-partisan concept of decentralization has "burbled with party politics". He further explained that 30% of the government appointees to the District Assembly, according to the Local Government Act [of 1988], should be technocrats and experts, but surveys conducted by CDD-Ghana in 2005 and 2007, revealed that most of the appointees were political activists.

Additionally, this argument "stems largely from the idea that decentralization will promote better governance as local officials are supposedly more aware of, and more responsive to, local needs" (Duncan, 2007: 713). Decentralization, as has been argued by proponents, is more likely to encourage and promote not only democracy, but also provides locals with the chance to have control

over their own governance.

## THEORETICAL UNDERSTANDING AND AMBIGUITIES OF DECENTRALIZATION

It is often easier to document and discuss the shortcomings of decentralization, public administration and governance in Ghana than in theory. There is a complex notion of subalternity pertinent to any academic enterprise, which concerns itself with historically determined relationships (Ghadi, 1998: 2) of any one concept in abstraction and its implementation. The concept of decentralization and its interpretations have become a battleground for variety of disciplines and theories. However, scholars of public administration including political analysts often discuss theoretical shortcomings and lack of development with very little incorporation of the effect of that theory or model (7 - 22). Dubin (1969:

6) argues that developing a theory must have a human experience. He posits "the need for theories lies in the human behavior of wanting to impose order on unordered experiences, which is not ordered by nature hence the experiences may be...theorized about, in very different ways".

As a solution to ease regional conflicts (Laksono and Topatimasang, 2003; Permana, 2002), decentralization is a process where central government transfers political, fiscal and administrative powers to lower levels in an administrative and territorial hierarchy (Duncan, 2007:

713). In theory, it holds regional leaders accountable to their constituents instead of the central government. Decentralization is defined in a variety of ways by the degree of delegation and autonomy of local actors (Assibey-Mensah, 2000; Fesler, 1965; Werlin, 2003), which presents conflicts and dilemmas in the concept and its impact (Faguet, 1997; Hommes, 1995). Empirical literature does not agree on the benefits of decentralization as different studies are poles apart in their conclusions. For example, while Olowu and Wunsch (1990), Putnam (1993) and World Bank (1994) argue that decentralization makes governments more responsive, Faguet (2008), Tanzi (1995), Prud'homme (1995) and Samoff (1990) think otherwise. However, the 1992 constitutional recognition for decentralization has renewed interest in political decentralization in Ghana, as locals often reject leaders appointed by the central government (Ayisi, 2008).

While economists focus on efficiency and equity, public administration scholars are also interested in the distribution of power, responsiveness, transparency, and accountability (Klingner and Nalbandian, 1998). The literature affirms that macroeconomic function must remain with the central government, suggesting that local governments must deal with program specificities for local demand. Oates (1993) analysis of over 50 countries confirmed a positive relationship between decentralization and economic growth.

<sup>4</sup> See an editorialized version of Professor Gyimah-Boadi's speech on "Reflection on Ghana's Decentralisation Programme: Progress, Stagnation or Retrogression" retrieved from <http://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/artikel.php?ID=162875> on July 19, 2010.

The theoretical argument for fiscal decentralization traces back to Madison and Rousseau, in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries (Wolman, 1990), though they had different reasons for supporting decentralization. For example, in the Federalist Papers No. 39 (FP39), Madison argues that leaders must derive their powers “directly... from the great body of the people,” which means that powerful locals and “not inconsiderable...handful of ...nobles are exercising their oppression by a delegation of their powers” (Rossiter, 1961: 241). Though decentralization is not specifically mentioned in FP39, Madison believes that the people must be given the mandate to elect their leaders as a way of “composing the distinct and independent regions, to which they respectively belong” (Rossiter, 1961: 243).

Rousseau (176: 59 - 50) also favored small government. To him, “rulers overburdened with business, see nothing for themselves: clerks govern” (1762,). Using the Poland political system, Rousseau, who advocated for a political reformation, instructed the poles to perfect and extend the authority of their provincial parliaments to avoid the dangers of larger state bureaucracies (Rousseau, 1772: 183-184). By this assertion, Rousseau was insisting on the essentials of local representation (decentralization). According to Wolman (1990), small democratic (local) governments were the fundamental hopes of the people, as most of them distrusted the activities of the central government. The debate for political decentralization is inconclusive in the literature as both proponents and opponents provide different findings in their studies (for example, Putnam, 1993; Prud’homme, 1995).

In discussing the politics of decentralization, therefore, it should be noted that the concept goes together with centralized government power. Though decentralization is primarily a strategy for transferring authority and responsibility from the central government to sub-national (regional and district) levels of government (Ostrom, 1989; Stone, 1997), many African leaders only adopt the concept in theory but fail to delegate powers to the districts and regions. Some studies maintain that the concept is not easily defined; therefore, it has several dimensions and wide variety types of institutional restructuring, which encompasses the term decentralization. Though some scholars see it as a simple term, they argue that its simplistic generalization is sometimes too broad. According to Fesler (1965:536), decentralization is a term of rich conceptual and empirical meaning, “which can designate static fact and dynamic process and it can refer to pure ideal-type and moderate incremental change” when the rational theory of decentralization is understood in all compartments.

## **DECENTRALIZATION: POLITICAL, DEVOLUTION AND DELEGATION**

For the purpose of this paper, a brief three-stage (political

decentralization, devolution and delegation) definition of decentralization is provided based on the degree of discretion and responsibility delegated by the central executive. The literature shows that developing countries have addressed decentralization in different ways, often reflecting the national history, politics and culture for administrative and economic efficiency; but more importantly is the role of district and regional leaders in focusing on the needs of their constituencies. However, the concept of the decentralization/development dichotomy has not yielded the desired results in other parts of the world (Kettl, 2000), including Ghana. This analysis defines decentralization as an electoral devolution to enable citizens at the grassroots (that is, locals) to elect their own leaders void of any direct input from the central government.

### **Political decentralization**

Political decentralization, which is manifested in the degree and types of political autonomy and accountability, is of greater importance to this study. A fully developed system of political decentralization in Ghana is a situation where local people in the districts and regions elect their own legislative and executive personnel so that those units will be able to hire, pay and dismiss administrative personnel without reference to central authority.

Political decentralization gives citizens and their elected representatives the political power in the public policy process. This form of decentralization is associated with pluralistic politics and representative government, but it can also support democratization by giving citizens or their representatives, more influence in the formulation and implementation of policies (Furniss, 1974; Harrigan, 1994) in their areas. Political decentralization often requires constitutional or statutory reforms. Such a reform may force elected officials in the constituencies to be more accountable to the electorates instead of satisfying the wishes of a distant executive. Administratively, political decentralization empowers citizens to “play a larger role in regional governance... [including] conflict resolution” (Duncan, 2007: 727). This empowerment, unfortunately, is lacking in the current political process where the executive has the exclusive power to appoint district and regional leaders. The literature affirms that political appointees are subject to the whims (Klingner and Nalbandian, 1998: 43) of the central government.

Generally, empirical studies tend to favor political decentralization over centralization in terms of innovation, leadership accountability and responsiveness (Taylor, 2003: 231). This assertion, according to Taylor, has become a sort of accepted wisdom among social scientists. Nevertheless, given the theoretical support by social scientists, a general correlation between political decentralization and innovation is yet to be firmly established. Treisman (2007) argues that self-governing

is the core aspect of modern democratic nations where the people must elect their own leaders. To Treisman, political decentralization is good for its facilitating features. These features include, but are not limited to, administrative efficiency, checks on central government abuses and policy experimentation. While decentralization satisfies geographically concentrated ethnic groups, it could also prompt locally elected officials to be unsupportive to the central government by "playing the ethnic card" to distort fiscal distribution. Political decentralization often leads to deconcentration.

### Deconcentration

Deconcentration is a form of network of central power and sub-state institutions comprising the elites of those constituencies. As Assibey (2000) puts it, deconcentration is a power sharing strategy where power is transferred from central operating agencies to regional ones. The central government under such a concept uses the local governments to improve efficiency and effectiveness of delivering services (Cheema and Rondinelli, 1983: 79 - 81). Rondinelli (1981) argues that deconcentration takes place as long as the central government disperses certain responsibilities of services to the regional and local governments.

### Delegation

The final form of decentralization discussed in this paper is delegation, which seeks to transfer services and responsibilities from central government agencies to specialized organizations with some degree of operating autonomy (Ayee, 2000). Apart from devolution, which is expected to stand on its own, the other forms of decentralization that have already been discussed tend to overlap in the execution of responsibilities between the centralized authority and district or regional representatives. The theory of decentralization obviously presents a problem for a country with a unitary political system like Ghana because of the system's political and legal structures.

The NPP under John Agyekum Kufour's presidency, like its predecessor, Jerry J. Rawlings, promoted the decentralization concept as one of its administrative goals, but how an administration would choose one strategy over another remains a matter of preference and interest of that administration. Though the Ghana Constitution provides the structure of decentralization in Ghana (Ghana Constitution: Chapter 20: Article 240, A – E), it does not allow citizens at the grassroots to elect their political leaders. For example, Article 243 [1] states that regional and district political leaders shall be appointed by the President. Undeniably, democratic deficits are associated with the ongoing decentralization

reforms in Ghana. One could argue that decentralization has not succeeded since it does not appear to adopt the characteristics discussed in the literature. The concept of political decentralization in Ghana has negative implications to the executive since some districts have over the years resisted the appointments and nominations of their leaders by the central authority (Ayisi, 2008).

## DECENTRALIZATION IN GHANA: A BRIEF HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

A discussion of the complexities facing Ghana's political leadership including the Kufour and Mills administrations regarding decentralization is beyond the scope of this paper. However, some understanding of the concept from a historical background may help to explain the quandary of the executive. The literature on this topic considers the colonial British indirect rule through the local chiefs as the genesis of decentralization in the then Gold Coast (now Ghana). Decentralization thus became a political tool for the British through the chiefs and their elders to reinforce the wishes of the British government (Antwi-Boasiako and Bonna, 2009). As Bamfo (2000) and Rathbone (2000) noted, those chiefs who cooperated with the British were rewarded and the uncooperative ones were punished. Such an authoritative implementation of the concept created fear among the chiefs and their subjects (that is, the locals).

Ghana's political independence in March, 1957 did little to change the political structures established by the colonizers. As a result, many studies have described post-colonial decentralization as ineffective, in which regime change through military coups became the order of the day after Kwame Nkrumah was ousted in 1966. It was during the mid-1970s under Lt. Col. Ignatius Kutu Acheampong's military regime that the government tried to empower the locals (Nkrumah, 2000). The history of contemporary decentralization in spite of Acheampong's attempt is credited to the Provisional National Defense Council (PNDC) regime under Jerry John Rawlings' administration (Assibey-Mensah, 2000). Assibey-Mensah (2000: 17) argues that after the passage of the 1987 Local Government Law (PNDC Law 207), 110 District Councils and their respective District Assemblies (DAs) were set up to ensure local participation in the decision making process. This led to the formation of the defunct People's Defense Committees (PDCs) in communities to identify each area's needs instead of relying on the central government to make every decision and try to solve local problems from the 'castle' (Office of the National Government). Research shows that the PDC concept created grassroots interest in local administration as district elections during the PNDC regime were the highest ever recorded for the decades in the late 1980s. Assibey-Mensah (2000: 17) also noted that official reports indicated that 58.9% of registered Ghanaian

voters cast their ballots in the local elections, and the turnout was the highest of any district-level election over the past 30 years.

The PDCs, made up of local self-identified defenders of the PNDC revolution, effectively took over local government responsibilities, though they were often limited to mobilizing the implementation of local self-help projects, while the deconcentrated ministries played a more significant role. Ayee (1994) notes that despite the PNDC's rhetoric, its interest in decentralization reflected in that of previous regimes, thus, a curiosity in the administrative decentralization of central government and not the devolution of political authority to the local level. Additionally, Ayee (2000: 49 - 50) perceives a key feature of local governance, through the PDCs for example, in the pre-1988 period as a dual hierarchical structure in which central and local government institutions operated in parallel, but with encroachment at times by better-resourced central government on the roles and responsibilities of under-resourced local revolutionary activists. The PDC concept of decentralization became a legitimate revolutionary political institution under the PNDC military administration. Since some studies have argued that local participation ensures more direct form of democracy in which the voices of ordinary people can be heard more easily, the PNDC used the PDCs and Workers Defense Committees (WDCs) to make decisions in the local communities and workplaces. These institutions, PDCs and WDCs, were to take part in the decision making process at the grassroots in the rural areas and workplaces in urban areas, respectively. Given the theoretical understanding of decentralization, it was believed that these groups would unlock the virtue and intelligence of the populace at the grassroots level and would foster good government and promote social capital (Debrah, 2009: 281).

### **Understanding the politics of decentralization from the PNDC era**

The military administration of Rawlings planned to transfer both fiscal and some political responsibilities from Accra (National Capital of Ghana) to all the districts and municipalities in the country. This move centered on Local Government Law decreed under the PNDC administration and was aimed to introduce fiscal balance between the central government and the districts. By transferring power to the districts, the PNDC administration was making government more responsive to local communities to placate critics of the centralized military rule. For example, according to Adedeji (200: 1), Ghanaians were not happy with Rawlings' PNDC administration during the late 1980s. He stated "objections to the authoritarianism of Rawlings government, which lacked structure for grassroots participation, were widespread despite rhetoric to the contrary by the PNDC".

The PNDC government introduced a legislative reform,

the Local Government Law (LGL) (PNDC Law 207) in 1988, which led to the creation of 110 designated districts within Ghana's ten regions, with non-partisan District Assembly (DA) elections held for the first time in 1988/89 under the PNDC, and subsequently every four years (1994, 1998, 2002 and 2006). The law provides in part that two-thirds of the DA members are elected on an individual non-partisan basis and one-third is appointed by the central government including a 'district chief executive' (DCE) for each of the 110 districts.

The 1988 LGL was to promote grassroots, citizen participation and ownership of the machinery of government by devolving power, competence and means power at the district level. The PNDC decentralization exercise, through the PDCs, was to satisfy the demands of the revolution and was not in the interest of democratic principles. Ayee (2000) argues that the decentralization policy under the second Rawlings regime had self-serving motives. The PNDC's decentralization policy is therefore seen by critics as an effort to increase the legitimacy of Rawlings' second revolution, which ruled Ghana from 1982 through 1992.

### **The dance: Constitution and decentralization**

Following over a decade of military dictatorship under J. J. Rawlings (1981 -1991), the 1992 Ghana Constitution provided a transition from a military rule to multi-party democracy at the national level, which also authorized the 1988 LGL reforms. It consolidated the aim of decentralization within the overall context of a liberal democratic constitution, yet essential democratic elements remained compromised, especially through the retention of presidential appointments instead of local elections in the districts. The objective of decentralization was laid out specifically in the 1992 Ghana Constitution (chapter 20) under decentralization and local government. Here, the 'constitution' states categorically in Article 240 1 "local government and administration [are to] be decentralized, and that the functions, powers, responsibilities and resources should be transferred from the central government [Castle] to the local government" constituencies (Article 240 [2])."

The independent role of the local government, with discretionary powers at the grassroots, was subjected to a provision in Article 240 [2b], which states that measures should be taken to enhance the capacity of local government authorities to plan, initiate, co-ordinate, manage and execute policies in respect of matters affecting local people.

The principles of participation in local government and accountability to the locals were also emphasized in Article 240 [2e], which states that to ensure the accountability of local government authorities, people in particular local government areas shall, as far as practicable, be afforded the opportunity to participate effectively in their governance. There is a contradiction here. For example, during the eras of Rawlings and Kufour's administrations,

the locals rejected their leaders, but the executive rejected the cry of citizens at the grassroots (locals) (Ghana News Agency, 2005).

It is not uncommon for the central government to appoint someone the people have rejected in parliamentary elections to become the senior administrator in the same constituency. In 2005, several of such appointments were made and the trend did not change. Critics argue that in the first place, [such practice] amounts to undermining democracy, because these were the people who were rejected by their own constituents at an election and the government is recycling them by using the 'back door' to now impose them on the people as their political heads (Ghana News Agency, 2005b). Without a doubt, the democratic intent in the decentralization requirements is provided in Article 35[6d]: The state shall take appropriate measures by decentralizing the administrative and financial machinery of government to the regions and districts and by affording all possible opportunities to the people to participate in decision-making at every level of national life and in government.

The 1992 Ghana Constitution preserved some of the PNDC 1988 reforms of non-partisan local level elections and presidential powers of appointment. A District Assembly shall comprise 70% elected members and 30% of the members appointed by the President in consultation with traditional authorities and other interest groups in the district (Article 242[d]). For example, the appointment of a 'district chief executive' (DCE) by the President is retained with at least the approval of 66% of the DA members (Article 243[1]). The DCE is the political head of the local executive, centrally involved in decision-making, with a 'district coordinating director' (DCD) as the highest ranking civil servant. Additionally, after the elections, the assemblies, once in session, will become the highest political authorities in the districts (Owusu-Ansah, 1989: 215)

The Ghana Constitution also provides guidelines for the local government on finances and clearly states that the DAs should have sound financial bases with adequate and reliable sources of revenue [Article 240(2)], with an attempt to secure this position through the establishment of the District Assembly Common Fund (DACF). This is determined annually by the legislature but with appropriation "not less than 5% of the total revenues of Ghana" [Article 252(2)]. The proceeds of the DACF are divided between DAs on the basis of a revenue sharing formula approved by the legislature. Article 240 provides reforms of the civil service with local government authority, which states that, as far as practicable, the persons in the service of the local government shall be subjected to effective control of the local authorities [2][d]). The irony of Article 240 is that it is focused extensively on the districts with no mention of the responsibilities of regional leaders. For Ghana, to benefit from the decentralization concept, it would largely depend on the vision of the leadership and a constitutional amendment to empower

the electorates.

## **DECENTRALIZATION: ONE CONCEPT WITH MANY INTERPRETATIONS**

Ghana's political history since independence lacks administrative continuity. The road to Ghana's independence was brutal and nasty as the British did not want to relinquish its power over the occupied colonies. The military and democratic mix of Ghana's political system since independence has given leaders a cause to be cautious of how they share power at the regional and district levels.

Since the military ousted the Convention People's Party (CPP) under Kwame Nkrumah's regime in 1966, democratically elected leaders like Dr. K. A. Busia (1969 - 1972), Dr. Hilla Liman (1979 - 1981), Jerry J. Rawlings (1992 - 2000) and John A. Kufour (2001 - 2008) have always been suspicious of individuals who could influence the military in coup plots. Busia and Liman became victims of military coups, while the Kufour administration accused some individuals of plotting to overthrow his administration. For example, several media reports quoted President Kufour as saying "ex-President Rawlings was planning a coup to topple his government" (Enquirer, 2006).

How does this play into decentralization? Given the above discussion, leaders tend to delegate responsibilities and government duties to individuals who are loyal to a ruling party instead of allowing the grassroots to elect their own leaders to ensure security. It could be argued that such appointments do not consider the interest of the citizens, who oftentimes reject the presidential appointees.

On four different occasions (1966, 1972, 1979 and 1981), the Ghana Constitution was suspended as a result of military coups. It can be argued that such political instability has forced democratic leaders to act like military leaders where the executive tends to hold on to power, while the regional leaders become extensions of the executive branch without any significant power. Democratic and undemocratic changes of government in Ghana affect local political structures. For example, the fall of the Nkrumah's CPP saw the collapse of the 'young pioneers' (youth wings of the CPP), while the PDCs vanished with the defunct PNDC as a grassroots political structure.

Ghana's political history shows that decentralization is a concept used by governments to reflect the leaders' political ideologies as seen under the Nkrumah, Rawlings and Kufour administrations, but the actual implementation of the concept under any of these leaders is far from how the literature defines it. Politically, whether civilian or military, the executive has always appointed favorites as political leaders in the regions and districts with little input from the local electorates.

## LOCAL ACCOUNTABILITY: MAKING A CASE FOR THE LOCAL ELECTIONS

Bobo and Gilliam (1990) argue that local involvement in the political process through elections ensures self-empowerment as locals gain more political power. Such empowerment translates to locals not only trusting their elected officials but also have a higher sense of political efficacy about local citizens' issues (382 -384). Despite the mixed conclusions of the impact of decentralization in the literature, as the concept has both "political and technical tradeoffs" (Aye, 2005: 255), Ghana is on record as chalking some progress in implementing decentralization. Therefore, allowing locals to elect their own leaders or public officials makes government more accountable to the local populations (Duncan, 2007:711) and more responsive to local concerns. As Debrah (2009) and Gregory (2007) noted, an analysis of Western political philosophical ideology affirms and underpins the centrality of local accountability in democratic political systems. This western political philosophy, in part, was in line with Owusu-Ansah's argument that the local elected officials will become the highest political authorities in the districts where they would be responsible and held accountable for their actions. The author maintained that this was the ultimate goal of the PNDC administration (Owusu-Ansah, 1989: 215). Regional and district elections would ensure accountability, which is historically rooted in steward of public trust (Kearns, 1995: 7). To Kearns, accountability is not just a "formal process and channels for reporting to a higher authority but involves a wider spectrum of local expectations and performance standards that are used to judge the performance, responsiveness and even morality of the elected local officials". It is against this background in the literature that this paper calls for districts and regional elections in Ghana.

In any matured democracy, the people govern themselves or play a significant role in the governing process through elections. The theory of modern representative democratic systems provides that the core of popular participation is voting, therefore, an elected candidate will represent the voice of the governed.

The gap created through legal and constitutional backing for not electing DCEs and RMs in Ghana has been highlighted in this paper. The actual challenge is on government (Parliament) to realize this loophole in the Ghanaian Constitution by legally and procedurally amending it for voters in the districts to elect individuals of their choice. A weak democratic constitution, one could argue, is better than the strongest authoritative decree since the former avails itself for amendments and not the latter.

The 1992 Ghana Constitution came into being after over a decade of military rule. It could, therefore, be argued that the absence of honest and prolonged discussion in the writing of this 'constitution' before its adoption may have represented the views of a few who

belong to the military class (or pro-PNDC<sup>5</sup>) with their authoritative ideology despite several years of constitutional assembly meetings. As a result, 16 years into the Fourth Republic is considered young in the political literature. However, it seems to be the ripe time for any amendments if the 'constitution' would be able to stand the test of the years ahead as Ghana snails into a well established democracy.

The government must devise new strategies for managing public programs as it critically evaluates policies regarding issues like health, education, the national economy, elections and transportation. With anticipated growth in the economy and other sectors, it is obvious that the central government may not be able to police every sector of the economy at large, especially in the regions; hence, the importance of decentralization as discussed earlier in this paper. Most government bureaucracies in Ghana remain structured and staffed to manage the traditional pre-independence political programs with the central government in control of every activity.

As the country has undeniably accepted democracy as the way toward viable political and economic development, government strategies and tactics must also change, especially in its structures and processes in the area of human resource management. Regrettably, such a centralized bureaucratic structure as the executive appointment of leaders in the regions and districts has not changed significantly in line with democratic principles. Although the district and regional leaders' appointments by a president have constitutional backing, this paper advocates for a constitutional amendment to allow locals to elect their leaders instead of the central government. Admittedly, since the 1990s, Ghana has undergone a steady, but often unnoticed transformation in terms of its policies toward improved health care, education, transportation and economic growth. However, in all these sectors, a decentralized management system could have provided a better sense of local ownership, which would have led to an improved maintenance of facilities and government assets as long as transparency and accountability existed on the part of the elected.

Local citizens' direct involvement in electing their leaders is more likely to improve government efficiency and responsiveness, which are likely to ensure regional accountability where the citizens will have the mandate to replace or retain their leaders through elections based on the leaders' performance during their tenure. The election of DA members and RMs could be scheduled the same date that the presidential and parliamentary election is held. Such a constitutional amendment is more likely to

<sup>5</sup> Owusu-Ansah (1989) sets the tone of the PNDC and other preparations the then military government tried to move the country from military to civilian government. See Owusu-Ansah, David (1986). The Provisional National Defence Council of Ghana. A move toward consolidation. *International Third World Stud. J. Rev.*, (1): 213-218.



diminish the notion of the indirect one party system where the president appoints DCEs and RMs throughout the country and those appointees are replaced as soon as the party in power falls during an election.

## CONCLUSION

Despite the comprehensive decentralization policy of the government since the late 1980s, Ghana is still buried in a highly centralized top-down public administrative political system (Aye, 2008). The little gains made in the area of decentralization seem to be eroding as partisan politics take precedence over democratic principles and local interest. The complexity of public management calls for the cooperative effort of all the individuals who make up an administration. The actions and decisions are so complex with multiple possibilities and changes that it becomes practically impossible to identify a universally acceptable definition for public administration (Stillman, 2010).

However, this paper provided a working definition by drawing on the literature. In discussing decentralization, it was noted that the theory of decentralization seems appealing, but one cannot conclude which one Ghana utilizes as described in the 'constitution'. Many studies affirm some progress in implementing decentralization (Aye, 2008:255). Ghanaians are in favor of decentralization as a positive method of citizen empowerment and local economic development, which enjoys both legal and constitutional guarantees with strong support from the citizenry.

However, though some scholars argue that decentralization ensures responsibility, efficiency and accountability through participatory democracy, Ghanaians at the regional and district levels are deprived of these democratic principles; but the requirement for officeholders to be answerable is at the very root of representative democracy (Debrah, 2009: 286) where locals through the democratic process can elect their own leaders. Therefore, this paper advocates for a constitutional amendment to allow theoretical democratic principle to become a reality in Ghana.

The history of decentralization and public administration in Ghana has come with criticisms as the executive tends to appoint party favorites (The spoils system concept). Such executive power, as enshrined in the 'constitution', does not ensure participatory democracy "unless the right, interest and involvement... [of]...the society at large are taken into consideration [through] elections" (Loh, 2008, 128).

Allowing locals to elect their own political leaders is more likely to force local public officials to perform since failing to do so, may result in the electorates rejecting them in future elections. However, to extend to which citizens are involved in the local administration of their constituencies depends on the political leader or the administration in power.

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