LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND PARTICIPATION IN GHANA

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ABSTRACT

Keywords

Local Government, Decentralisation, Participation, Accountabilty, Ghana

For a few decades now, national leaders worldwide have become more interested and developed a positive appreciation of the role of the local government in the socio-economic development of a country. This paper discusses decentralisation and the local government system of Ghana. Through empirical findings and literature review, this paper analyses the local government structure of Ghana, its effectiveness and citizen participation. It examines the gap that exist between decentralisation and local government as proposed in the laws of the land and decentralisation as being practiced. The paper draws attention to the structural deficiencies and obtacles confronting the full realisation of a more participatory local government in the country. It observes central government's relunctance to truely relinquish control over its powers and the various recentralisation "traps" it has built in the decentralisation process. The paper concurs that participation without accountability is only a partial ingredient to a highly responsive local government.

GANA'DA YEREL YÖNETİM VE KATILIMCILIK

ÖZET

Anahtar Kelimeler:

Yerel Yönetimler, Yerelleşme, Katılmcılık, Hesap Verebilirlik, Gana

Son birkaç on yıldır, dünyanın her tarafında ulusal liderler yerel yönetimlere giderek daha fazla ilgi göstermeye başlamış ve yerel yönetimin bir ülkenin sosyo-ekonomik gelişimindeki rolüne karşı daha olumlu bir geliştirmişlerdi. Bu çalışmada, Gana'daki ademi merkezileşme ve yerel yönetim sistemitartışmaktadır. Ampirik bulgular ve literatür taraması yoluyla, bu çalışma Gana'nın yerel yönetim yapısını, yerel yönetimin etkililiğini ve vatandaş katılımını analiz etmektedir. Çalışmada ayrıca, anayasada öngörüldüğü gibi yerel yönetim ile ülkenin yerel yönetim yasası arasında var olan uçurum ile uygulanan yerel yönetim arasındaki ilişki incelenmektedir. Ülkedeki daha katılımcı bir yerel yönetimin tam olarak gerçekleşmesinin önünde duran yapısal eksikliklere ve engellere dikkat çekilmektedir. Çalışma, merkezi yönetimin, yerel yönetime dair yetkilerini azaltmadaki isteksizliğine ve ademi merkezileşme sürecinde inşa ettiği çeşitli yeniden merkezileşme "tuzaklarına" dair gözlemler ihtiva etmektedir. Bu çalışma, katılımın iyi yerel yönetişim için gerekli ancak yeterli bir bileşen olmadığını ve siyasi katılımın ve hesap verebilirliğin artmasının ihtiyaçlara oldukça duyarlı bir yerel idarenin ortaya çıkmasını sağladığını vurgulamaktadır.

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1. INTRODUCTION

It has been established that for a country to successfully develop, there has to be a great collaboration of its government - local and central - and the various sectors in the country. Decentralisation is one of the accepted vehicles to foster collaboration and synchronisation among the levels of government and the various sectors of the country. Local government can be regarded as the foundation stone for democracy and thus decentralisation, and is the first line of service delivery to the community. The institutes of local government vary greatly, however, between countries and even where similiar arrangements exist, the terminologies often differ.

This article focuses on the local government system of Ghana; the level of citizen participation and the effectiveness of the local system of the country. The paper is divided into three parts. The first part, the introductory part, starts with a brief historical background of the country and the concept of local government. The second part of the paper describes the existing structure of the local government and the final part discusses participation and accountability.

The paper concurs that participation is a necessary but not sufficient ingredient for good local governance and emphasises that increased political participation and accountability results in a highly responsive local government.

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2. HISTORY AND BACKGROUND OF GHANA

Ghana is a geographically small country in Africa, specifically along the West Coast of the continent. The country has an area of 238,537 square kilometres and it is bounded on the West with Cote d'Ivoire, the north with Burkina Faso; the East with Togo; and the south with the Gulf of Guinea (Aryee 2007: 1) .

Before Ghana attained independence in 1957, it was called the Gold Coast because of the huge deposits of gold in the country. Currently the country is divided into 16 regions and subdivided into 170 districts and 275 constituencies. The population as recorded in the 2000 census was 18.9 million but the country's current population is approximately 29.5 million which has earned Ghana the reputation of having one of the highest population growth rate in the world. Ghana has a youthful population as over 50% of its population is under the age of 15. The country is secular however its population is

predominately Christian. As is the case in many countries on the continent, the country is very diverse in its culture and has over 90 ethnic groups and speaks more than 79 local dialects. However, it has chosen Akan, Dagare, Dangwe, Ewe, Ga, Gonja, Kasem, Nsema as formal local dialects. English is however the language used in formal settings (Commonwealth Local Government Forum, 2017).

The currency of the Republic is the cedi. Ghana recorded an 8.5% economic growth in 2017; a gross International Reserve of US$ 7.6; and a gross domestic product of $ 42.69 billion. In 2018, the quarterly gross domestic product (GDP) growth was estimated at 5.4% in the first quarter and 5.4% in the second quarter. (World Bank, 2019). The country is a major exporter of cocoa and gold and has a mixed economy with traditional agriculture as the dominant sector.

In the field of education, many affirmative measures have been put in place to encourage female child education and offset the existing imbalance in the ratio of boy/girl education. In recent years, under the authority of the ruling government, free public education has been extended from the Junior High School level to include the Senior High level in public Schools.

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The average life expentancy rate of a Ghanaian is 63 years. The country has witnessed a huge improvement in the health sector. This notwithstanding, the infant mortality per 1000 live births is 79. Since the year 2005, the country has recorded successive increased rates of access to health services. There is however disparities between the urban and rural accessibility to these resources(Langnel, 2019:2).

Embedded in the country is a strong believe in democratic government. The country was democratically ruled three years before independence by internal self-rule (1951- 1957) and continued until 1960 when it succumbed to a one-party dictatorship and two brief renewals of civilian, constitutional govenment. The country has seen its share of military dictatorship (February 1966 – October 1969; January 1972- June 1979; June 1979 – September 1979; December 1981-January 1993). In November 1992, the country held a multi party, presidential elections and returned to constitutional rule and has remained ever since. Despite some persistent challenges the country has seen

progressive improvement in democratic ruling and is regarded as one of Africa's success stories (Aryee 2010:2-3. Langnel, 2019:8). The 1992 constitution, which is the currently enforced constitution of the state is based on the quasi-executive presidential system of government. It states that majority of ministers of state are appointed from among the parliament (Langnel, 2019: 5).Ghana continues to improve on its governace through media pluralism, publication of Auditors General Reports and increased operation of constitutionally created bodies like Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ).

2.1.THE CONCEPT OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT

The history of the concept of local government is traced back to the beginning of civilization. Some authors purport that the concept is as old as the history of individual countries. Although there arise differences about where and when exactly to attribute the beginning of this profound concept, one thing is certain though, that some form of local government was seen even in ancient administration of nations and community groups.

Despite its long history, scholars have not agreed on a specific definition for the term local government. The idea of local government like many other terms it can be associated with – democracy, decentralisation, and governance - has been characterized contrastingly by various researchers. The issue of subsidiarity is mostly emphasised and generally seen as the root and basis for all local government concept - scholars all agree that local government is to bring administration very close to the ordinary individual in a particular locality.

According to the Shah (2006: 1), local government refers to specific institutions or entities created by national constitutions (Brazil, Denmark, France, India, Italy, Japan, Sweden), by state constitutions (Australia, the United States), by ordinary legislation of a higher level of central government (New Zealand, the United Kingdom, most countries), by provincial or state legislation (Canada, Pakistan), or by executive order (China) to deliver a range of specified services to a relatively small geographically delineated area.

According to the International Encyclopedia of Social Sciences, local government may be loosely defined as a public organization authorized to decide and administer a

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limited range of public policies within a relatively small territory which is a sub-division of a regional or national government.

In general terms, local governments are public legal entities with special revenues, budgets and personnel who have duties and powers laid down by law, whose decision bodies are determined by the local people to meet the common needs of the local community living in a particular geographical area (Özer & Akçakaya 2014: 3).

Within its historical development, it is seen that the first local administrations were created in order to fulfill the tasks of the monopoly of the central government today such as military structuring, national defense, criminal follow-up and punishment (Jackson, 1945: 13). There are various views and different approaches to the emergence of local governments. However, it is stated that local governments first emerged in Western Europe in the11th and 12th centuries. (Akyol, 2012: 5). Relatedly, the origin of contemporary local government, is attributed the Western and traditional culture.

Modern local government emerged as an answer to a succession of separate needs and demands (Wilson & Game, 1994: 41), and was seen as an expression of freedom of society (Kjellberg, 1995: 42). Local government appeared in different countries for various reasons. In the Scandinavian as well as other countries, local government surfaced as a deliberate attempt to limit the intrusion of central government in the affairs of local communities. In United States of America (U.S.A), local government institutions grew in response to a combination of citizen demand, interest group pressure and state government acquiescence (Browman & Kearney, 2000: 248). Local government in Turkey did not come about as a result of indigenous development; it was set up without a demand from the public. It was introduced from the top as a result of great influence from the Western world when the country opened up to the outside world. Another major influence was the country's interest in the efficient and effective provision of public services throughout its boundaries (Polatoglu, 2000: 156). In sharp contrast to the U.S.A., but similar to Turkey, local government in Ghana was established in a top-down manner. It was initiated to promote popular grassroots participation in the management and administration of local governance institutions for improved conditions of life (Ahenkan, A., Bawole N. J. & Domfeh K., 2013: 191).

Broadly, local government exists for diverse reasons. The basic reason perhaps has to do with the concept of subsidiarity. The idea of bringing government as close as possible to the citizens of a country. Özer & Akçakaya (2014, 85) broadly group the reasons for the existence of local government into four categories - social, political, administrative and economic reasons.

Administratively, it is literally impossible for central government to singlehandedly coordinate all the affairs of a country efficiently and effectively. Politically, local government is a means of instituting a sense of nationalism and participation. Local governance enables people to participate more directly in governance processes and empowers citizens previously excluded from decision making thereby forging a strong sense of involvement and belonging in the citizens of a nation. Local government, because of its direct connection with the grassroot level is a means of economically providing and distributing public services to specific areas and localities of a country (Yıldızhan, 2012: 13; Dryanova, 2013: 17).

The sphere of authority of the local government at a surface glance may not be on a very grand scale as that at the national or international affairs, however, it has a very central role in the lives of citizens. The local government is very intimate and affects the citizens in all sorts of ways from the cradle to the grave. Like Jackson implies it, local government is the "somebody" that keeps the community tidy and fit for living; ensures that houses are properly built; the young children have a place to learn; and makes sure that the sick, the poor and aged are tended to (Jackson, 1945: 14-15).

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In totality, local government can be viewed as an indigenous government having sway to settle on whatever choice, approaches and guidelines wanted locally with very minimal or no control by any legislature or influence of the central government.

3.BRIEF HISTORY AND SYSTEM OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN GHANA

Ghana is one of the few African countries that has had a significant experience with a democratic political life. Decentralisation in Ghana has a long standing history which goes back to the 1870s. From the years of colonisation, through the battles and struggles for independence to this present day, successive governments have thought of how to create and foster a strong local government whiles keeping up a vibrant central

government as well (Ayee, 2000:28-31). According to Nkrumah, decentralisation in Ghana during the post-independence era was mainly deconcentration (Nkrumah, 2000:57). Decentralisation during the colonial peiod was in the form of native administration that consisted of hand picked and non elected members, mostly the traditional authority of a locality - paramount chiefs, sub chiefs and elders. According to Crawford, the British administered the Gold Coast state through the abberant principle framework where chiefs were utilised as the operators (Crawford, 2004: 9). These native/ local authorities assisted the British colonial government to administer law and order in their respective localities.

In the beginning, the British set up 37 nearby chambers as chosen bodies in charge of the general wellbeing and harmony in the state, however they realised that allocating some measure of authority to the local committees was most likely to increase the fulfillment and achievement of their interes,t hence the incorporation of the native authorities in their administration.

Towards the independence of the country, the British realised that they were losing power over the settlements and took reparative actions. In 1950 and 1951 the British permitted the Gold Coast inner self-government, portrayal and progressively critical collaboration in local government (Boafo-Arthur, 2001: 3).

It should be noted that, because the country was a British colony, it inherited a legacy of a strong unitary system of government that concentrates power and resources at the centre and conservatively devolves less to local governments. Ghana's first attempt at a state-local reform was an administrative decentralisation with sectoral ministries organised in territoral hierachies at the regional and local level. The main objective of this reform was to expand public services to all parts of the country (Awortwi, 2016: 355-356).

After independence in 1957, Kwame Nkrumah under the National Liberation Movement began attempts to bring local governmental changes. The Converntional People's Party (CPP) government under the leadership of Kwame Nkrumah made five provincial, self-governing congregations.

The chiefs and the National Liberation Moverment (NLM) however became a great constraint to the approach of the CPP government (Knierzinger, 2009: 23).

The CPP attempted the establishment of a proper and structured local government again through the 1960 constitution. The constitution included a local government Act which asserted that local government should be self sufficient and responsible for its own financing (Crawford, 2004).

In 1966, the CPP ceased to be in government and the National Libration Council(NLC) took over. This period was characterised by recognisable swings towards the the strategy of local governance. All these attempts notwithstanding, the country still had a very weak local government structure (Nkrumah 2000: 68). Infact, according to some authors as (Awortwi 2010, Ahoi, 2017 and Nkrumah 2000), the predominant interest that prevailed in the first move from independence up until the 1970s was that of the central government and not the local government.

The military regime led by -National Redemption Council- (NRC) in the year 1974 abolished the distinction, which existed before this date, between the local council and the central government bodies at the local level and established a single structure of the District Councils and assigned to it the responsibility of the totality of government at the local level (Awortwi, 2016: 357).

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The most drastic revolution of the local government administration in the country took place during the military regime of Flight Lieutenent Jerry Rawlings under the Provicional National Defence Council (PNDC). In 1982, the PNDC regime issued an 11 point decentralisation plan designed to reform the state-local relationship and promote democracy, grassroot institutional enpowerment, stronger and more effective local governance and all round government efficiency(Awortwi, 2016: 358, Yebo 1985:66). The regime announced the deconcentration of the central and top level of government and favoured the encouragement of participatory government with great emphasis on the grassroot level. In other words, the philosophy of the regime was to develop a decentralisation programme that was meant to 'give power to the people' and bring 'democracy to the doorstep' of the people(Ayee, 2008a, 2008b).

In July 1987, the PNDC launched a three tier local government system. More also, 45 additional local territories were created under the jurisdiction of the disrict

assemblies. The PNDC Law No. 207 which made the local government the highest political and administrative authority at the local level was also later introduced.

Despite these tremendous efforts and milestones towards an autonomous local governance, there were elements of centralisation in the process. A typical example is the appointment of the District Chief Executives(DCEs) by the central government. This situation is still the case although there has been a great outcry by several stakeholders against this prevailing situation.

The 1992 constitution consolidated the laws on local administration and this remains the present and prevailing arrangement of decentralisation in Ghana (Ayee, 2000: 26).

After, the significant changes brought about by the PNDC regime, the local government of Ghana has not seen any groundbreaking reforms. What happens these days is a few adjustments made by ruling political parties to manage the system and appese the populace of authors and stakeholders criticising and highlighting the weaknesses of the local government system. Typical examples of these adjustment include the reorganisation of constituencies under the Kufuor administration in the year 2004 and most currently the increase in the number of regions and subsequently the regional co-ordinating council from 10 to 16 this year.

Currently the country is preparing to embark on a referandum in December this year to determine whether the DCEs should remain appointed or be elected by universal adult suffrage. This is going to be a huge determinant of change in the trajectory of the local government administration of the country.

3.1.LOCAL GOVERNMENT STRUCTURE IN GHANA

The local government system of Ghana is made up of a Regional Co-ordinating Council (RCC), a four-tier metropolitan and and three-tier municipal and district Assemblies as can be seen in the diagram below.
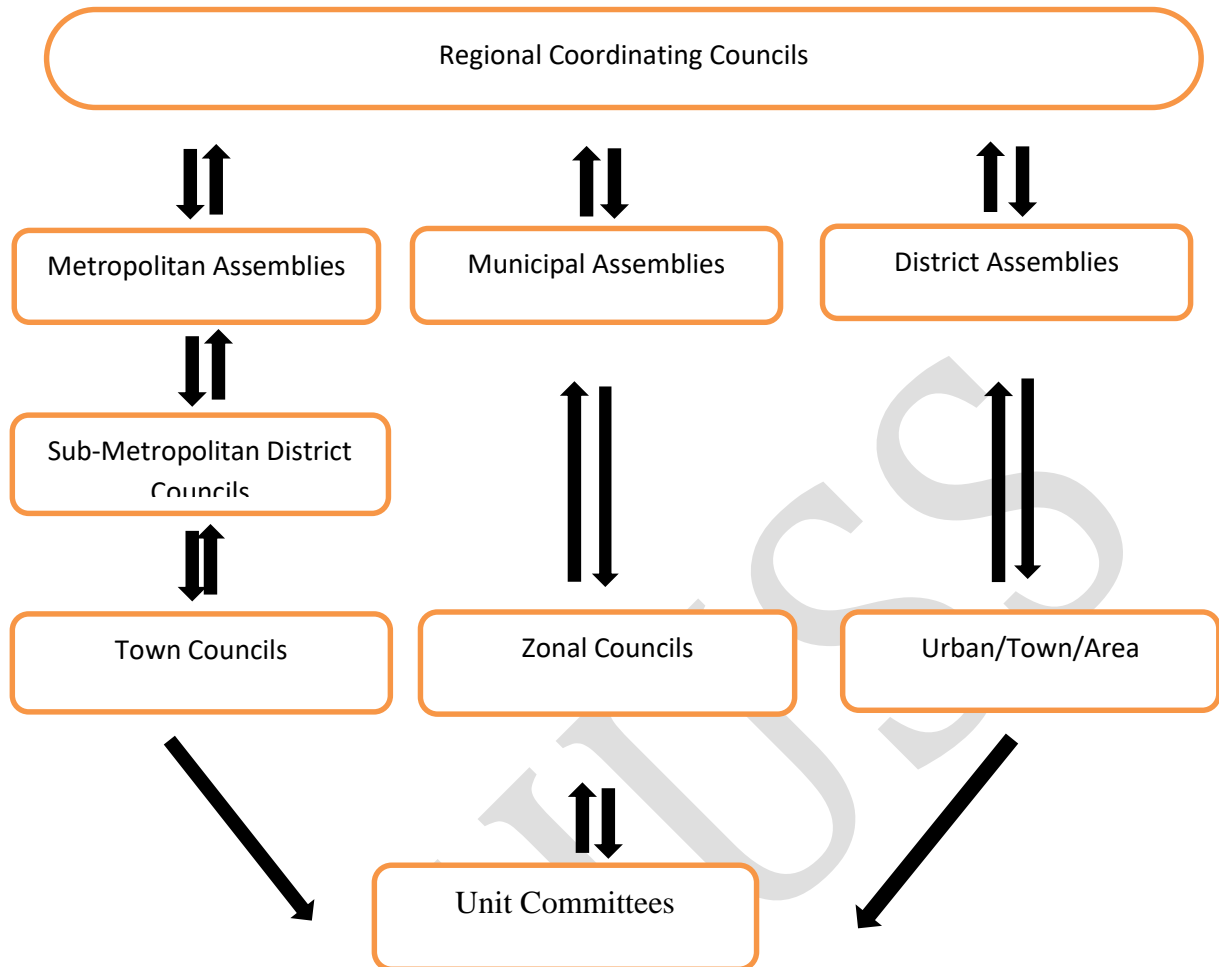
Figure 1: The overview of the local government structure of Ghana

Source: National Commission for Civic Education (1998)

3.1.1.The Regional Coordinating Council (RCC)

The regional level administration of Ghana is interwoven into the local government structure and administration through the RCC. The main role of the regional level is to serve as an intermediary between the central government and the local level. The RCC under the chairmanship of the regional minister is thus established to serve a coordinating and monitoring role in the local administration. Mahama (2009, 20) defines the RCC as "the central government deconcentrated administrative body responsible for co-ordinating, supervising and the harmionising the activities of all the local government authorities of the region." There is thus a RCC in every region in the country. Until this

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year, the number of RCC was 10 but following the creation of 6 new regions in the country the number of RCCs has consequently risen to match the current number of regions.

The RCC comprises of : the regional minister; his deputy; the presiding member of every district assembly; the district chief executive of every area; two chiefs from the regional house of chiefs and the regional heads of the RCC without voting right (Ahwoi, 2010: 107).

It is worth noting that the RCC does not command a local resource base in the form of locally generated revenues and also has very limited service delivery function (Ayee 2008). Regardless, in practice and function, the RCC is powerful. This has a lot to do with the undue influence it exerts on the district assemblies under the auspices of 'supervising' its (DA's) activities. Morealso, reference can be made to the fact that the regional minister is an appointee of the central government and therefore holds some inherent authority over the District Assemblies (DAs). Therefore, the RCC directs and controls the activities of the DAs in practice.

3.1.2. The Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies (MMDAs)

The MMDA is a hybrid composition which combines both elected and appointed officials. 70% of its members are elected by universal adult suffrage whilst 30% are appointed by the central government, specifically the president in consultation with the traditional authorities and other interest groups but subject to the approval of two-thirds of the MMDA members present and voting (Ayee, 2012: 628, Ahwoi, 2010: 111).

Generally the MMDAs have the same compositions and similar functions but the major distinction is in the populaion sizes- 250,000, 95,000 and 75,000 for metropolitan, municipal and district assemblies respectively. It is also noteworthy that the generic name for MMDAs in most literatures is the DA.

The DA according to Article 241 (3) of the 1992 Consitiution of Ghana is described as the highest political authority in the district that has deliberative, legislative and executive powers. The DA is the basic unit of the local government system of Ghana and is found in the 170 districts of the country. Consistent with what is mentioned above, the DA is composed of the District Chief Executive (DCE), an apointee of the president serving

in the capacity of the executive authority and the Members of Parliament (MPs) whose constituencies fall within the area of authority of the DA.

According to the Local Government Act (1993) the DA is confered with the power of being the highest political authority of the district and also doubles as the planning , development, budgeting and rating athourity. Article 10 of the above mentioned Act iterates numerous specific responsibilities and duties of the DA. Generally, the DAs are responsible for harnessing all efforts within the localities and harmonizing them into the national development strategy. They also serve as the agents of change at the local level of government.

Presently, there are a total of 212 MMDAs in the country- 6, 52 and 154 metropolitan, Municipal and district assemblies respectively (Ayee, 2012: 628. Ahwoi, 2010: 111).

The DAs are saddled with so many weaknesses, thus reducing their effectiveness and efficiency. Chief of these, is the issue of autonomy, both fiscally and politically. An example is mentioned by Nkrumah, when he states that the financial accounts of local authorities are audited by the central agents, although this in its rights is not a bad situation, it comes with other complications and restrictions. He also mentions the inability of DAs to borrow money without the approval of the central government (Nkrumah, 2000: 60). Morealso, the presence of the central government is felt strongly at the district level through the DCE.

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Because the DCEs are presidential appointees they are invariably skewed to championing the cause and agenda of the ruling political party and central government instead of the cause of the locality they are supposed to be representing. Moreover, inspite of the provisions made by the Local Government Act for the fiscal autonomy of local government, the central government through the ministries have significant power over the revenues and spendings of the MMDAs.

Crawford accounts that some control mechanisms put in place by the central government "tends to stifle local authorities" making them look upwards to the centre to undertake major development projects (Crawford, 2003: 22-23). Ayee (2000), Erikson (1999) and Nkrumah (2000) among other authors have also made similar observations.

3.1.3.The sub-district structures

The sub-district structure are established by the legislative instrument 1589 and are immediately below the MMDAs. They are esentially consultative bodies with no budgets of their own (Aryee 2008a). They play an intermediary role between the grassroot communities and the district authorities. In other words, they offer a means of channelling community needs and demands from the grassroot to the DA level. They also play a very vital role in encouraging local participation in government since they are a direct link to the grassroot level (Crawford, 2009: 67).

The sub-district structure has two tiers – the Urban, Zonal and Town Councils (UZTCs) and the Unit committees (UCs). UZTCs are not elected bodies and consist of the representatives of the relevant DAs, UCs and the government appointees. They help in fostering the grassroot enthusiam in projects and developmental agendas of the DAs. The UZTC consists of different numbers of member population. That is, the Urban Council is composed of a minimum of 25 and maximum of 30 members whereas the zonal council/ Town council and Unit council is composed of a minimum of 15 and a maximum of 20 members; the UCs are however elected bodies consisting of not more that 15 members- 10 elected members and 5 apointed (MLGRD, 2010. Ayee, 2008a. Ahwoi, 2010: 114). There are over 1,300 UZTCs and 16,000 UCs in Ghana (Crawford, 2009: 61).

Similar to the DAs, the subdistrict structures of the country are facing great financial limitation. It seems however, that the fiscal challenges at this level of local government is much more overwhelming that these structures are mostly not functional.

4.LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND PARTICIPATION

Participation simply means the action of taking part in the achievement of a set goal or objective. Creighton (2005:7) mentions participation to be the process by which public concerns, needs and values ar incorporated into governmental and corporate decision making. He emphasizes that participation is a two-way communication and interaction, with the overall goal of making better decisions that are suppoerted by the public. Local government participation therefore means, the involvement of "common" community members or electorates in the decisions making process. In other words, the

grassroot level hold exercise power, through their involvement, over decisions related to the general affairs of their own communities.

According to Daves and Grant (2003: 308), decentralisation leads to increased participation. This goes to mean that local government invariably leads to participation. In fact, it is for the sake of participation and self governance that local government is instituted and vital.

Where local government is participatory, it is increasingly responsive to and interactive with the community. Members of the locality have a voice or a say in the administration and governance of that particular place. For this reason services are increasing provided in response to grassroot and citizen demand and priorities (Centre for Democracy and Governance, 2000). This in turn increases the enthusiasm of citizens and their involvement in projects that the government is championing.

A great part of participation in local government is political. Political participation embraces electoral participation in the election of officials at the local level. Citizens are allowed to choose their own leader through voting. In other word, regular local elections are the heart of the process.

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Ghana's local government has fallen short in this area. The appointment of the DCE and the regional ministers as the executive body of the local government undermines participation. Apart from the fact that the citizens at the grassroot level are not given a chance to chose their own leaders, the DCEs in Ghana serve in the power scope of the "president" at the district level (Crawford, 2009: 69). Their position is very key in the function of DAs. Their power seem not to have boundaries, despite the checks and balances of the General Assembly and the EXECO and its subcommittes. This is mainly because the decisions of the DCEs mostly go unchallenged. Perhaps due to the 30% appointed members who provide partisan support to the DCE thus discouraging prospectives challengers to the DCE's decisions from other elected member (Oluwa & Wunsch, 2004: 72. Crawford, 2009: 69). Therefore the DCEs are mostly seen to be championing the cause of their affiliated political party and the central government instead of that of the local communities they govern. According to Antwi-Boasiako (2010, 173), political participation encourages government responsiveness and improves

efficiency. This is because citizens have a mandate to replace or retain officials and leaders with poor performance.

Participatory governance can also rely on the mechanisms and instrument such as town and interest group meetings, hearings and community involvement in budgeting and planning. This ensures that the local public is generally informed and can provide input concerning key decisions directly at public meetings, occasional surveys or referenda. When an active channel of communication and interaction exist between the leadership and the citizens, the latter tend to participate voluntarily in the locality improvement projects because they "own" them (projects) and feel a stronger sense of responsibility and hence coorporate towards the completion of said projects.

Participation is a very vital element in good governance at all levels, be it central or local. Participation being a necessary condition for successful governance however does not mean it is a sufficient one; participation without accountability can result in futility. This paper argues here that participation should go hand in hand with accountability.

According to a study conducted in Ghana, it was revealed that participation can be ineffective or just a mere strategy (Bossuyt & Gould, 2000: 2). Crawford also undertook a fieldwork in some districts in Ghana that showed significant levels of participation (Crawford, 2009:63-65), but did not imply commensurate grassroot inclusion in final decision making. That is to mean that, though structures may be in place and promote citizen participation through meeting and other avenues (and the citizens themselves may feel some involvement in the process of decision making), this could be entirely illusional. Put differently,the structures are meant merely as smoke screens to offer a sense of true participation but in actual fact are not effective.

4.1. LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Accountability is one of the essentials of good governance which cannot be overemphasized. According to a note written by Stepenhurt and O'Brien, accountability exists "when there is a relationship where an individual or body, and the performance of

tasks or functions by that individual or body, are subject to another's oversight, direction or request that they provide information or justification for their actions." From

this definition, it is evident that accountability involves two facets: the obligation of the government to provide information and justification for its decisions and actions to the institution responsible for providing oversight; and feedback from the overseeing institution.

Issues about accountablility, though perceived from varied angles, have not been ignored by decentralisation analysts. Agrawal & Ribot expressly state that "if powers are decentralized to actors who are not accountable to their constituents, or who are accountable only to themselves or to superior authorities within the structure of government, then decentralization is not likely to accomplish its stated aims" (Agrawal & Ribot, 1999: 478).

Accountability is a necessary condition in governance to help keep officials in check and ensure that misconduct and corruption is avoided in the daily functions of the government. Governments' discretions are most especially prone to abuse of power and absence of accountability mechanisms will leave them, as it will leave any organisation, prone to corruption and huge imbalances (World Bank, 2009). This is commonly seen where governmental appointments are made on the basis of political affiliations as is the case of Ghana. A typical example is seen in the presidential appointments of DCEs and 30% of assembly members in the DAs. The original motive for the appointment of the 30% of assembly members was to bring a fair distribution of skilled professionals in all districts, rural or urban. However, in practice, this appointment quota is used by ruling government to establish local partisan support.

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There are various types of accountability but this article identifies three main types of accountability: political accountability, which expresses itself in periodic elections; administrative accountability, which is represented through the horizontal and vertical mechanisms with and between agencies; and social accountability, which includes mechanisms that hold agencies accountable to citizens. Local governance is said to be more focused on the social accountability.

This paper discusses accountability as regarding, upward accountability (local government in relation to the central government) and downward accountability (local government in relation to grassroot level or local electorates) and emphasizes the need for the latter.

Accountability in the administrative sphere refers to local civil servants being held accountable to their top administrative officers and to outside officials or entities such as public audit officers, ombudsmen, regulators, a particular administrative agency, or a board or committee (World Bank, 2009). As can be seen from the diagram of the structure of local government of Ghana, the sub-district units report to the MMDAs who in turn report to the RCC through the DCEs. There is sufficient upward accountability in the bureaucratic structure of local government of the country. That said, upward accountability is not to be easily dismissed as it helps to keep the entire nation in synchronisation, that is, ensuring that both local government and central government are working towards a common goal. The author emphasizes downward accountability because it is evident that this form of accountabilty is the one that the local government system of Ghana falls short of.

Western political idologies affirms the centrality of local accountability in democratic political system (Antwi-Boasiako, 2010: 173). Babo and Gilliam argue that local government in the political process through elections ensures self empowerment as locals gain more political power (Babo & Gilliam: 1990, 382- 384). Relatedly allowing, locals elect their own leaders, makes government more accountable. The accountability that election provides is however not enough to sufficiently afford a very responsive government (Ahmed, T, Ahmed, K. N et al, 2016: 11-12). Consequently, social accountability in between elections is necessary.

There is always a tendency to assume that local participation automatically yields strong mechanisms of accountability (Jackson, 2003:8). In actual fact, participation and accountability can each singularly be present in the absence of the other. Crawford (2009, 65-71) draws a similar conclusion from a fieldwork in two rural districts in Ghana, where he finds reasonably high levels of political participation coupled with incommensurate level of downward accountability mechanism.

5. CONCLUSION

Notwithstanding the comprehensive and extensive decentralisation policies of government implemented in Ghana, the country is operating in a highly centralised top-bottom system hence, cripling to a great extent the local government system of the country. The local government system of Ghana falls woefully short in the areas of

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particpation and accountability, and financing when compared with the local government system of the Western world.

The paper highlighted that although the local government has a structure that is comprehensive and looks like it promotes participation, that is not entirely the case. There is a gap between participation and accountability. The DAs are criplied by partisan bias and an upward accountability that undermines their autonomy. They merely have an impression of having power but in actual fact, the central government maintains a tremendous influence over them thereby limiting their powers. A major place where central authority is maintained is the fiscal domain.

This paper advocates for a constitutional amendment that allows the districts to select their own DCEs. This is a huge part of participation and will invariably contribute to some level of accountability. And like Crawford said "For local government to become more responsive, sustained attention is required on the strengthening of downward accountability mechanisms." (Crawford, 2009: 76).

The paper also advocates for the scraping off of the RCC "supervisory" role over the DAs since this system makes the DAs pliable to the RCC and ultimately the central government. It also suggests a revitalisation of the unit committees which are inactive in various districts due to financial restrains.

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The above evaluations clearly indicate that the issue of fiscal autonomy of the local government should strongly be considered and straightened out. This is because for local local government to be efficient and effective, it is necessary that it holds significant measures of power.

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