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**DOES INSTITUTIONALISING DECENTRALISATION
WORK? RETHINKING AGENCY, INSTITUTIONS AND
AUTHORITY IN LOCAL GOVERNANCE**

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**DOES INSTITUTIONALISING DECENTRALISATION WORK?
RETHINKING AGENCY, INSTITUTIONS AND AUTHORITY IN
LOCAL GOVERNANCE**

A case study of Ntonaboma in Kwahu-North District, Ghana

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Keywords: Decentralisation, local governance, transformation, institutions, participation, agency, power, authority, Ghana

Abstract

This thesis draws on an ethnographic research in Ghana to question mainstream views on decentralisation that local level institutions can be consciously crafted to enlist the participation of marginal actors in governance thereby leading to efficiency and equity in development. The research explores the everyday practice of local governance in Ntonaboma, a resettlement community in the Eastern region of Ghana by using participant observation and interviews.

Evidence from the study reveals that first decentralisation is not a technical or managerial exercise but rather a societal practice taking place among heterogeneous actors with diverse interest and values. Secondly, the interactions occurring among these diverse actors are mediated through the interplay of a variety of institutions at the local level. Thirdly, the complex and dynamic character of decentralisation at the community level make the specificities of context very relevant in understanding the transformative potentials of decentralisation especially how it impacts on people and their social organisation.

The study places emphasis on the application of agency, institutions and authority in local governance approaches. Evidence from the study suggests that institutionalised decentralisation inadequately provides possibilities for ordinary people to transform the nature of their interactions within the community. The thesis raises further questions about the simplistic and instrumental use of institutions in local governance approaches. The study notes that institutions are not static and do not determine outcomes but are informed by the prevailing conditions at the community level. Thus, the actions of actors and specificities of the locality do shape institutions. The study emphasises the role of existing institutions and socially embedded principles in village governance. It thus suggests that, the process of decentralisation is a political process mediated through diverse institutions and with varied outcomes for different individuals.

The study concludes by exploring implications for local governance and decentralisation to making local governance pro-poor.

DEDICATION

**TO MY WIFE
JENNIFER ADU-MPIANI**

AND

CHILDREN

**VANESSA OSEI-KUFUOR
NANA AFRIYIE OSEI-KUFUOR**

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Finally, I am solely responsible for any shortcomings of this thesis.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

AFRC	The Armed Forces Revolutionary Committee
BECE	Basic Education Certificate Examination
AC	Area Council
CDD	Centre for Democratic Development
CDR	Committee for the Defence of the Revolution
CPP	Convention Peoples Party
CPRT	Common Property Resource Theory
DA	District Assembly
DACF	District Assembly Common Fund
DAO	District Administrative Officer
DCE	District Chief Executive
GD	Group Discussion
GDHS	Ghana Demographic and Health Survey
GSS	Ghana Statistical Service
GOG	Government of Ghana
IMF	International Monetary Fund
JSS	Junior Secondary School
LGU	Local Government Unit
MLGRD	Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development
NA	Native Authority
NLC	National Liberation Council
NIE	New Institutional Economics
NRC	The National Redemption Council
OASL	Office of the Administrator of Stool Lands
PP	Progress Party
PNDC	Provisional National Defence Council
PNP	People National Party
SAP	Structural Adjustment Programme
SMC	Supreme Military Council
UC	Unit Committee
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
VDC	Village Development Committees

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

This thesis questions the transformative potential of decentralised local governance¹ at both the organisational and the ‘citizen participant’² levels in the context of complex village realities. The focus is on understanding the reality of institutionalised decentralisation and specifically, whether the implementation of local government structures in a locality could facilitate individual agency, effective governance and the equal redistribution of power among various stakeholders with diverse interest and values.

In many developing countries the discourse on decentralisation between the 1970s and the present has shifted from government reforms to local level governance. The changes are partly due to the failings of earlier decentralisation approaches that placed emphasis on transferring the roles and functions of hierarchical government structures to lower administrative structures of government, and partly due to the emergence of new thinking about ‘good governance’, poverty reduction and sustainable development. The renewed concern to acknowledge rights, power, difference and rising levels of poverty during the 1990s in most developing countries especially in sub-Saharan Africa resulted in the widening of the concept of governance to embrace participation in the political and economic activities of the state

¹ I use local governance to mean a contested field that encompasses “the totality of processes which contribute to the development of a specific area as well as the norms necessary for mediating a harmonious integration of actions” of multiple actors with different status (Webster, 1998: 31).

² Jenny Pearce (2010: 12) uses citizen participant to mean the “private but responsible citizen, striving to balance public good with self interest”.

through institutional mechanisms (Cheema and Rondinelli, 2007; Ribot, 2002b; World Bank, 2000).

Most developing countries, including Ghana, have launched decentralisation reforms for the purpose of improving service delivery, local development and management. The approach to decentralisation in Ghana since the 1990s, however, has been implemented mostly as a managerial reform as a result of pressure from external donors ostensibly to fix the economic decline in the 1980s (Crawford, 2009; Aryee, 2008). This is evident in the way the policy prescriptions for decentralisation as outlined technically in the Local Government Law (Law 207) and subsequently amended into the Local Government Act (Act 462) 1993 place much emphasis on getting the 'institutions right' to strengthen local government. In Ghana, decentralisation has not only redistributed power but also created new forms of local government with some degree of political, administrative and fiscal autonomy, often with democratically elected and appointed members. The aim of decentralisation reforms in Ghana as stated in the 1992 Constitution of Ghana and the Local Government Act 462, 1993 was to make development inclusive and sustainable with poverty reduction as the main priority. For example, Article [240 (2) e] of the Ghanaian Constitution recommends that people are to be given the opportunity to participate in the structures of local government.

Even though there is a clear mandate, architecture and functions for the district assemblies in Ghana, the relationship between the district

assemblies and the local communities³ are not adequately explained in the policy framework that guides the approach to decentralisation and local government. Furthermore, the conditions and processes through which the decentralisation and local government reforms are to enhance efficiency, improve social equity or reduce poverty at the sub-district levels were not better defined (Aryee, 2008; Crawford, 2009; Crook, 2003).

The inadequate consideration given to the impact of the outcomes of decentralisation reforms on people especially in targeting and including the poor has led to an ongoing debate about the transformative potential of the concept in reality. Critics generally question the claim that decentralisation leads to more direct citizen involvement in governance, promote social equity and eventually lead to enhanced poverty reduction (Crawford, 2008; Larson and Ribot, 2004; Crook and Sverrisson, 2001; Blair, 2000). Drawing on empirical evidence they argue that the outcomes of decentralisation in reality have not met initial expectations. Their evidence suggests that, the actual practice of decentralisation as a local governance mechanism impacts differently on people because it involves actors who are economically and socially differentiated, with diverse interest and values and whose actions are shaped differently by the broader structural contexts. The main concern raised in their arguments is that decentralisation is a complex and contested process but it is often implemented based on policy guidelines without due consideration to the heterogeneity of the local context (Geiser and Rist, 2009; Taylor, 2007; Jones, 2003).

³ Local communities is used to refer to the sub-district structures of the local government system such as the urban councils, town councils, area councils and unit committees.

This study contributes to such debates by exploring how local government structures engage citizens at the community level. The intention is to understand the everyday practice of decentralisation and local government, how it is enacted within the specificities of a particular context, the mechanisms and processes involved, and how the ensuing outcomes impact differently on people.

This thesis uses an ethnographic approach to explore the everyday practice of local governance in Ntonaboma, a resettlement community in the Eastern region of Ghana. It provides a meaningful understanding of the complex reality of unit committees⁴ in village governance and the actions and strategies of social actors. The resettlement history of Ntonaboma coupled with the conflation of four villages into a single local government unit for administrative purposes provide a starting point for understanding the role that context plays in both the practice and outcomes of decentralisation.

The study claims that exceedingly placing emphasis on local government's mandates, architecture and functions to promote the participation of marginal actors in local governance evades structural inequalities, power relations and the diverse motivations that shape individual participation in local governance. I argue further in this study that, at the community level the institutions that shape interactions are diverse with different shades of 'formality' and 'visibility' and that these complex institutions interplay to shape the outcomes of decentralisation. This thesis demonstrates that, including the recursive relationship between agency and

⁴ The lowest political-administrative unit within Ghana's decentralisation framework or local government structure.

structure, and the dynamic relationship between individuals and institutions in the debate on decentralisation would bring insights relevant to making local government structures match the needs and expectations of their community members.

In order to launch a discussion on how decentralisation is actually practiced and to unravel the everyday realities of the concept, this chapter presents the introduction and the structure map of the study.

1.2 Structure of the Thesis

Chapter two provides insights into the theories that shape decentralisation and local governance. The focus of the chapter is to review the relevant literature to identify gaps in the conceptual underpinning of institutional approaches to decentralisation. Tracing the diverse concepts and theories underpinning decentralisation, the chapter highlights the simplistic assumptions of decentralisation that narrowly focus on standard managerial procedures to attain efficiency and effectiveness in governance. The chapter draws on the gaps identified in the mainstream views on the institutional approach to decentralisation to argue that, rather than simply focusing on technically getting the incentives and institutions right for local governance, decentralisation could offer hope to the poor if the gaze is widened to embrace issues of participation, social relations, power and the ‘political’⁵. The chapter advocates for an alternative approach to decentralisation that places emphasis on understanding the recursive

⁵ I have used “political” to mean the various social practices that manifest in struggles over resources and power (Hickey, 2006: 5).

relationship between agency and structure in the contextual practice of decentralisation to illuminate the various structural factors that shape participation in local governance.

Chapter three brings into perspective the research questions and objectives that guided the thesis. It presents the philosophical orientation of the study and discusses the methods of sampling employed for the study. The chapter discusses the multiple methods used in data collection, how data generated for the study was analysed and the ethical issues raised in the study. It presents an evaluation of the data gathering exercise and discusses how my subjective position as a researcher was reflexively managed within the research process.

Chapter four presents the major structural reforms aimed at transforming local government in colonial and post-colonial Ghana. The chapter highlights the dialectics of decentralisation from both the colonial and post-colonial period. A historical overview of local government reforms in Ghana is discussed. The chapter traces the attempts by both colonial and post-colonial governments to institutionalise formal mechanisms for devolving governance to social actors. The ambiguities and complexities inherent in the institutionalisation of decentralisation within the current decentralisation framework are highlighted, showing how attempts have been made by successive governments to devolve power to communities' while still holding onto power at the centre. By placing the attempts at institutionalising decentralisation in Ghana within a historical perspective, this chapter provides a framework and context for understanding mechanisms for the inclusion and exclusion of social actors in formal

collective institutions at the local level. Such a perspective provides an understanding of how social and cultural practices shape governance and either complement or clash with the new local government institutions. The chapter also highlights the undesirable consequences of governance reforms driven by external imperatives which inadequately understand the existing social relationships, norms, values, and expectations that can have a longstanding influence on the actions of individuals.

Chapter Five interrogates the construction of human agency in local governance approaches by placing the dynamics of institutionalised decentralisation in the context of people's social life. In this chapter, I argue for a rethinking of the optimistic conception of individual purposive action based on the possibilities of boundaries to human action and choice in social life. I argue that, individual participation in local governance is exercised through social arrangements which obviate the abstract notions of agency in institutionalised decentralisation theory and policy. Specifically, the chapter argues that institutional approaches to decentralisation instrumentally utilise agency in a simplified and optimistic manner that glosses over important structural constraints that individuals encounter in their attempt to take action in daily mundane activities. I argue that both individuals' and the agency they exercise should not be conceptualised in an abstract manner devoid of social and routinised relationships, differentiation, interests, subjective values and livelihood concerns if the outcomes of such actions and strategies are to effectively promote social equity and have an impact on their lives. The differentiation of capacity to access and shape new local governance spaces and the complex motivations shaping participation in the

decentralised governance process are examined. The chapter demonstrates that individuals may not consciously act to change the relationships in which they are embedded as espoused in representative forms of local government.

Chapter Six questions the 'functional and instrumental' nature of local government structures prevalent in Ghana's decentralisation policy and practice. The transformative potential of institutionalised decentralisation suggests the possibility of consciously crafting local level institutions through the application of 'design principles' that reinforce the technocratic nature of much institutionalised decentralisation. The chapter critically examines the interplay between bureaucratic and socially embedded institutions at the local level and how this interaction challenges or complements the activities of local government structures in practice. The chapter illuminates the many ways in which the day-to-day processes of village governance were shaped and mediated by diverse overlapping institutional arrangement including those borrowed from existing institutions. These socially embedded and bureaucratic institutions at the local level, the Chapter argues, are interlocked and worked together to promote cooperation and enhance peaceful coexistence. The Chapter draws on the spontaneous nature of community management activities to argue that institutions for governance at the community level are flexible and adapted to solve a lot of community and individual problems.

Chapter Seven highlights the complexity of authority structures and the political nature of village level governance. The key argument in this Chapter is that authority is not static or legitimised by legal instruments alone

but rather it is negotiated in daily practice, reflecting the 'processual' and 'political' nature of the concept. The chapter delves deeper into the practice of decentralisation and the day-to-day process of exercising authority by individuals to illuminate the complex registers of authority. The chapter also highlights the various ways in which authority is enacted and validated in practice among varied authority structures within the same context. The chapter illustrates how individuals, in their attempt to cognitively anchor new institutional arrangements, draw on legitimising symbols of authority. A key argument in the chapter is that interactions are organised around different structures of authority resulting in different claims to legitimacy at the local level. The chapter draws on the complexity of authority to highlight its shifting nature in the daily lives of social actors within a particular locality.

The last chapter presents the findings of the study, conclusions and recommendations for policy. The chapter weaves together issues emerging from the discussion to conclude institutional solutions to decentralisation are oversimplified and de-contextualised. The chapter argues that integrating social analysis into the practice of institutionalised decentralisation would reveal the wider interrelated issues that both constrain and enable individual participation, especially the social relations and configurations that shape access and participation in new institutional governance spaces.

CHAPTER TWO

CONCEPTUALISING INSTITUTIONALISED DECENTRALISATION

2.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the literature to identify the various concepts that have shaped decentralisation thinking and practice in development since the 1990s to the present. Since these key concepts underlying decentralisation are highly varied in terms of the goals to be achieved, the chapter draws on various core notions and concepts to tease out the link between decentralisation, participation and governance. The key concepts of participation, empowerment and transformation inherent in the normative expectations of decentralisation drive the discussion in this chapter. Specifically, the chapter provides a thumbnail sketch of decentralisation to illuminate how decentralisation theory and policy inadequately apply the concepts of agency, institutions and authority in development practice.

To gain further insights on the process of how the mechanisms for decentralisation play out in practice, the chapter further explores the varied theories and perspectives that underpin contemporary thinking and practice about the concept. Drawing on the limitations of the efficiency and equity perspectives on decentralisation, I argue that the democratic decentralisation approach inadequately offer transformational possibilities both on the part of the poor and their social organisation due to the uncritical understanding of the link between agency, institutions and structure.

The inadequate conceptualisation of human agency, power relations and context specificities in democratic decentralisation approach leads me to

draw insights from social theory and the emerging post-institutional perspective to provide a better understanding of decentralisation practice. I argue further in this chapter that the actions of the individuals and their participation in local government structures are mediated through social relations and other diverse institutional arrangements which are shaped by context.

The chapter finally reviews literature on participatory governance using the metaphor of space to illuminate the effects of power relations on the political agency of people. Finally, based on the gaps identified in the literature, the chapter offers an alternative perspective to decentralisation that will complement the practice of institutional decentralisation in reality. Specifically, the next section provides a historical background on decentralisation to reveal how the concept has changed over time before highlighting the different schools of thought that shape debates around the concept in theory and in practice.

2.2 The temporal dynamics of decentralisation

This section discusses the various thoughts that have shaped debates about decentralisation in development literature over time. The ambiguity around the discourse and the practice of decentralisation requires an understanding of the temporal dynamics of the concept in both theory and practice. The essence in discussing the temporal dynamics of decentralisation is to reveal the particular implications that such changes in the approach to decentralisation have on the thinking and practice of local governance and development.

Decentralisation in the early years of its introduction in mainstream development in the 1970s was more often associated with inefficiency of government (Cheema and Rondinelli, 2009; World Bank, 2000; 1999). Earlier decentralisation reforms were conceived narrowly as the disaggregation of the central states power and authority to sub national units of administration, local governments, or other agents of the state. Such a conception portrayed the state as both inefficient and as the same government (Rondinelli and Cheema, 1983). Hence, many decentralisation reforms during this period presented the concept as the remedy to the inefficiencies of the central state (World Bank, 1993). For example, the World Bank in 1992, sought to use decentralisation as a mechanism to strengthen public sector management, promote rules and institutions to provide a predictable and transparent framework for public and private business, and promote accountability for economic and financial performance (ibid).

Decentralisation was also advocated as a way of reducing the role of the central state in general, so as to make government more responsive and efficient (Smoke, 2003; World Bank, 1999; Mahwood, 1993). Countries that implemented decentralisation reforms in the 1970s and 1980s, focused on deconcentrating hierarchical government structures and bureaucracies to sub-national units as a result of the many failures of the central state. The policy and practice of decentralisation during this period was to accelerate development, break bureaucratic bottlenecks arising from centralised government planning and management, and participate more effectively in a more globalising economy (Smoke, 2003).

Latter forms of decentralisation policies, beginning in the mid-1980s, widened the concept to include political power sharing, democratisation, and market liberalisation as a result of the concerns arising over the ineffectiveness of the central state to promote economic and social improvement. Later, during the early 1990s, the discourse around decentralisation widened to embrace not only government but also other societal institutions, including the private sector and civil associations. Decentralisation reforms were primarily driven by international development agencies, which associated decentralisation with rolling back of the state, the extension of bureaucratic control, and the marketisation of social services (World Bank, 1997; 1993). Debates on the policy and practice of decentralisation within this period shifted from the proper allocation of responsibilities within government to how strongly the state should intervene in economic activities, and the appropriate roles of government, the private sector, and civil society in the development process.

However, in the late 1990s, thinking about decentralisation focused on the broader perspectives of governance due to the recognition of the complex institutions shaping people's lives (World Bank, 2001). The concepts and practices of decentralisation now placed emphasis not only on the transfer of authority within government but also on the sharing of power, authority, and responsibilities among broader governance institutions. Latter forms of decentralisation policy in late 1990s placed more emphasis on local forms of democratic governance that widened spaces for citizen involvement that were also shaped by the ideals of 'the good governance agenda' to reduce poverty. Three primary forms of decentralisation namely, devolution,

deconcentration and delegation were pursued by most countries that had decentralised although other forms of decentralisation in the form of privatisation and partnership were also found in the discourse of decentralisation (Work, 2002; Rondinelli, 1983). However, this study places more emphasis on devolution as a form of decentralisation that transfers power and authority to elected local governments that are both independent of central government control and democratically elected (Crawford, 2008; Ribot, 2002a). Devolution may also be about local government elections and the control of public life by elected politicians (Ribot, 2004; Blair, 2000).

The form and content of decentralisation approaches implemented in mainstream development have mostly been shaped by prevailing debates in development policy and practice. Contemporary critical thoughts about decentralisation centre on mechanisms to improve citizens' engagement, and governance processes, and on further strengthening decentralised institutions. Within much of the debates, decentralisation is presented as a statist project of social transformation (Corbridge, 2008). The debates focus on establishing the appropriate strategy for addressing concerns about the inefficient state and, its relations to citizens, or society in general. Based on such "structural-functional" assumptions of state-citizen relations, two main schools of thought are mostly evident within the decentralisation literature. The theoretical positions are reflected in either the 'free-market economists' or those who are both 'anti-state' and 'anti-market' (Bardhan, 2002).

In general, both schools of thought concentrate on the appropriate mechanisms to promote more direct citizen engagement in the processes of governance and the role of the state in addressing the needs of society.

While the 'free-market economists' draw more on technocratic principles to address the inefficiencies of the central state, the latter group advocates for a representative democracy that is supplemented with a vibrant and participatory civil society (Bardhan, 2002; Heller, 2001).

The technocratic view is informed by the idea that experts have the ability to either design robust local level institutions or fix the deficiencies of inefficient institutions in order to enable the state govern society (World Bank, 2001). Viewed From this perspective, decentralisation is thought of as a technocratic activity due to its adherence to bureaucratic principles of public administration, fiscal and instrumental rational planning to achieve structural transformation. This view stresses the importance of getting local government 'institutions right' for development outcomes to be efficient, accountable and responsive (Ribot, 2004). Central to the technocratic approach is the tendency to initiate governance reforms from above and to insulate decision-makers from politics (World Bank, 2001). The state's organisations and staff are expected to act impersonally to achieve functional ends through the application of instrumental rational techniques (Corbridge, 2008). To achieve these functional objectives of the state, certain technical procedures framed in the discourse of "good governance" are adopted in order for state institutions to function more efficiently, address the needs of society and finally transform it. The priority of the technocratic school is to get the institutions right to foster 'good governance'.

Critics argue that the technocratic approach inadequately considers context specificities, over simplifies complex reality and downplay local politics (Corbridge, 2008; Slater, 2002).

The other extreme position on decentralisation, what Bardhan (2002) terms “anarchocommunitarians” (AC), are in opposition to the dominant role accorded to the state and the market in mainstream development thinking and practice. A lot of emphasis is placed on civil society and all forms of association rather than on the institutions of the state. The AC view advocate for the deepening of democracy by placing emphasis on formal representative institutions supplemented by an active civil society. The main thrust of this approach to decentralisation is the rejection of the overly centralised and elite-controlled character of the state and the market in favour of empowering local actors with their forms of organisations (Houtzager et al. 2003). These theorists advocate for local actors including the marginalised and oppressed to be mobilised, preferably through the activities of ‘social movements’ to challenge the hegemonic state and its associated elites. One of their arguments is that, local actors have the capacity to know and express their interest to shape the outcome of development through active mobilisation (ibid).

The two approaches discussed above converge around the mainstream view that *state*-society relations in general can be fixed and transformed through mechanisms of decentralisation (Bardhan, 2002). Both approaches emphasise some form of ‘modernism’ that, suggests that state-society’s relation can be transformed either through conscious design of the institutions of the state or through the mobilisation and the subsequent empowerment of the poor and marginalized around their local forms of organisation to manage their affairs (Slater, 2002; Scott, 1998). However, comparing the two approaches, the AC conceptualise people as being

defined through relations with others and embedded in community, while the technocratic view sees people as self-interested and autonomous. Heller (2001: 136) writes that, “the technocratic vision understands but reifies institutions at the expense of mobilisation, while the ACs understand and reify mobilisation at the expense of institutions”.

This thesis takes the view that the state should decentralise power and authority to lower-level institutions and also consider the socio-political perspectives that will make local government responsive. However, the belief of the technocratic approach that participation in governance can be engineered through appropriate institutional designs is rejected. This is because formal local government structures, which are created by the state, tend to neglect the differentiated nature of the community and the structural factors that shape community participation. Similarly, the claim by the AC that increasing associationalism and democracy from below can increase participation is also inadequate, because the various structural and contextual factors that shape individual participation in governance at the local level are not considered.

Rather, this thesis advocates for a middle ground that incorporates in a more dynamic manner both the institutional and sociopolitical parameters of decentralisation that creatively manage a delicate equilibrium between representation and participation, and between technocracy and democracy reflected respectively in both the technocratic and the AC approaches to decentralisation (Heller, 2001). Thinking around this position integrates both the subjective nature of social actors and the classical notion of citizenship in a more relational and contingent perspective (Geiser and Rist, 2009). This

position is also informed by the fact that, decentralisation is primarily not only a managerial issue of improving governance procedures, but it is a political process that involves the negotiation and redefinition of the institutional arrangements that govern the relationship between the state and its people. Hence the process of decentralisation is shaped by interest and agency of the various actors and institutions. Also increase associationalism and democracy from below may not sustain participation, transparency and accountability but reinforce the dominant position of dominant local elites foster the relations of patronage and perpetuate existing power relations (Heller, 2001).

This thesis argues that it is important for the state to develop and simplify techniques in order to implement its development programmes, for monitoring and evaluation purposes, but how do such rational techniques permit the incorporation of complex, illegible local practices that local people want and need to run their lives (Corbridge, 2008; Slater, 2002). Therefore, considering the occurrence of the practice of decentralisation in ordinary social arenas at the community level, this thesis advocate that decentralisation policy and practice must move beyond the functionalist perspective of 'state-society' relations. The mechanisms for decentralisation should envisage neither the state nor society as positioned outside each other but, in reality they are but closely knit with one another (Corbridge, 2008; Midgal, 2001). Furthermore, both the state and society should not be conceived as distinct monolithic entities, immune from power and politics, but rather as complex and diverse, consisting of various actors and institutions. Perhaps, decentralisation could be seen more as a "social

interface”⁶ where various entities with different interest and agency behave politically to pursue their interest (Long, 2001: 243).

Following on from the inadequate conception of state-society relationship in the decentralisation discourse is the problematic conception of individuals and their relations to the state (Corbridge, 2008). Decentralisation policy focuses on incentives for behavioural change (Ribot, 2002a). The justification for such an argument is made around the assumption that mechanisms for decentralisation provides the incentives for state officials of the bureaucracy to work with local representatives, while local people are supposed to actively participate in the affairs of their locality and subsequently hold their representatives accountable (ibid). Also democratic decentralisation policy documents lean towards representative democracy that claims that strengthening and empowering local governments will make government more efficient and increase accountability and participation. Yet, the actual practice of decentralisation and local government reinforces the position of local elites and fails to transform existing structural factors that shape participation in local governance (Blair, 2000). Rather than relying on an idealised notion of decentralisation, the next section interrogates the core concepts that shape decentralisation thinking and practice in mainstream development.

⁶ Long (2001 :243) uses the concept of social interface to mean “... a critical point of intersection between different life worlds, social fields or levels of social organisation, where social discontinuities based upon discrepancies in values, interests, knowledge and power are most likely to be located (ibid).

2.3 Questioning institutionalised decentralisation

This section problematises the diverse ‘core notions’ and concepts that underpin the institutional approach to decentralisation in mainstream development thinking. In questioning the approach to institutional decentralisation, emphasis will be placed on the conceptions of human agency, institutions and social structure to understand how these concepts play out in the practice of decentralisation at the community level. Much effort will be made to understand how the design and implementation of appropriate institutional framework for local government leads to improved efficiency, equity and effective governance at the local level.

Decentralisation has become identified with the promotion of efficiency and the enhancement of public services, as well as with support for more transparent and accountable forms of government (Larson and Ribot, 2004; World Resource Institute, 2003). Decentralising power and authority to local governments is likely to lead to improvement in decision-making which is essential for promoting democracy and good governance. Proponents of decentralisation, notably international donor agencies claim that, the democratic content of decentralisation has the potential to make local governments more responsive to local citizen’s needs, bring about greater participation in public decision-making and improve efficiency, equity and development (World Bank, 2006, 2002; UNDP, 2002). The claim in these assertions is that decentralising power to communities or local representatives, has the potential to make development outcomes equitable and sustainable, resulting in improved systems of accountability that are more effective and transparent. This will also enable local leadership to

make effective demands on the central state (World Bank, 2001). Furthermore, decentralised arrangements allow for more community participation and therefore the voices of people are more likely to be heard in collective decisions.

Mainstream views on decentralisation that seek to involve common people in the public decision-making processes to make development outcomes efficient, equitable and sustainable are welcome. However, these views as found in the discourse on decentralisation inadequately provide insights beyond the economic and political aspects of decentralisation (Johnson, 2001). The dominance of efficiency and effectiveness in the policy discourse on decentralisation also accounts for the decline in the social thinking around the concept (ibid). This is as a result of the neoliberal state reform that advocates for a reduction in state-driven social policies and the privatisation of services (Peet, 2003). For example, decentralisation reforms since the 1980s have considered state social welfare and utility expenditure as an unproductive government expense (World Bank, 1993). While there are arguments to support privatisation as a form of decentralisation on fiscal grounds, concerns over its impacts on poorer consumers exist.

Decentralisation as a mechanism for local governance extends beyond just the role and responsibilities of local government structures to include broader institutions and processes that organise the collective life of society (Brinkerhoff, 2007; Bierschenk and Oliver de Sardan, 2003). The decentralisation literature says little about the role to be played by nonstate actors to make local governments work in transparent and accountable ways. For example, Aryee (2008) highlights how Ghana's local government

framework mentions the Unit Committees (UC) as the lowest local government unit, but yet makes no attempt to provide guidelines for community participation beyond the district level. Therefore, interrogating some of the theoretical concepts that underpin institutionalised decentralisation will broaden our understanding on the extent to which the introduction of new institutional arrangements leads to social transformation.

I begin by understanding institutionalised decentralisation as the “administrative bodies, systems and mechanisms, both local and intergovernmental organisations, which help to manage and support decentralisation” (Smoke, 2003: 10). This includes the mechanisms that link formal government bodies to other key local government actors such traditional authorities and Non-governmental authorities and civil society (Parker, 1995). These institutional arrangements then become the key architecture on which decentralisation is built and are mostly concerned with defining which formal institutions are to be involved in a decentralisation program, and the development of an appropriate legal framework that defines the relationships between different institutions within a particular locality. Institutional decentralisation has “elements of politics (who benefits), organisational theory (structural changes) and bureaucratic reorientation (changes in roles, attitudes and behaviour orientation)” (Hobley, and Shah, 1996: 12).

Though the institutional dimensions of decentralisation at the local level may be complex and varied, Parker (1995) identifies a set of discernable conditions that will make institutional decentralisation work within a particular locality. First Parker identifies the importance of a legal

framework that defines the local government structures, how they are to be constituted, and how they relate to other institutions. In Ghana, the local Government Act 462, 1993 provides the legal framework that underpins the process of decentralisation and has put in place sub-district structures to shape local governance. Secondly, an active civil society is advocated as very important in shaping the outcomes of decentralisation. Social capital is used here to refer to the level of associational life and the different forms of institutions that can participate in decentralisation. Parker, writes that in Ghana there is a variety of “well-developed political, moral and legal institutions and possess identities” that have been encouraged through associational life (Parker, 1995: 33). Thirdly, local capacity is needed to undertake the role and functions that are devolved to the decentralised structures. Finally, there needed to be in place an effective system of accountability. The absence of a well defined system of accountability that sanctions individuals and institutions that fail to carry out their functions appropriately may affect the legitimacy and authority of institutions devolved as a result of decentralisation.

In theory, devolving power from central government to lower levels in an administrative and territorial hierarchy as a result of decentralisation is to foster representative, accountable local government that is better able to discern and respond to local needs and aspirations. Institutional forms of decentralisation through representation offer local actors the power and capability to participate and shape the processes and outcomes of public decision-making (Blair 2000; World Bank, 2000). At the same time citizens are considered to be capable of effectively demanding accountability from

their representatives (Ribot, 2002a, 2005; World Bank, 2000; Smoke, 2000). At the individual level, Blair (2000) argues that, participation in local, local government structures can lead to improvements in self-identity and worth, which can help to break down customs of inequality and discrimination. Furthermore, membership in local administrative bodies can provide important skills that can be transferred to other walks of life (ibid).

The recognition of individual action and choice in decentralisation discourse moves the concepts into the realm of democracy and rights based premises (Newell and Wheeler, 2006; Gaventa, 2002). The transfer of rights by the state to citizens is claimed to create the space for citizens to engage and shape the activities of their representatives (Ribot, 2002a). With such rights of citizenship, individuals are supposedly assumed to act differently and exercise power in their interactions with their representatives enabling them to positively transform the power relations in which they are embedded. So, in decentralisation policy and practice, we see how citizenship right is valorised alongside regulatory and economic measures of the state aimed at transforming the values and beliefs of citizens (Haruna, 2001).

However, providing the poor with citizenship rights from the state may not offer them the political agency needed to influence the affairs within everyday life⁷ in which structural factors and associational life shape the outcomes of their actions (Bracking, 2005; Cooke and Kothari, 2001). In practice there exist varied forms of “moral repertoires” on which society may

⁷ Featherstone (1992: 160) notes that, “everyday life is usually associated with the mundane, taken-for-granted, common-sense routines which sustain and maintain the fabric of our everyday lives.”

draw in order to validate any particular pattern of rights and obligations (Dean, 2001). Therefore, operationalising any form of citizenship rights must consider the existing power relations and structural factors that shape actions in a particular context.

Given the centrality of political agency and local government structures in the practice of decentralisation, this study will focus less on the technical and administrative aspects of decentralisation, and more on understanding how policies to decentralise local governance bring about transformation of institutions and socio-political relations at the lower levels of society. Furthermore, the study will also put emphasis on how local government structures complement or challenge social organisation at the community level, given the critical role that the interplay of community institutions and local government structures have on the outcomes of decentralisation reforms. To do this, I will draw out three main elements, namely, agency, institutions and authority, to show how contemporary thinking around decentralisation especially on individual behaviour and social organisation is informed and shaped by new institutional thinking.

Firstly, decentralisation is assumed to deepen democracy and improve socio-economic development through the extension of political representation to the local level (Larson and Soto, 2008; World Bank, 2000). The general logic is that, humans should have a say in their own affairs. For example, Manor (1997) writes that, bringing government close to people helps to tap the creativity and resources of local communities by giving them the chance to participate in development. It is this democratic tenet of decentralisation that advocates for the strengthening of political participation

in which citizens possess the right to hold public officials to account through periodic elections, collective action and other democratic means (IFAD, 2001). Such mainstream views on decentralisation claim that the devolution of power to local authorities creates incentives for increased civil society activity and representation of local population in decision-making (Grindle, 2007; Tendler, 2007). The argument also runs that, once decisions are made at the community or local government level, they will be transparent and responsive to the needs of the community. Thus, decentralised arrangements allow for more voices of people to be heard in final decisions (Ribot, 2002a). In supporting this argument, Smoke (2003) writes that, if citizens are able to express claims and demands on their representatives and other state institutions in at least some modest way, they feel a sense of control and autonomy and become empowered in the process.

The assumptions on participation, accountability and responsiveness at the local level in the decentralisation discourse are shaped by rational choice decision-making and individual self-interest. These assumptions seem to suggest that, a prototype individual with entitlements and capacities enshrined in citizenship rights should become active after the introduction of decentralisation. The implication is that with such nominal 'citizenship rights' and the right institutions, individuals will have the agency to actively participate in the new decentralised representative spaces based on the terms and contracts set in the policy documents and to confront perceived inequalities. The underlying emphasis is on the individual conceived as making choices and taking actions rationally independent of others. People participating in these new governance structures are assumed to be

strategic and autonomous capable of exercising agency to negotiate community rules and decisions, and amplify their voices to make development outcomes and practice responsive and accountable.

Secondly, in the name of decentralisation, new local government structures are being created to increase and deepen citizen participation in local governance (Smith, 2009). Ribot (2002a) insist on and encourage the creation of local government structures during decentralisation reforms. The mechanism adopted is to actively design robust organisational structures, bureaucratic in form, to replace existing inefficient local government structures or to make such existing institutions efficient (Ostrom, 2005). By focusing on getting the 'institutions right' for effective governance, decentralisation reforms assume an instrumental perspective on local government structures. The practice involves the introduction of local government structures at the local level to create opportunities for competitive local electoral politics and, within this competition, an enhanced local voice and improved responsiveness (SLSA, 2003). For example, in most policy documents on decentralisation, such as the Provisional National Defence Council Law (PNDCL) 207 in Ghana, we see an array of measures through the provision of a legal framework, clarification of functions the building of organisational structures and demarcation of boundaries, all of which echo the bureaucratic 'design principles' of the mainstream institutional literature. These formalised local organisations are to make community governance efficient, equitable and sustainable through institutionalised participation (Ribot, 2002a). The overarching question is

how to design local government structures that are representative, empowered and downwardly accountable in practice.

Finally, the institutional decentralisation literature seeks to devolve and redistribute power to key authority structures at the local level to oversee and manage community initiatives (Osmani, 2001). Much of the recent work on decentralisation has focused on the institutional arrangements between central and local governments. The routine in these reforms is to craft local level institutions that are legally separated from the national centre with meaningful powers and sufficient resources for coordination and regulation purposes (Ribot, 2004). Gibson (2000: 4) writes that, "authority should reside at the lowest level commensurate with the necessary information and resources for making and implementing decision." The assumption is that creating new transparent and accountable authority structures will result in the flattening of hierarchical power within the community (Mansuri and Rao, 2003). 'Traditional' or 'customary' authority is assumed to erode over time in favour of new democratic institutions at the local level (ibid). Similarly, hierarchical control of community management is supposed to give way to a level playing field for the expression of claims in which mutual trust, partnership and collaboration shapes the decision making process (World Bank, 2002).

The above decentralisation sketch is underpinned by neo-liberal and populist thinking that places emphasis on rational explanations for institutions and human action respectively (Craig and Porter, 2006; Ostrom, 2005; 1990). Little attention is paid to the extent to which diversity and complexity of context shapes the actual outcomes of decentralisation leading

to unintended consequences (Geiser and Rist, 2009; Larson and Soto, 2008; Olowu and Wunsch, 2004). Therefore, narrowly focusing on getting the institutions and incentives for participation right oversimplifies the complex and contextual realities on the ground ((SLSA, 2003; Mtisi and Nicole, 2003a; Mollinga, 2001). To date, a poor understanding of the institutional arrangements that make decentralisation and local governance work has impeded practical efforts in decentralisation and local governance. The process of decentralisation in any particular locality can only be understood against the background of the distinct socio-economic conditions, political process, history and cultural context of the area. I will now highlight the three inadequacies of the institutionalised approach to decentralisation that this study seeks to interrogate.

First, mainstream views assume that confidence and capacity for exercising voice at the local level emerges through participation in democratic bodies implemented at the community level through decentralisation (World Bank, 2006, 1997). This assumption inherent in the institutional arrangements for implementing decentralisation takes individual participation for granted without considering the pre-existing social context within which agency is exercised. It is problematic to simply assume that individual involvement in local governance institutions will lead directly to empowerment and efficiency in local governance. The empirical literature on decentralisation reveals that more participation did not automatically lead to empowerment and responsive policies (Crawford, 2009; Crook and Sverrisson, 2001; Goetz et al. 2001). Evidence suggests that already poor and marginalised citizens encounter difficulties in having their voices

included and heard to at the community level (SLSA Team, 2003). Similarly, the implementation of local level governance institutions within the community takes little account of the unequal ability of individuals to exercise rights, and the effects of wider social structures on them (Cleaver and Toner, 2006; Hickey and Bracking, 2005; Agrawal, 2005). More so, the objectives of accountability, transparency and legitimacy found in the discourse of decentralisation are more tied to the state and its reforms without much focus on state-citizenship relations (Corbridge et. al., 2005).

Cheema and Rondinelli (2007) mention that the relationship between decentralisation and citizen participation is conditioned by a complex political, historical, social and economic factors that differ among localities. In community interactions, individual participation or involvement are shaped by diverse and dynamic factors such as the social position of the individual within the social structure and social relations (Cleaver, 2009, 2007; Toner, 2008; Wong, 2008; Mason, 2000). Public participation in decentralised arrangements may benefit only those who are economically and socially better off due to the relative difference in power among the various actors (Agrawal and Gupta, 2005). Individual actions and choices are also shaped by relational and contextual factors that guide appropriate and expected actions under certain circumstances (Cleaver, 2005). Some authors argue that decentralisation reforms are merely cosmetic because they fail to adequately engage with the existing patterns of inequalities (Saito, 2008; Larson and Soto, 2008; Bryld, 2001; Crook and Sverrisson, 2001).

Secondly, the literature on decentralisation has given little attention to the relationship between existing community-level institutions and local

government structures (Benjamin, 2008). The blueprint approach to institutionalised decentralisation pays insufficient attention to the diverse and multiple mechanisms that govern numerous interactions within the context of a particular locality (Benjamin, 2008; Johnson, 2004; Mosse, 2003; Benjaminsen and Lund, 2002; Metha et. al., 1999). There are plural institutions within the community with different shades of formality and transparency that shapes participation at the community level (Toner, 2008; Meinzen-Dick, R. S., and Pradhan, R. 2002). Yet, the approach to decentralisation suggests the desirability of new robust and sustainable local government structures to replace weak and ineffective ones (Olowu and Wunsch, 2004). The assumption is that efficient local organisations can be consciously designed to make governance arrangements optimal (Ostrom, 1992). New local government structures implemented in the community may not necessarily be equitable and inclusive or preferred especially when such local government structures are mapped onto existing local institutions whose architecture is shaped by structural and social cleavages. The terms on which the poor engage with local government structures are thinly explored in the decentralisation literature (Benjamin, 2008).

Thirdly, how power and authority devolved to diverse stakeholders is enacted and legitimated in practice is little considered or put into real scrutiny in decentralisation reforms. The assumption in decentralisation and local government reforms is that social actors are ready and capable to exercise authority and shape collective activities once power has been formally devolved by the state to the locality (World Bank, 2001; 1997). The 'processual' nature of authority and how it is enacted and legitimated through

social practice including everyday encounters are thinly considered (Lund, 2006; Lentz, 2006). The reality of local government reforms reveals that having authority through legal instruments of the state does not constitute ability to exercise authority within the locality (Sikor and Lund, 2009; Ribot, 2009). The power devolved from the state to certain individuals need to be exercised alongside other existing important authority figures such as traditional authorities within the locality. This suggests that within a specific locality diverse authority figures negotiate, forge alliance and compete in their attempt to exert authority since power is socially constructed and reproduced through everyday interactions (Cleaver, 2000).

The above institutionalised decentralisation sketch reveals that, despite the celebratory accounts of decentralisation in the literature, empirical evidence suggests the prevalence of high inequality and poverty (Geiser and Rist, 2009; Crawford, 2008; Crook, 2003; Smoke, 2003; Crook and Sverrisson, 2001; Blair, 2000). There is some uncertainty about the outcomes of decentralisation, especially, on the 'good governance' and the poverty reduction agenda (Crawford, 2009; Johnson, 2001; Crook and Sverrisson, 2001; Blair, 2000). Critics suggest the existing framework for decentralisation inadequately embraces the complex dynamics of the poor and the various structural constraints that shape their engagement within their community (Geiser and Rist, 2009; Larson and Soto, 2008). For example, citizens are not able to participate on an equal footing, exercise voice in public discussions and access new local government structures (SLSA Team, 2003). Such outcomes of decentralisation reinforces the assertion in some parts of the literature on decentralisation that the approach

fails to transform asymmetric power relations and structural inequalities in which the poor are embedded (Geiser and Rist, 2009; Larson and Soto, 2008; Crook and Sverrisson, 2001).

Other writers also suggest that, there are multiple institutions at the community level that shape both individual access to decision-making spaces and resources (Berry, 2009). These multiple institutions at the local level imply the diverse ways in which existing social structures of inequality and power relations shape the actions of people (Odgaard, 2002). The struggles and contestations that shape access to power and the distribution of resources at the local level are evaded. Rather, decentralisation policy and practice assumes a homogenous community, relegating social difference and politics to the back ground (Ribot and Larson, 2004; SLSA Team, 2003; WRI et al, 2003). Decentralisation and local government reforms need to consider the wider state–citizen relations, especially those involving issues such as the socio-political processes in wider society (Mosse, 2007).

This thesis argues that, if decentralisation is to provide realistic opportunities for choice and action, then a framework that elucidate how social dynamics influence community management or governance activities of diverse groups of people, and how these activities in turn shape particular kinds of outcomes is required. This is not to suggest that 'social' thinking is absent in development policy, however, it has not been accorded a significant role in policy-making around decentralisation. For example, social thinking in decentralisation policy and practice failed to adequately take into consideration the structural factors that shaped poverty in societies. The

discourse on decentralisation still tends to define the social context of democratic decentralisation in narrowly institutional terms (Ribot, 2004; Crook and Manor, 1998).

Therefore, this thesis advocates for a decentralisation framework that adequately captures the complex and dynamic social lives of the poor, their relations of exchange, the different ways in which structure enables and constrains their agency, and the wider mechanisms and practices through which governance at the community level are embedded.

The next section seeks to explore the literature to search for theoretical perspectives that shape the underlying conceptions of decentralisation. Emphasis will be placed on highlighting the primacy of rational principles made obvious in efficiency arguments for decentralisation.

2.4 Theoretical perspectives that shape decentralisation

A possible approach to understanding decentralisation and local governance is by considering the New Institutional Economics⁸ (NIE) and public choice theory which is dominant in much contemporary decentralisation thought and practice (Leach, Mearns et al., 1999). The NIE draws on economic logic to understand individual behaviour in and of institutions. Furthermore, the NIE seeks to get the institutions right to shape individual action in collectively desirable ways (Harris et. al., 1995).

⁸ Vatn (2005) clarifies the positions of the new and neo institutionalists and acknowledges the presence of some confusion in the literature regarding use of the neo and new in institutional discourse. Eggertson (1990), for example, distinguishes between new (Williamson, 1985) and neo institutionalism (North, 1990, Ostrom, 1990). In this thesis I use new institutionalism to cover both positions.

The rational choice and behavioural approaches inherent in the new institutionalism offer a framework to understand governance at both policy and community or everyday level. According to Mollinga (2001: 733), the “appeal for the new institutionalism to policy makers lies in its suitability for designing standardised policy prescriptions, and its exclusion, or rephrasing, of the issues of power and politics” while advocating the important role of local institutions in governance. Agrawal and Ribot, (1999) write that the NIE literature suggests that greater efficiency and equity in public decision making is possible through the process of internalising externalities, utilising all available information and better linking service deliveries to needs.

Relying on the work of some institutional theorists such as North (1990) and Ostrom (2005, 1990), I will demonstrate how the New Institutional Economics (NIE) and the Common Property Resource Theory (CPRT) fit well into the debate on decentralisation policy and prescriptions as both consider ‘institutions’ and ‘behaviour’ as key to reducing uncertainty (North, 1990; Ostrom, 1990; Williamson, 1997). Though the two strands of the NIE have developed quite separately they are by no means unrelated (Bardhan, 1989: 1339). First both approaches are analysed from the point of view of self-interest individuals and their bounded rationality. The assumptions of individual utility maximisation tend to drive the overall approach of the NIE whether in discussions about individual or collective or institutional levels.

This section discusses the main arguments inherent in the two main strands of the new institutionalism by teasing out the underlying concepts to show how the new institutionalism theory explains decentralisation policy

and thinking at different levels of state and community. Finally, I will draw on 'emerging' post-institutionalist thinking to illuminate the inadequacies of the new institutional approaches to decentralisation that makes its pro-poor agenda doubtful in reality.

2.4.1 Transaction cost approach- institutions as 'rules of the game'

The NIE focus on transaction cost as an important factor underlying institutional change. The transaction cost approach provides ideas about the crafting of robust institutional arrangement to lower information, monitoring and enforcement cost. The idea underlying the transaction cost approach is that, within a large complex economy, as the network for interdependence widens, the impersonal exchange process gives considerable scope for all kinds of opportunistic behaviour and the cost of transacting can be very high (Ingram and Silverman, 2002). Transaction costs arise because of limited information, uncertainty about the future, and the prospect that individuals or organisations behave opportunistically in their interactions with others (Williamson, 1997). The transaction costs include the cost of information, negotiation, monitoring, coordination and enforcement of contracts (Bardhan, 1989).

The key argument of the transaction cost approach is that institutions evolve to lower transaction and information costs that arise as a result of impersonal contact in exchange (North, 1990). To reduce the cost of transactions, institutions are introduced to lower the cost of constantly monitoring the opportunistic behaviour of individuals leading to efficient outcomes in social exchange. Inherent in the transaction cost approach is

the idea that decision-makers are rational and goal oriented, but because of the human cognitive and emotional architecture, they sometimes fail in important decisions (Jones, 1999). The pursuit of benefits is limited by individuals' capacity to retain and process information resulting in individuals becoming boundedly rational. The cost of information leads to high transaction costs that result in the possibility of opportunism on the part of individuals. High information cost limits the ability of people to monitor the choices of others (Bates, 1995).

The transaction cost approach treats actors as rational in the basic sense of making choices that further their interests, but distinguishes itself from neo-classical assumptions of rationality by attending to cognitive costs or mental models of decision making (Harris-White, 1995).

North (1990; 5) distinguishes between institutions and organisations by defining an organisation as "a group of individuals bound by some common purpose to achieve objectives". For Uphoff (1986), an organisation constitutes the structures of organised and accepted rules. North (1990) writes that, when an organisation is conceptualised in this way it eventually becomes a subset of institutions. North's argument is that, organisations are characterised by their purposive origin and hierarchically organised roles. Institutions on the other hand, are structures and mechanisms of social order and cooperation governing the behaviour of a set of individuals within a given human collectivity (North, 1990).

Purposively crafting organisations together to specifically undertake community management functions is termed as the 'institutional arrangement' (Ostrom, 2005). The institutional arrangement constitutes the

established policy and legal environment, the organisation, process, mechanisms and procedures for decision-making, negotiation and planning (Svendsen, 2005).

2.4.2 Common Property Resources Theory- institutions as ‘rules in use’

Another strand of new institutionalism that takes its theoretical grounding from ‘game theory’ abounds in the Common Property Resources literature (CPR) (Ostrom, 1990, 1992; Bromley and Cernea, 1989; Wade, 1988). The CPR theory focuses on how rules can be consciously crafted for effective collective action (Ostrom, 1990). This was in response to earlier claims that collective-action problems will rarely only be overcome (Hardin, 1968; Olson, 1965). This approach epitomised in the work of Ostrom (2005) defines “institutions as the prescriptions that humans use to organise all forms of repetitive behaviour and structured interactions including those within governments at all scales” (Ostrom, 2005: 3).

To use the game theoretic terms, institutions raise the benefits of cooperative solutions and the costs of defection for opportunistic individuals who seek to shirk their responsibility. The CPR approach looks for answers of how best to solve common dilemmas and other policy problems for self organising institutions. The approach focuses on the crafting of rules that shape positively individuals’ private and collective interests through the design of appropriate institutional rules, sanctions and means of enforcement to ensure cooperation (Ostrom, 2005, 1990).

Inspired by institutional economics, the CPR literature is rule-focused, normative, and driven by instrumental ambitions of crafting

institutions for efficient management (Ostrom, 1992; Agrawal and Gibson, 1999). It signifies the rights and duties of a group of individuals to one another with respect to a resource held together. The CPR approach prescribes a structured form of ownership arrangement within which resource users develop management rules, provide incentives and institute sanctions to ensure compliance (Schlager and Ostrom, 1992). Schlager and Ostrom highlight the importance of operational rights and collective-choice decisions in collective action. Operational rights specify who has the right to access the resource. Collective rights refer to management, exclusion and alienation rights. At the collective-choice level, the CPR literature advocates for the need for participation in governance so that decisions concerning the resource are deliberated upon by all stakeholders (Ostrom, 1992).

The CPR literature presents a formal framework for identifying the different types of rules that shape resource management practices. According to Ostrom and Ahn (2003: xiii) “the economic and political performance of societies ...depend on how the members of a community solve the problem of collective action”. Hence the collective action approach advocates the setting up of governance institutions based on principles of cooperation that involves all community members in the crafting of rules to govern interactions at the village level. The CPR literature recommends, a set of guidelines, mostly referred to as the design principles for ‘crafting robust self governing irrigation systems. I will now briefly highlight the main features of the design principles that have shaped the thinking around local governance mechanisms.

2.4.2.1 Design Principles

The design principles provide the conditions under which institutions involved in the decentralisation of formal institutions will work best (Ostrom and Sawyer, 2003; Ostrom, 1992). When social capital glues the community together, the CPR literature suggests that groups can achieve co-operation and co-ordination in a wide variety of settings especially through the 'right' institutional arrangements or design (Baland and Platteau, 2000; Ostrom et al., 1994; Ostrom, 1990; Wade, 1988). The design principles approach to institutions for collective action advocates for the codification of rules backed up with authority systems to monitor and sanction free riders (Ostrom, 2005). The claim is that, based on the right principles, robust institutions can be consciously designed to restructure individual incentives through the local structure of authority to ensure cooperation, making development outcomes efficient, sustainable and equitable over the long run (World Bank, 2003).

According to Ostrom's (2005: 267) design principles, "when the users of a resource design their own rules (design principle 3) that are enforced by local users or accountable to them (design principle 4) using graduated sanctions (design principle 5) that clearly define who has rights to withdraw from a well-defined resource (design principle 1) and where cost are effectively designed proportionate to benefits (design principle 2), collective action and monitoring problems tend to be solved in a reinforcing manner" (Ostrom' 2005: 267; emphasis in original). The operation of the above principles is strengthened by the three further design principles namely; conflict-resolution mechanisms, minimal recognition of rights and

'nesting' of local institutions with other levels of decision-making and governance (ibid).

As shown in Box 2.1, Wong's (2007: 25) simplifies Ostrom's design principles into three broad themes namely participatory decision making, good governance, and authority building. Decentralisation policy documents show the division of territories into unique administrative boundaries each nested to a higher level institution. Participatory decision-making of all stakeholders in communal activities implies that all community members are involved in the decision-making process. The participation of all social actors in the governance arena confers transparency, accountability, and equity to decision-making processes. The argument is that getting all individuals to participate in decision-making and negotiation of rules manifest in improved compliance to rules. Establishing and implementing new formalised organisations that promote participation enables the formally excluded groups to be involved in governance.

The CPR design principles call for clear structures of authority that sanctions free riding (Ostrom, 2005). Authority structures can monitor, enforce and impartially interpret collective rules. To sanction is to deter free-riding and also make individuals to shed their self-interest towards beneficially collective goals. Clearly defined membership and boundaries enhance the process of governance administration and service delivery because it provides an idea about who is included and excluded (Shale, 2005). Rules and roles provide an idea as to expected forms of individual behaviour and the nature of interaction. This is aimed at building relations of trust and cooperation which is to enhance community participation.

Box 2.1 Ostrom's Design Principles

Participatory decision-making

- Joint decision-making
- Inclusion of marginal into groups and committees
- Negotiating rules
- Conflict resolution mechanisms

Good Governance

- Clear accountability
- High transparency
- Clearly defined membership and boundaries
- Regular meetings
- Visible public manifestation of collective action

Authority Building

- Clear roles and responsibilities
- Majority ruling by voters
- Rule based management
- Robust monitoring and enforcement mechanism
- Graduated sanction

Source: Wong (2008: 35)

Despite the strong appeal and use of the design principles in mainstream development policy, the underlying principles are often focused on good governance separating public management from social life (Cleaver and Franks, 2005; Mosse, 1997). Institutional formation is presented simplistically as unambiguous and uncontested, yet in reality it is a long and complex process involving complex interactions, relationships, struggles over power, legitimacy and resources (Cleaver and Franks, 2005). Concerns have been raised about the CPR approach's uncritical engagement with issues of power and the underlying historical and political processes of the community (Mosse 1997). The next section discusses the limitations of the new institutional theory as applied in mainstream development.

2.5 The inadequacy of institutional theory

Decentralisation and local government reforms have benefitted from insights from new institutionalism. The NIE approaches suggest the conscious design of institutions based on certain 'design principles' to govern behaviour, translating individualised rational acts into collective outcomes (Ostrom, 2005). However, the post-institutionalist literature has identified some inadequacies within the mainstream decentralisation literature from a theoretical and policy viewpoint to include; the inadequate conceptions of human agency, the interplay of formal and socially embedded institutions, the inadequate understanding of 'the political and the community', the simple focus on the evolution of institutions and the desire to universalise, and the absence of the concept of social power (Metha, 2007; Cleaver and Franks, 2005; Johnson, 2004; Mosse, 2003; Benjaminsen and Lund, 2002; Mollinga, 2001; Metha et. al., 1999).

Institutional theory conceptualises individuals as rational whose motives and actions need to be shaped by rules and incentives (World Bank, 2003; Uphoff, 2002). However, explaining individual behaviour according to simple incentives is narrow and problematic (Wong, 2004, Cleaver, 2000; Kabeer, 2000; Mason, 2000). Individual behaviour needs to be understood within a broader complex set of motivations some of which are socially informed (Cleaver, 2004). Mason (2002) writes that the way we think, feel and reason are not necessary rational. Such emotional elements are perceived as 'inside' the individual but they have consequences for the way we think. Thus, to fully understand individuals' actions and the motivations shaping decision-making process, we need to position individuals in a life

world in which decisions are based on a broader reflection as much as on the immediate, context specific structure of incentives. However, such reflections differ among diverse individuals and do not turn the members of the community into a bounded, homogenous entity. A lot of factors such as wealth, political authority, ethnicity and age affect the position of people and their motivation to participate in local governance (WRI, 2003).

A major limitation of the mainstream institutional literature lies in its inadequate understanding of the relationship between bureaucratic institutions and socially embedded institutions⁹ and the normative privileging of the former over the latter in policy directives (Cleaver, 2002; Webster and Engberg-Perderson, 2002; Metha et. al., 1999). This is not to say that socially embedded institutions are necessarily 'better' than bureaucratic institutions but as the two institutions, bureaucratic and socially embedded, interlink and 'are not necessarily easily distinguishable' in practice (Cleaver, 2002; Metha et. al., 1999). The boundary between formal and informal institutions is blurred in reality and preference for one may blind the potential for the other. For Metha et. al., (1999), the assumed dichotomisation between bureaucratic and socially embedded institutions fails to recognise the messy middle ground between these two forms of institutional arrangements. They argue that, the messey middle is beset by "ambiguity and openness to divergent interpretations" (ibid: 16).

⁹Cleaver (2002: 3) rejects the separation of formal and informal institutions and uses the term 'bureaucratic' and 'socially embedded' to distinguish these two institutions respectively.

There are multiple channels through which institutions can be accessed. Yet in decentralisation policy we see the normative privileging of bureaucratic over socially embedded institutions. Such privileging obscures the multiple ways in which various actors straddle the sphere of diverse institutions to access resources (Benjaminsen and Lund, 2002; Cleaver, 2002; Berry 1989). Bierschenk and Oliver de Sardan (2003) highlight the cumulative character of local institutions which make a distinction between traditional and modern or formal and informal as purely rhetorical devices. Understanding the interplay of both bureaucratic and socially embedded institutions and the underlying rules and norms reveal the way in which practices reflect the 'right way of doing things' (Metha et. al., 1999 :20)

Related to the 'formal-informal' divide, is the mainstream institutional literature privileging the local over the global, that brings into question the issue of scale and nestedness (Merrey, 2006; Ostrom, 2005, Webster and Engberg-Pedersen, 2002). Critics call for the multi-layering of institutions so that local institutions are nested with institutions that operate at the meso and macro levels to offer social actors 'more room to manoeuvre' (Ostrom, 2005; Srivastava, 2004). Local institutions, they argue, need to link the agenda of higher level institutions to provide individuals access to other flexible channels in which they can negotiate their concerns. However doubts are raised about the potential of these other spaces to provide equitable access and inclusiveness (Cornwall, 2002, 2004b). The over reliance on multiple local level institutions as the policy option for decentralisation raises the potential for social exclusion and the expansion of inequitable modes of decision making. Such multiple institutional

arrangements may perpetuate the disadvantaged positions in which the poor find themselves (Wong, 2007; Cleaver, 2005).

Institutional theory has also been questioned based on its simplistic and unilinear evolutionary conceptions (Franks and Cleaver, 2005). Institutional crafting assumes institutions as conflict free, fixed, and unchanging where institutional viability is linked with fixed and formal structures. The evolutionist idea that formal institutions can be deliberately crafted to meet some specific functional ends is questioned as unhelpfully narrow as it fails to recognise the complex and more diverse nature of institutional functioning (Franks and Cleaver, 2005; Benjaminsen and Lund, 2002; Cleaver, 2002; Rocheleau, 2000). Simply focusing on crafting bureaucratic institutions to meet functional ends may either lead to arrangements that are not necessarily embedded in existing relations or practices (Cleaver 2000). Consciously crafting robust bureaucratic institutions fails to recognise the fluid and dynamic nature of institutions. Institutions in reality are often ad hoc, partial and intermittent, and change over time and space (Cleaver, 2001).

The assumption in the institutional theory that institutions can be specifically designed to represent all stakeholders has been questioned as being simplistic because power, inequalities, privilege and disadvantage are all features of institutional arrangements (Wong, 2007; Martin, 2004). The institutional design principles, assume that individuals equally participate in crafting rules (Ostrom, 1990). Rules of the game treat everyone equally, and all members of the group are assumed to be familiar with the rules (ibid). However, in reality institutions do not equally benefit all who participate in

them. Under conditions of asymmetric social relations, seemingly equitable institutional arrangements may lead to different outcomes for different people (Cleaver, 2005). People bring to bear their social positions and identity in shaping rules in use, since processes of rule crafting involves ongoing negotiation, imbued with power relations (Mosse, 2003). Therefore, focusing on rules overlooks the configuration of power relations and the modes, in which actors interpret, negotiate and apply rules (Villas, 1997). If institutions are conceived of as patterned social practice over time and what people do, then relations of power are always part of this patterning. New institutional designs and prescribed roles are therefore not independent of the relations of power and authority at play within a particular locality (Chalmers et al 1997; Leach et al 1997).

Participation of stakeholders in new forms of local government is prevalent within the institutional theory literature that shapes evolving governance approaches like decentralisation. Yet, how local government structures promote participation and social action is deficient in decentralisation discourse. The next section discusses participation, agency and power in governance.

2.8 Participation

This section, discusses the historical traces of participation in the development literature and how it has shaped the thinking and practice of decentralisation. The term participation has been part of mainstream development approaches since the 1940s acquiring various shades of meanings and diversity of practice to reflect the prevailing development

thinking and emerging development paradigms (Hickey and Mohan, 2004; Cornwall, 2008). The traces of participation in development practice reveal how it has been applied and adapted continuously through several approaches in development theory and practice. The plethora of participatory approaches identified in the literature put emphasis on the importance of 'people' or 'individuals' in shaping the outcomes of development. However, the particular participatory approach applied in development at any time depends on the "political, ideological and time specific influences" (Morvaridi, 2008: 11). The inadequacies of a particular approach result in a redefinition of the underlying values and mechanisms shaping participation to reflect the current thinking about development.

For example, the discontent with state-led development and top-down approaches to development in the 1970s resulted in the proliferation of different forms of participatory approaches each with its own meaning and associated practice. All the various forms of participation though reveals some diversity of practice, they are applied in development interventions as an appropriate remedy for exclusion, inequity and disempowerment (Cornwall, 2008). Some of the forms of participatory approaches shown in Table 2.2 focused on enlisting people perceived to be excluded from development to participate in projects. The failure of these project led participatory approaches to manifest in 'good governance' in development resulted in the search for new forms of participation that gave citizens a greater role in development (World Bank, 1999). It is within this renewed emphasis on active citizenship participation in governance that

decentralisation received impetus in mainstream development discourse as an institutionalised form of participation (Ribbot, 2002a).

Hickey and Mohan (2004: 9) use four main criteria namely; “the locus and level of engagement, ideological/political project, conception of citizenship, and the links to development theory” to analyse the different approaches to participation in development theory. Cornwall (2008) also considered the ‘differences of interest’ that guides the various forms of participation in development approaches. Cornwall explains that dwelling on the diversity of interest brings to light ‘ideas about why or how’ participation is utilised (ibid: 271). The difference in interest manifests itself in the debate on participation as a ‘means’ or ‘ends’ in development (Nelson and Wright, 1995). Participation as a means is more related to efficiency of the approach, while participation as an end moves towards equity and empowerment goals of development. The depth and content of participation in any particular participatory approach is illuminated by contextualising the practice of participation.

Therefore, taking into consideration the purpose of this study, I will focus on ‘transformative’ forms of participation that entail institutional reforms that reconfigure the relationship between the state and its citizens. Such new governance spaces located at the interface between the state and society are assumed to provide the opportunity for diverse citizens to engage with and shape institutions of the state. The claim is that citizens are active, conscious and strategic in these public spaces. The centrality of agency in these forms of participation is aimed at making development more inclusive equitable and sustainable.

More attention is given to 'participation as citizenship' because of the rights it bestows from the state to citizens to claim and assert their control over local governance spaces. Those who argue for a more transformative approach to participation rather focus on individual incentives and local organisations at the expense of wider issues of power and politics and other competing influences shaping the boundaries for action for different individuals (Cooke and Kothari, 2001).

Critically analysing the transformative claims for participation in the development literature reveals the limited evidence in reality especially on the part of the poor (Cooke and Kothari, 2001). Chambers (2005) writes that, the limited evidence of participation in development practice lies more with the improper application of the techniques and methods for doing participation in relation to the poor than on the underlying ideologies. Secondly, other authors explain that participatory approaches over plays individual agency neglecting the crippling effect of social structure especially how it mediates access to resources and shape individual agency (Toner, 2008; Hickey and Bracking, 2005). Thirdly, the wider issues of power and politics are also side-stepped in these transformative participatory approaches (Cornwall, 2003; Cooke and Kothari, 2001; Mohan and Stoke 2000). These shortcomings of participation are manifested in the inability of certain individuals to shape the wider structural factors and outcomes of development.

The varied outcomes of participation especially the variations in individual agency to shape outcomes of development suggests the need to ask some critical and reflexive questions about the nature and dynamics of

participation occurring in local government structures at the community level. Significantly related to the above is the level at which agency is sufficient and radical enough to enable people to adequately undertake active, conscious and strategic actions to challenge existing power relations (Cleaver, 2009; Toner, 2008).

The immediate question that comes to mind is how socially located individuals on their own are able to reposition themselves among seemingly diverse individuals within the frameworks of a 'radical citizenship' approach to undertake certain activities to shape the affairs of their community (Cleaver, 2009; Cornwall, 2008). The resources on which people especially the poor have to draw from to take up and make use of these spaces are not made known, though evidence suggests that their resources are 'thin, unequal and often depleted' (Cleaver, 2005; Hickey and Bracking, 2005). The enabling and constraining aspects of structure on people's ability to undertake certain 'set of practices' within their community receive little consideration (Wong, 2008; Toner, 2008; Cleaver, 2004). The multiple institutional mechanisms mediating diverse interactions among individuals within the locality is not a matter of concern (Benjaminsen and Lund, 2002; Metha et. al, 1999).

Responding to these inadequacies of participation requires a broader understanding of the concept as an activity enacted in space during interaction among diverse social actors. This gives insights into the contested and negotiated nature of the participation in reality. More important is the effects of power and social relations on the possibilities for action for different individuals (Cleaver, 2007; Toner, 2008). The next section

conceptualises participation as a spatial practice focusing on the role of 'power and difference' in shaping the action and choices of different individuals within the invited participatory spaces. The main argument of the section is that participation needs to be understood as a 'situated practice' by the placing emphasis on the various factors that shape the boundaries for choice and action for different individuals within that space.

2.8.1 Conceptualising participation as a spatial practice

In this section, I draw on the ideas of Cornwall (2002a; 2004a) and Engberg-Penderson and Webster (2002) to conceptualise participation using the 'metaphor of space'. Understanding participation as a spatial practice reveals some important aspects of participation that are often 'unseen' in its application in development approaches (Cornwall, 2002). My intention is to understand the dynamics of participation by exploring the effects of power and difference within a bounded space populated by heterogeneous individuals with diverse interest and values, and who are differently located in the social structure. With this in mind, let us now move on to conceptualise participation as a spatial practice by taking into consideration how it relates to individual agency and transformation in governance.

Table 2.2: Modes of participation in development theory and practice

The theoretical literature on decentralisation evokes the 'community' as sites for public engagement where citizens are provided with opportunities to come together to deliberate and make decisions on issues that affect them (Cornwall and Coehlo, 2007; Gaventa, 2006b). The community in this sense can be perceived as a bounded entity, metaphorically akin to a 'physical space', not identical to a space conceived in terms of distance, but rather one "which is colonised, reproduced and transformed by human societies" (Sayer, 2000: 110). Sayer writes that space only exists through "its constituents and embodies the social relations that permeate that space" (ibid). Thus, people and their relationships are not outside the local government structures but are themselves spatial and shaped by the dynamics of that space (ibid: 110). Cornwall (2002: 2) draws on the notion of 'space' to understand participation as 'more concretely in terms of the actual sites that are entered and animated by citizens'.

Engberg-Penderson and Webster's (2002) concept of 'political space' illuminates the role of the poor in poverty reduction by placing emphasis on their 'actions and strategies' to utilise resources and assets within a given institutional arrangement. They focus on the role of institutional channels, political discourses, and social and political practices of the poor to understand how development interventions will transcend the technical and incorporate the political nature of interventions for development to be beneficial to the poor.

Two types of participatory spaces, 'invited' and 'claimed' are found in the participatory literature based on their mode of emergence and how participants to the space are constituted (Cornwall, 2002a). Since

decentralisation in practice constitutes an invited space, I will focus more attention on invited spaces. 'Invited' spaces such as local government structures are conceived by Cornwall as being brought into existence by external resource bearing agents which may be either transient or more durable in nature. On the other hand, popular spaces are seen as more evolving organically and are mostly claimed and brought into existence by actors at the 'margins' but can be institutionalised or fleeting spaces (Cornwall, 2002a).

For Cornwall, invited spaces have the potential to lead to transformation by broadening citizen participation from inclusion to engagement aimed at "enhancing equity than the narrower efficiency goals of participation" (ibid; 4). But who gets invited to participate and the modalities for invitation are left unquestioned allowing the whole process of invitation to become a privilege. It is also important to consider the variations among the invited participants in their ability to draw on the terms and contracts of the invitation.

Central to the invited participatory spaces are also its language of empowerment reflected in the notion of 'radical citizenship' where participation is perceived primarily as a citizenship right bestowed on individuals by the state. By entering the invited space as citizens with sufficient rights will enable individuals to have voice on issues that affect them (Kabeer, 2006; Gaventa, 2002; Cornwall, 2002a). The invited arenas of participation then become an appropriate space that provides the actors, who populate it with voice, skills and the resources to engage, and deliberate within these spaces. Inclusion in the invited spaces it is claimed will unleash

the empowering potential of these spaces. Experience garnered within the invited spaces can also be used by the participants in other associational spaces in which they interacted (Mohanty, 2004). Such transformative actions are considered possible within invited spaces because such spaces are perceived as 'homogenous sites' imbued with solidarity in which diverse participants have similar interest and are willing to cooperate. The invited spaces are normatively conceived and implemented as neutral sites where all participants are considered capable of acting purposefully and strategically irrespective of their social positioning and differential access to resources (Chhotray, 2004). Since individuals are positioned differently within the social system with multiple identities, just opening up new spaces and inviting participants to interact will vary for different individuals due to the differences in resources that they bring to bear to 'make and shape' these spaces (Kapoor, 2005; Gaventa; 2004; Cornwall, 2002a).

Critics argue that the invited space inadequately enlists effective participation due to its neglect of the underlying structural factors that shape the space (Kapoor, 2002b; Mohan and Stoke, 2000). The ideals of consensual deliberation are rarely achievable in reality since inequalities, status and social positioning of people who populate the invited space shape the nature of communication within any social arena (Kohn 2002; Cooke and Kothari, 2001). Within the invited spaces the participation of multiple social actors with complex backgrounds in terms of beliefs, values and experiences varies due to the diffused power asymmetries and shared cultural background of the actors (Bebbington, et. al, 2004). The argument is that public decision-making is a negotiated practice among diverse social actors

in which accommodation, contestation, deferrals and conflicts occur (Crowler, 2007; Oliver de Sardan, 2005). If the public sphere involves interaction consisting of these multiple social actors then the ability to openly deliberate issues will be constrained for some based on the existing power relations and the differential positioning of individuals within the social system in relation to others (Sayer, 2000).

Critics also question the conception of the invited space as the site that offers the possibilities for meaningful social transformation since it fails to engage with issues of power and politics (William et. al., 2003a; Cooke and Kothari, 2001; Mohan and Stoke, 2000). Bierschenk and Olivier de Sardan (1997: 240) write that, politics is present anywhere social actors interact on common issues and needs to be brought back firmly in to the analysis of development. The argument is that, the discussion of power within the invited space fails to illuminate the underside of everyday aspects of power relations especially how power and difference define the participatory space, 'privileging certain voices and excluding others, and reinforcing the status quo' (Brock et al., 2001: 1).

In reality the invited spaces may even be bounded allowing only certain people access into the space which will make the invited participants read from the same script due to the suppression of divergent views (Cornwall 2002a: 18; Kapoor, 2002b). The broad invite to all members to participate in interactions in the invited space may overshadow individual differences and the unequal ability to shape deliberations.

2.8.2 Understanding power relations and politics within the ‘invited’ participatory spaces

The focus on efficiency and output concerns limit the ability of participatory approaches to facilitate any social change to the advantage of marginal groups due to the neglect of the underlying structural factors shaping individual participation (Cooke and Kothari, 2001; Mohan and Stoke, 2000). The dynamics of participation and the effects of power relations within these spaces have consequences for who enter and exit these spaces, with what identity, discourse and interest (Gaventa, 2006; Cornwall, 2004a). This section intends to understand the workings of power in the new invited spaces by placing more emphasis on how power is conceptualised and applied in the normative thinking about local government structures.

Craig and Mayo (1995: 5) draw on Parsons (1963) consensual notion of power to conceptualise power within invited participatory spaces as not finite but variable. Such harmonious and circulatory power is assumed to reside with individual members within the invited space. This perception of power draws attention to the ‘generative’ aspects of social power as ‘expandable’, capable of harmoniously accommodating diverse social actors with different intentions and values. The underlying assumption is a normative preference for cooperation rather than competition, where spaces for participation can expand so that many people have power without any one losing out (Eyben et al., 2007). These assumptions envelop manifestations of social divisions and differences that shape the dynamics of the invited space (ibid).

The logic inherent in this conception of power, according to Craig and Mayo (1995) is that, “empowerment of the powerless could be achieved within the existing social order without any significant negative effects upon the power of the powerful” through deliberative dialogue (ibid: 5). Thus, empowerment in invited spaces places an emphasis on relocating the poor within the prevailing order or bringing the marginal population in to participate (Cornwall, 2002a:3). Within the invited participatory space, heterogeneous actors, both the empowered and the powerful, with diversity of interest and different resources are assumed to co-exist to negotiate decisions by peacefully reconciling their differences through public deliberation. Such an approach to participation relates well with the ‘harmony model of power’ that underpins the neo-liberal conceptualisation of participation and empowerment (Mohan and Stoke, 2000: 249; Craig and Porter, 2006).

Critics suggest that harmonising power within the invited space fails to highlight the structural factors that shape outcomes of individual actions (Kapoor, 2005). The simplistic and narrow conceptualisation of power within the ‘invited’ participatory space is critiqued for evading issues of difference, social divisions, and more importantly social relations (Eyben et al., 2007; Kapoor, 2002b; Williams, 2004; Cooke and Kothari, 2001). The mode and nature of interaction occurring at any particular period are all shaped by contextual factors.

The discussion so far has revealed the taken for granted nature of many of the assumptions that underlie the concept of decentralisation. Concerns are raised about how the claims made about the effects of

participation in decentralisation and local governance are achieved in reality especially the impact on individuals and their social organisation. For the outcomes of decentralisation to be equitable and sustainable it requires a framework that adequately engages with how the process shapes individual participation and through which processes. Therefore, in the next section, I intend to provide an alternative perspective to decentralisation that takes into consideration the dynamic and complex role of individuals, institutions and authority.

2.9 Alternative Perspectives to Institutionalised Decentralisation

The practice of decentralisation as discussed in the literature review so far has revealed that decentralisation increases complexity by bringing new forms of power, authority and accountability to local settings already replete with 'traditional' forms of organising. Similarly, decentralisation also exists within complex environments of contestation among social groups, perhaps between and across wealth, age, gender and ethnic cleavages. Therefore, the practice of decentralisation from the perspective of local governance should engage with local, social and economic complexity. In this thesis, I seek to complement and add to the set of critiques above to improve the practice of decentralisation in three possible ways.

First, decentralisation reforms tends towards rationalism in which individuals are considered as active and strategic capable of acting to transform the existing structural inequalities in which they are embedded (Dwievedi, 2001). Such individual strategic acts, perceived as radical and transformative, inadequately capture the role of social structure in shaping

human action (Wong, 2007; Cleaver, 2005, 2002; Webster and Engberg-Pederson, 2002). The rationale for this argument is that more often than not mainstream development approaches fail to adequately consider the complex motivations shaping individual actions and behaviour and the unconscious motivation of several acts. The dividing line between the desire to undertake such purposeful acts and the capability to perform such acts within a society in which relations are inextricably linked is thinly explored.

Significant to this is the role of structural constraints and power relations in shaping popular agency. In reality, local communities may be dynamic and internally differentiated, and the priorities and claims of social actors positioned differently in power relations may be highly contested. These factors point to the importance of diverse institutions operating at the micro level, which influence control over community management activities. Therefore, understanding the complexity of interactions shaped by rules, procedures, and enactments occurring in everyday social life illuminates the dynamic relationship between agency and social structure (Giddens, 1984).

Secondly, decentralisation policy and practice advocate for the transfer of meaningful powers to a local government structures (Ribot, 2004). Robust local organisations are considered critical to effective governance in decentralisation policy and practice. The process involves crafting robust bureaucratic organisations and drawing on it to make local governance efficient and equitable. In reality, the process of institutional crafting is a 'messy and contested practice' (Metha et al., 1999: 7). Drawing on post-institutional thinking, I argue that institutions in decentralisation policy and practice should be seen as "regularised patterns of behaviour between

individuals and groups in society” (Mearns, 1995: 103), rather than as local government structures that enlist the participation of stakeholders for efficiency purposes. There are multiple and overlapping institutional arrangements, some visible others opaque, which are often consciously or unconsciously drawn upon by people to shape their numerous day-to-day social interactions (Benjaminsen and Lund, 2002; Cleaver; Berry 1998). Martin (2004) argues that “institutions have a legitimating ideology that proclaims the rightness and necessity of their arrangements, practices, and social relations” (1257). I advocate for an approach to decentralisation that views local government structures as flexible, partial and evolving. Such a dynamic view of local government structures allows for complexity, for the social and historical factors of the locality to be taken into consideration in the policy and practice of decentralisation (Mosse, 2003).

Finally, the narrow definition of the political and the uncritical application of power within the decentralisation literature is of much concern (Hickey, 2006; Hickey and Mohan, 2004; Williams, et. al. 2003; Mohan and Stoke, 2000). Decentralisation translated through formal structures backed by legal arrangements obscure the issues of ongoing local politics and the processual nature of authority at the local level (Lentz, 2009; Lund, 2006; Bierschinek and de Sardan, 2003; Chhotray, 2004). The issue of power and politics should not be confined only to the affairs of the state but to the economic and social spheres of society, especially the contestations and struggles that occur among heterogeneous actors on decision-making and negotiations over resources. Mohan and Stoke (2000) write that since the preferred destination of decentralisation is the community, the politics and

the ensuing power relations shaping interactions among heterogeneous actors need to be considered. Therefore, I argue for a wider conception of power and politics in decentralisation approaches to include all social relationships based on power embedded in the day-to-day routinised interactions of social actors.

2.10 Conclusion

This chapter discussed the diverse core notions and concepts that underpin the discourse of decentralisation indicating the complexity of the concept. The theoretical insights gained from the literature review provided the basis for questioning the transformative potential of decentralisation. I have shown that the mainstream literature on decentralisation pays a greater attention to achieving functional ends. Such a technocratic approach, I argued, inadequately takes into consideration the peculiarities and heterogeneity of context. The emphasis placed on effectiveness and efficiency within the decentralisation discourse is in tension with the principles of social equity and inclusion.

The various perspectives of decentralisation explored in this chapter revealed the conceptual separation of governance from other spheres of social life. The institutional approach to decentralisation bestows citizenship rights to individuals enabling them to behave autonomously irrespective of social relations. Power relations and existing structural factors that shape the individual agency are sidestepped in decentralisation. The mainstream view on decentralisation conceptualises authority as fixed and static however this review has shown that authority in local governance is rather than fluid and

permeable. Drawing on social theory and the emerging post-institutionalists arguments, the chapter has shown that the approach to decentralisation needs to critically engage with dynamic individual-society relations, discard the separation of the formal from the socially embedded institutions to identify the complex mechanisms that shape local governance within a locality.

CHAPTER THREE

THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the methodology for this thesis by discussing the conceptual and theoretical issues that informed this study. It explains how the research was conducted; data generated, analysed and interpreted. The first section of this chapter presents the aims of the study, states the research questions for the study and then the theoretical orientation of the research. The second section discusses the data gathering techniques used in the fieldwork involving how data was subsequently processed, collated and analysed. Finally the chapter presents the ethical issues that guided this study, the evaluation of the conduct of the fieldwork and the discussion of issues of reflexivity.

3.2 Research Rationale, Objectives and Question

The author's interest in this research developed as a result of my reflections on the reality of decentralisation at the village level while working as a project officer with the Catholic Relief Services (CRS) in a remote village beyond the Volta Lake in the Afram Plains district of Eastern Region in Ghana. I noticed the lack of interest of village members in the activities of the state such as using the local government structures of decentralisation at the village level to restructure ongoing relations in their favour. The state's absence in most parts of the district was mostly reflected in the poor condition of and in some cases non-existent public infrastructure and state

services, and widespread poverty. The absence of the state in the everyday life of most people created the enabling environment for local elites or traditional village leadership to fill the lacunae created by the state's absence and managed the local affairs of the villages. I became fascinated by the importance of communal life and the way in which local leaders were able to influence the day-to-day life of the village through diverse mechanisms. For example, within the village you will notice attempts by social actors to solve their everyday individual and collective problems through diverse mechanisms such as religious, familial and customary institutions. The interplay of creativity and continuity in solving community problems was observable during problem situations in the villages. My understanding of these observations was that whatever happened in the locality, people knew how to respond to their problems and the mechanisms on which to draw, which were shaped by certain individual beliefs, experiences, values and social relations.

In 2002 during one episode of local level elections in Ntonaboma, I observed the little enthusiasm of village members in the process of electing representatives to the district assembly and unit committees. What aroused my interest was that, if decentralisation had such little appeal among these diverse actors with different intensions and interest, then why do development policies amplify the concept as the best form of institutional arrangements for the state to tap into the resources of local areas for development. I did not write off the actions and strategies of the social

actors¹⁰ concerning their participation or non participation in both the elections and village affairs and their disregard for the state in their everyday life. Rather, I sought to gain access to their knowledge, the values and ideas shaping their actions, the constraints they encountered and strategies they employed to overcome their situation taking into consideration the structural characteristics of the society in which they were embedded. This was the genesis of this research.

This study seeks to understand the extent to which local government structures offer transformative possibilities for individuals and their social organisation. According to the World Bank (2001), decentralisation as a policy reform is assumed to contribute to poverty reduction mainly through its ability to facilitate the empowerment of the poor and make governments responsive to the needs and preferences of the poor. However, evidence in the literature suggests that the poorer, weaker and marginalised are constrained by inequitable institutional arrangements and seldom benefit from participating in social organisations that are supposed to support them (Franks and Cleaver, 2006; Hickey and Bracking, 2005). Similar concerns are raised about the transformatory potentials of the underlying institutional arrangements that facilitate decentralisation (Geiser and Rist, 2009; Larson and Soto, 2008). The institutional formation for decentralisation is over simplified in policy documents as the evidence in reality is messy and complex (Besley, 2003).

¹⁰ Long (1992: 12) uses social actors to connote “those actors that can be meaningfully attributed with the power of agency’. Examples are individuals, state and organisations who can engage in meaningful action, but in this thesis my emphasis is on individuals at the community level and their social organisation”.

This research was undertaken in Ntonaboma, a resettlement town located in the Kwahu North district of the Eastern Region of Ghana, between January and June, 2007. The research contributes to the debate on the transformative potential of decentralisation by ethnographically exploring its practice to understand the social processes that occur as a result of decentralisation.

3.2.1 Research Questions

The main research question guiding this thesis is:

Do local government structures lead to changes in participation and social organisation at the community level?

The general objective is to explore whether institutionalising decentralisation results in transformative outcomes in local governance at both the citizen participant and organisational levels or not. The specific objectives of this research are:

- To understand individual participation in new decentralised local government arrangements at the community level.
- To understand the interplay between bureaucratic and socially embedded institutions in local governance at the community level and the extent to which this interaction shapes community organisation.
- To examine whether the devolution of power from the state to a particular locality transforms the existing relations of power among various local actors within the community.

Responding to these objectives necessitated an exploration of the practice of decentralisation to understand how the introduction of new local government structures at the village level as a result of decentralisation leads to changes in participation and social organisation. In this research I placed emphasis on the actions and interactions of social actors and their engagement with diverse institutional arrangements, and how these actions and relationships affect the outcome of decentralisation at the village level. These issues guided the design and strategy for the research which is the subject of the next section.

3.3 Research Design and Strategy

In order to critically understand the interplay between local government structures and local peculiarities, a research design, based on non-numerical narratives was adopted for the study (Mason, 2002). The study adopted the actor oriented approach to illuminate the recursive nature of agency and structure in shaping outcomes differently for individuals in local government structures specifically designed to facilitate individual agency. The actor-oriented approach as a strategy in this research was to provide a wider framework for understanding the choices that individuals make and the reasons for such actions which are more often than not related to the specificity of context and the dynamics of social life (Long, 1992).

3.3.1 An Actor Oriented Approach

This study draws on an actor-oriented approach because of the emphasis it places on human agency within the context of the recursive

relationship between agency and structure (Giddens, 1984). The actor oriented approach considers the social actor as a “knowing, active subject, who is aware of his/her own situation and possess knowledge about and an interpretation of the surrounding society and his or her own and others places and possibilities in it” (Jespersen, 1998: 44: emphasis in original). The starting point to such a conceptualisation is that social actors are knowledgeable and capable. It accepts the heterogeneous nature of the community and the role of social relations in facilitating the outcomes of human strategic action. The actor oriented approach prioritises those ideas and motivations that enable people to pursue their strategies to achieve the intended objectives.

The premise underlying this approach is that actors involve themselves and react to local governance reforms at the community level based on both the information they have available and other factors that are inherently contingent on socio- cultural context, the changes in power that would result and the impact it would have on their goals (Jespersen, 1998). Focusing on how people responded to an intervention provides insights into the dynamics of the decision-making spaces, the various actors who shaped local governance and the motivations that shaped peoples’ decision to intervene or not in certain situations.

The utility of the actor-oriented approach is that it positions the researcher to inquire into how far certain specific kinds of knowledge are shaped by the social relations in which they are embedded. It also provides the researcher the platform to investigate the differential abilities of different actors to respond to ‘similar structural circumstances, even if the conditions appear relatively homogenous’ (Long, 1992: 20). The possibility of external

intervention leading to both intended and unintended outcomes implies that different groups or individual actors will understand the intervention quite differently. An actor-oriented approach places emphasis on the interests, characteristics and actions of different types of actors in a given context.

The appeal of the actor oriented approach to this study lies in its recognition of the diversity of actions and individuality. Since my intention is to understand the practice of decentralisation from a 'bottom-up' perspective, the actor oriented approach seeks to offer insights into social actors' everyday life experiences especially the 'emergent forms of interaction, procedures, and strategies that evolve' between heterogeneous local actors with varying degrees of interest (ibid: 25). It provides the researcher with diverse explanations of how things are done and the reasons for doing so. Such explanations, some of which may seem 'illogical', bring deeper insights into the certain occurrences that the study seeks to understand.

Epistemologically the actor oriented approach embraces the existence of "multiple social realities that is the coexistence of different understandings and interpretations of experience" (Long, 2003; 4). Within this epistemological standpoint, knowledge is not simply out there to be discovered but "involved ways of construing and ordering the world" (ibid). The approach calls for a methodology that applies ethnographic methods to understand the reality of interventions especially, the 'processes by which images, identities and social practices are negotiated, contested, and sometimes rejected by the various social actors involved' (Long, 2003: 48).

One of the constraints with this methodology as evidenced in this research was its limited applicability for understanding issues to do with

nestedness of the community to higher level institutions. The emphasis placed on the micro level to understand the practice and outcomes of decentralisation on individuals within the community inadequately considered other important civil society players and other formal organisations within the locality. Similarly, the research methodology also did not take into account the linkage and interaction between the community and the district assembly and how this interaction shaped the outcome of decentralisation. Another concern with this approach during the early stages of the research was the difficulty in identifying the key actors whose strategies and action shaped local governance within the community.

However, my position on the actor oriented approach is that different actors have different powers - the capacity to do something or prevent something from being done - and different means, therefore the particular conditions and environment in which they occur have to be considered when identifying the actor's process and relationships of power in response to any intervention. This requires focusing on the mechanisms of constraint and enablement which shapes the actions and intentions of differently located individuals. The focus on social actors and their social organisation also produced research questions that sought to find out reasons for these actors' complicity in producing outcomes that perpetuated, rather than challenged, the status quo. Such research questions flipped the focus on social actors as agents of change, which underpin current decentralisation assumptions, to a focus on mechanisms of constraint and enablement which shaped their actions and intentions within the community.

3.4 Ethnographic Approach to Data Generation

Based on the idea that social life is always throwing up new data, this study adopted an ethnographic approach to data collection to understand the reality of decentralisation (Mason, 2002; Brewer, 2000). Ethnographic studies focus on the production and reproduction of everyday life by often “othered” people, revealing meaning, social structure, power relations, and history (Lather, 2001: 481). The utility of the ethnographic approach lies in its ability to enable the researcher to understand social realities by ‘investigating into the practices and conceptions of the actors concerned, the interplay of the pragmatic and cognitive relationships and the structural and institutional context in which all this occur’ (Oliver de Saardan, 2005: 3). It also overcomes the dichotomies between bureaucratic and socially embedded institutions by enabling the researcher to gather data from all sites in which interactions occur rather than dwell on pre-determined sites (Webster and Engberg-Pedersen, 20020).

Since this study adopted an actor oriented approach which sees “meanings, values and interpretations as culturally constructed” (Long, 2001: 50), the data collection exercise used observation, in-depth-interviews and group discussions (GD). The purpose of triangulation in ethnographic research enables the researcher to use two or more comparable processes within the research process to enhance the comprehensiveness of data, to contextualise the interpretations, and to explore a variety of similar and dissimilar viewpoints. Triangulation was used in this research to observe as many parts of the social setting, and as many persons and roles, as possible by using different methods of data gathering and analysis. The use of

multiple methods of data collection enabled me to operate within and across research strategies using different data sources to corroborate each other and also to respond to all the research questions for the study (Mason, 2002).

Ethnographic approach provided firsthand experience through observation and conversation to understand how local actors participated in new local government institutions that are transplanted onto the community as a result of decentralisation. Drawing on ethnographic approach to data collection, I sought to bring out the meanings that social actors gave to participation, the motivations for their actions and their experiences about decentralised governance within the context of Ntonaboma. Local actors' ability to shape decision making processes and the resources needed to access and participate in the decision-making processes were examined. The interactions that occurred in the field between the village members and the researcher were meant to understand the actions of people and the motivations that shaped their actions. I also sought to find out the institutional mechanisms or channels that mediated the diverse interactions that occurred at the village level. Questions related to who did what in the village, and in relationship with whom were asked to enable me get deeper insights into who were the key social actors in the management of the community's public affairs. Living in the community and observing interactions among diverse social actors in the management of the community's affairs also provided a platform to understand the different ways in which people in authority exercised or legitimated their power.

3.4.1 Negotiating Access to Selected Site and Cases

This study was designed with the view that getting the support of gatekeepers was very important in gaining full access to the 'natural settings' in which ethnographic data was to be collected. For this study, I used gatekeepers to direct me to places, events, or people likely to be helpful to the progress of my investigation (Bryman, 2004). In the Afram Plains, I re-established contact with the local Catholic priest in Donkorkrom who was known to me during my previous work in the district as a development officer. The parish priest introduced me to the District Chief Executive (DCE) the next day who was briefed on the intentions of the study. The DCE gave me an introductory letter to be given to any of the district assembly (DA) members in Ntonaboma. This was aimed at facilitating my access and the research in Ntonaboma. However, I subjectively decided not to use the letter from the DCE to gain access to Ntonaboma as this had the potential to lead to unintended outcomes such as me having links with the ruling party.

On arrival in Ntonaboma initial enquiries were made about leadership of the community. Customarily, and in tandem with local norms in Ntonaboma suggested that a visitor must seek access to the community through the traditional leadership of the area. I interacted with the traditional leadership and having spelt out the mission of my research, they allowed me to go ahead with my research. Fortunately, a contact was made with the assembly member for Akroso village who incidentally happened to be the Mankrado for Akroso village. He later introduced me to the chief of Agyaade village and then to the representatives of Yamuoso and Supom villages. The DA member for Akroso village provided me with a fieldwork guide.

During the initial phases of the data generating exercise, it was observed that the DA members and the Unit Committee (UC) chairpersons were not very transparent in the identification and selection of individuals to involve in the study. I noticed that they asked my fieldwork guide to send me to respondents who to some extent were the influential individuals within the villages. I also got to know that the initial respondents selected by the DA member for Akroso village were government appointees to the DA and UC. As time went on I became partially enrolled into the village life and could hang out in the evenings with the village folks when the Pandora box opened and I could enter into the 'life world' of the individual village actors to understand the local village realities especially on issues bothering governance and individual actions. Staying in Ntonaboma for a long period of time made it possible for me to interact more frequently and freely with people. Continuous stay in Ntonaboma enhanced the nature and quality of interactions especially when we 'hung out' in the evenings. This strategy helped me in having easy access and more time to converse with my informants in the evening after they had returned from their farms. This made it possible to be privy to some unofficial information that 'slipped out' during conversations.

3.4.2 Observation

The research design used for this study adopted an observation technique because the ontological perspective of this study sees "interaction, action and the behaviour" of social actors as very central to this study (Mason, 2002; 85). Atkinson et. al., (2001) have commented that

ethnographic approaches are grounded in a commitment to the first-hand experience and exploration of a particular setting. As Mason (2002; 87) suggests, “observation allows the generation of multidimensional data on social interaction in specific contexts as it occurs rather than relying on people’s retrospective accounts, and on their ability to verbalise and reconstruct a version of interaction or settings”.

Through observation I gathered data from the various setting in which actors interacted to deliberate on communal issues. Observing interactions among diverse actors at its natural sites enabled me to have useful insights and meaning of how social relations, cultural norms, and economic factors shaped how people socialised, associated and participated in public spaces of deliberation which were found not to be so different from interactions occurring in other spaces at the everyday level. Through observation of communal labour I managed to gather detailed information on the practice of communal labour, the rules that shaped the practice, how these rules were made and the socially embedded principles shaping the actions of village members within the context of communal labour.

The main ‘natural occurring’ settings selected for the study were the general village public meetings, village social gatherings, UC (town committee) meetings and meetings of other committees in the village. During the period of fieldwork, a public meeting was observed one in each village. To understand the dynamics of these spaces, I focused on understanding the nature of the interactions and the actions of participants in public deliberations, especially the motivations for their actions in their encounters within these spaces. The nature of participation and the rules that shaped

interactions within these settings were of particular importance during the observation process.

Within the UC and other village public meetings, observations were mainly focused on the power dynamics operating within these spaces and how it shaped the decision making process for different located individuals. I also took note of the rules, norms and practices that shaped the negotiation, accommodation and struggles taking place within these committees at the village level. In all, a total of three unit/town committee meetings each were observed for Akroso, Agyaade and Yamuoso villages respectively. I also observed the Ntonaboma tractor committee and the Akroso and Yamuoso Traditional Council meetings. These observations enabled me to place an emphasis on understanding the behaviour of members during meetings, how decisions were arrived at, who shaped the outcomes of decisions and the power dynamics within these spaces. Also observing these diverse institutions with the village enabled me to have deeper insights on how these committees overlapped in the performance of their functions within the village. It also revealed the characteristics of individuals who had formal positions on these committees.

During the observation of the first village meeting in Akroso village, the *Amankrado* who presided over the meeting tried to make the meeting as participatory as possible but the participatory rhythm and attendance waned during subsequent village meetings. The attendance for the first meeting I observed was very high because village members had been informed that there was a 'visitor' (that is the researcher) who will be attending the meeting. Further stay in Ntonaboma revealed poor attendance at public

village meetings. In observing interactions in settings, issues that were of interest to the study and gaps that needed follow up were written down in my diary. I also noted down my impression of the nature and the dynamics of interaction in the village meetings. Much importance was placed on local norms and the differential ability of participants to shape the interactions occurring within these spaces.

3.4.3 In-depth interviews

The in-depth interviewing technique for data collection was used for this study. Such an approach to data collection involves gathering accounts of local actors by means of in-depth interviews in the form of conversations which allowed them to describe their experiences as they saw them. Using the 'conversational' approach of interviewing allows respondents the freedom to also comment or give insights into other issues that may not come up during the interview process. The utility of the in-depth interview is manifested in the 'considerable latitude' in gathering information from various individuals with diverse socio-economic and cultural backgrounds (Bryman, 1988: 46).

It is important to note that the themes and issues of interest for the study were not static but were developed to guide the interviewing process. As put by Mason (2002; 63) 'most qualitative research operates from the perspective that knowledge is situated and contextual, and therefore the job of the interview is to ensure that the relevant contexts are brought into focus so that situated knowledge can be produced'.

Using this technique for the study allowed for the exploration of people's action and strategies to gain useful insights into the negotiations, struggles and contestations occurring in village governance. Specifically, the in-depth interview technique enabled me to interact with respondents to find out their role in the unit committees and the extent to which the new local governance institutions shaped the nature of their participation. Key issues important to the study were picked up during conversations and used to further explore their views in relation to their ability to access new institutional spaces, exercising voice in the decision making processes and demand accountability through their participation in village governance. The conversation with community actors provided the platform to have deep insights into the village governance process such as the rules used in the village, how these rules were made, who participates in the rule making and, how these rules were enforced, how sanctions are undertaken. For most of my respondents, I had to revisit them for further interactions to fill in some gaps which were not well captured during the previous conversation.

Village members were normally engaged in casual interactions to acquire an in-depth understanding of village power relations. Such informal conversations proved very useful in understanding the interactions among diverse village members and how social relationships mediated individual access to resources and other positions within the village. It also provided insights into historical experiences, motivations, values and norms shaping village interactions. To explore the transformative potential of these new spaces, I had to engage people from diverse backgrounds including those from poor and well to do households, old and young, married and single,

educated and uneducated, settlers and indigenes in informal conversation to find out the nature of their participation. This was to enable me understand the selection process and their mode of engagement for these diverse group of individuals.

In-depth interviews offered insights into the existing institutional practices for village governance. Members of the unit committee, elected and appointed assembly members, traditional council representatives and other powerful individuals within Ntonaboma were also interviewed to unearth the dynamics of the institutionalised spaces, how power permeates such spaces and to understand how formal and 'informal' institutions interact and shape local governance at the village level.

3.4.4 Life history approach

In addition to observation and informal interviews, the life history method was also used in this research to trace the changes or otherwise that have occurred in the life history of social actors. The life history approach is a form of unstructured interview that allows the respondents to reflect on their life history, highlighting the changes and processes that shaped their experiences (Bryman, 1988: 49). Using the life history approach was effective in getting information from respondents because it allowed me as the researcher to structure the narrative to suit the interest of the research. For example, it enabled me to gather information on diverse and mixed range of motivations from respondents for participating in numerous village activities. It also gave ideas on their efforts and endeavours to get things done in the villages. This approach was very useful in understanding how

and why some social actors were able to acquire allocative and authoritative resources to become very influential members of the community. The interviews produced narratives that provided useful insights into social actor's subjective values or dispositions that are acquired socially or culturally over time.

3.4.5 Group Discussion (GD)

The study sought to understand female respondent's participation in local governance and how they were able to shape interactions around village public affairs. The GD was used in this study to gather the views of female respondents separately from the intruding nature of their husbands during the interview process. During the early stages of the data collection process it was difficult to get female narratives within a setting in which there was no influence from their husbands or other male members of the family. Some of these women during interactions muted or distorted their experiences about participation in community management. Bringing all the women together resulted in the gathering their actual experiences about participation in decentralised local governance. How women shaped and were shaped by the social relations in which they were embedded, was discussed during the GD process.

Secondly, the GD was also used to gather the experiences of traditional leaders and other village committees during the study. The GD provided an arena to get all members of the traditional council in the various villages to discuss issues related to local governance.

However, the GD had its own limitations as certain members within the various group tried to monopolise the interactions that took place. This occurrence was shaped by power relations, but I tried to manage the discussions that took place often calling on people who were often mute to express their views. This was very pertinent in the traditional council group discussions. Within the female groups, the respondent looked up to certain individuals among them to talk on their behalf.

3.5 Secondary Data Sources

Secondary data was initially collected from government and district assembly documents. Specifically, the secondary sources of data comprised published and unpublished government documents such as the 1992 constitution, and laws relating to decentralisation. The Afram Plains district Assembly bye-laws and development plans were also gleaned. The major constraint encountered was that the available documents from the district assembly were often limited to technical descriptions with little narratives especially documents that had to do with the provision of services and tangible structures. This limited the reliance on secondary data in responding to the questions raised in this study.

Table 3.1

3.6 Data generated

The research methods generated three types of data. The first type of data generated emanated from my ethnographic observation of activities within the settings selected for the study namely village public meetings, unit committees meetings, traditional council meetings and the domain in which communal labour occurred. Field notes, tape recordings and transcripts of in-depth conversations and discussions undertaken constituted the second type of data generated. The next section discusses how the data was recorded and analysed.

3.7 Data Recording and Analysis

The analysis of data for this thesis was a difficult, complex and time-consuming endeavour. The data analysis began with the first set of conversations and field notes gathered in the field. This made the data analysis an ongoing project within the fieldwork (Glaser, 1992). Considerable effort was made to integrate observations, recorded conversations and field notes to give order and themes to the emerging data. Field notes constitute a representation of observed events, persons, places and written accounts of interactions that have been condensed and preserved to offer insights and meanings to the researcher time and time again (Mason, 2002). At the end of the data collection activity, I listened to the conversations and read through the field notes to get an idea of what has transpired during the day, which aspects of each conversation from which respondents needed call backs and whether the emerging data answered the research questions set for the study.

Data collection was integrated with data analysis, allowing me to check out patterns and the research questions as they emerged and redefined data collection strategies as necessary (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Precisely, key words, themes and relationships were identified to order the data into categories. Before setting off for fieldwork for this study, the plan for analysing the data generated was to use the computer assisted software, precisely the Nudist software. But when the process of data generation began, I observed that the data emerging from the narratives of the respondents were bulky and complex due to the fact that, I allowed the respondents to raise issues and topics which they felt were relevant and needed to be heard. However, this did not mean that my research became poorly focused and ineffective, but giving the respondents the flexibility to talk about other village issues was a strategy to get in-depth information from my respondents and also build attachment with the community members.

The initial idea to use a computer software abandon to analyse the data was abandoned for a manual more subtle procedure that brought out the layers of meanings from the emerging data. During the data collection process a matrix was developed in which the various words and themes coming out from the data were placed into categories resulting in a spreadsheet that brought order to the messy, complex and bulky data. This process was done every day in the evenings after collecting data in order to draw out the relationships, meanings and ideas from the data. The process of ongoing data analysis during the fieldwork revealed the gaps in some of the responses and aided in preparing for follow-up interviews.

3.8 Reflections on my position as a Researcher

In qualitative research, the positionality of the researcher in respect of the researched can significantly influence the research process, data collection and analysis. Malterud (2001: 483-484) writes that, a researcher's background and position will affect what they choose to investigate, the angle of investigation, the methods judged most adequate for this purpose, the findings considered most appropriate, and the framing and communication of conclusions. In this study, my position as a former development worker in the study area shaped the data collection in certain ways. In the villages studied, I was both an 'insider' and an 'outsider' simultaneously with both positions changing with different settings and social actors that I came across. The general binary implied in the "insider – outsider" debates is that, it is less than real, because it seeks to assume that being an "insider" or "outsider" is a fixed attribute. Also, given that the data collection process is about constructing social meaning – a process that involves both the researcher and the source – in many ways such a dualism is meaningless in practice. To illustrate this point, the following examples, focusing on my positionality in relation to categories of informants are briefly recounted. These observations lead to the suggestion that at a particular time, at a particular place, I did find myself being an "outsider", which frustrated access to certain types of information and informants. First, the fact that the study area was an opposition strong hold and had a high number of migrants made some of the respondents very anxious in divulging certain experiences and expressing their own accounts. Within certain areas of Ntonaboma, especially in the Zongo areas of Akroso and Agyaade

villages, I felt at the margins during the data collection process as some of the key actors within these areas were not interested in responding about certain issues related to access to resource management and power relations. It appeared that some of the community members were particularly suspicious of the underlying reasons for my interest in decentralisation and overtly cautious about the fact that, I had not chosen any other area in the Afram Plains district other than Ntonaboma, which is known to be against the ruling government. The Ntonaboma community is also on record to have prevented the current District Chief Executive (DCE) from visiting the area because they claim he had neglected the community from the developmental activities of the district.

My surname, OSEI-KUFUOR, also created a lot of challenges for me during the fieldwork. I bear the same surname ¹¹as the 'President of Ghana', John KUFUOR who was the president of Ghana at the time of the study. In Ghana, surnames go a long way to determine one's place of origin, tribe and family relations. These factors have a lot of implications for politics in the country. Hearing of my surname made the community members to immediately imagine my political orientation. The selected study community is also perceived as an opposition area, so I had to do a lot of explanation during the fieldwork to convince people that I had no relation with the president that what I was doing was for academic work. During the initial stages of the data collection exercise the majority of the respondents were a

¹¹ During the period of my research in 2007 the president of Ghana was John Agyekum – Kufuor and Ashanti

little bit apprehensive or suspicious of my intentions for the research which shaped the way some respondents engaged me in detailed conversation. The fear was that engaging a 'stranger' with the same surname as the president could lead to some unintended outcomes for the individual and the community. However, for those who supported the party of the president they thought my visit provided an opportunity for them to support me in to get the information needed for the study. In all these I had to reflexively maintain a neutral position and continuously explain my position as a researcher with no links to the presidency.

The cultural norm or practice of keeping 'bad' things from the view of the visitor or stranger as stated in a proverb that *'ohohoo na owi akooko na ni abo'* meaning 'it is the stranger who consumes the fowl that is deformed or the no one wants'. The essence of this proverb is to highlight the difficulty in getting respondents or informant from the community if the researcher used a gatekeeper up the social hierarchy of the village. The gate keeper, in this case the DA member for Akroso wanted to influence the selection process of respondents, by suggesting individuals to be interviewed. The leaders also did not want to suggest individuals perceived as their opponents or people they disagreed with in the village. Their fear was that, they would reveal unpleasant things about their activities in the village. During the interview process, I realised that such individuals suggested by the village leaders were biased in their responses and sometimes economical with the truth. This had the tendency of introducing bias into the respondent selection process if not carefully negotiated. It became evident during the data collection process that such respondents appeared to be telling me what

they thought I should hear because they were not certain of how the information given was going to be managed despite reassurances of anonymity. This could be explained by the fact that, not many field research activities have been conducted by researchers in Ntonaboma community. This was evident when I was constantly told by some respondents during the early stages of the research that, community participation in local governance was very high and all local government structures were in fact functional and working very well. The names of community representatives on the various committees were shown to me to reinforce the claim by the respondents that local government structures were effective in Ntonaboma. On the other hand, other people in the community who saw me as an 'outsider' realised the opportunity to spill the beans on how certain people had monopolised local government structures in the community and took the opportunity to blow the whistle without putting their social relationships in the community at risk.

In the study, the DA member for Akroso village, Nana Akuamoah Boateng, who later became my host, gave me a research guide who showed me around the four villages and also led me to my selected respondents. However, during the early stages of my research I noticed that the respondents were not enthusiastic about giving detailed information or being interviewed. I thought it was due to inertia and with time things would be alright. One day after an interview session with a female respondent who was above fifty years old and a UC member she told me that if I wanted to get reliable and accurate information, then, she will advise that I undertake the research or conduct my interviews alone or if possible change the

research guide. According to her the research guide was perceived as an informant to Nana Akuamoah Boateng, hence individuals would find it very difficult giving out information if I am always seen in his company. According to her the fear of being labeled as having said something unpleasant about a village leader or the need to avoid conflict will make the selected respondents say 'only good things' about the leaders and not the reality of how things were done in the village. It was later that I got to know of a latent conflict among the various chief chiefs on land use and ownership which had affected interaction and trust between the researcher and the researched.

All the interviews with the local actors were carried out in the local predominant language, 'twi'. However, there were other respondents especially the settler farmers who could not speak 'twi' fluently and preferred to speak in their own indigenous language, ewe. This impeded some of the respondents to express themselves in their native language. Provision was made for a translator for individuals who could not speak 'twi'. This made the process of data transcribing very difficult since I could understand 'twi' but not 'ewe'. The physical presence of the translator during these conversations to some extent affected the depth and nature of some of the responses. I had to make call backs to further engage the respondents repeating similar questions and probing further for more responses so that it could be checked against earlier responses for authenticity and consistency. However, majority of the interviewees agreed to the recording of the conversations, which facilitated accuracy in transmitting people's views during the data analysis. Many of the interviewees when told that their identities would remain

confidential in the study pointed out to me that “we are now in a democratic era so we can all speak our mind freely without any fear”.

Despite efforts to interview more women representatives among the elected and appointed DA and UC representatives, more than 72% of them were men reflecting the male dominated political structure of decentralisation at the local level (Afram Plains District Assembly, 2002). Similarly, interviewing women during the data collection process was challenging due to the protective nature of husbands. Interviewing women in the presence of their husbands was a difficult activity since most women felt uncomfortable talking in the presence of their husbands. A related study on conflict and peace building in the Afram Plains by Aryee et al (n.d: 7) noted the difficulty in interviewing women especially on sensitive issues since the “existing culture forbids women from making pronouncements on controversial issues like land without the presence of men”.

As an ‘outsider’ who sought to interview their wives, their husbands wanted to sit in whilst the interview took place, mostly trying in a subtle manner to shape the conversation. For example, during the data collection there was an instance when I asked the husband of a female respondent if he could excuse us or move away a little bit to enable the wife feel free to talk. However, the wife responded in defense of the husband that they are one family and whatever she knows the husband is aware of; so it is not a problem if the husband sits in the interview. As I spent more time in the village and became immersed in the community it became evident that the actions of the husbands were formed by history of the actions of a teacher posted to the town in 1996.

Historical narratives during the research revealed that a teacher was once posted to the Ntonaboma community and he absconded with the wife of his landlord. This occurrence explained the actions of the husbands to shield their wives from “outsiders”. This limited the female respondents for this study and resulted in a bias towards male respondents for the study. However, there were other women respondents who were not married or whose husbands did not interfere with the interview process. As I spent more time in Ntonaboma, my status also changed from visitor to a known person working within the villages. I could manage to go about my research in the village without much attention to my presence and encountered minimal constraints with community members. With time I became familiar with community members and could normally interview their wives in the evenings when they were cooking their family meals. This was an ideal opportunity to have full access to the respondents as they had time to talk while cooking and their husbands were either out with their peers or hardly came near the area where cooking took place.

Another important issue that I had to consciously consider was respondents’ expectations concerning the outcome of the research findings. The respondents wanted to know whether by their participation in the research they stood to benefit from any governmental intervention. I had to continuously explain to them that my research was purely an academic exercise but I will also make sure that the findings are published so that the state could draw on some of the findings to inform its policy decisions. However, I assured the community members that I will make the findings of the study known to them through a GD when I complete the study. Other

respondents also made a request for money personally from me which I had to politely turn down. My fear was that when I start giving out money to respondents it will become the routine where others will also demand payments before they were interviewed. I kept on telling the respondents that if they do not benefit from the findings of the study their children stood the chance of benefitting in the future.

The initial plan to engage two research assistants from the community to help with the fieldwork had to be dropped. This was mainly due to three reasons; first the quality of the field notes from the previous interviews by the research assistants, secondly, their ability to ask questions that reflected my research themes and finally the ethical issue of their community membership making people not to come out with information that was seen to be sensitive. However, since the orientation of this study is based on in-depth actor narratives it became evident that it will be difficult to engage research assistants do undertake that kind of interview. Also the fees quoted by the prospective research assistants were on the high side as compared to my initial budget for the research. This did not in any way affect my study as the extent of my duration in the field enabled me to get in-depth information on the issues I was researching on.

The theoretical sampling approach adopted by this study placed no limit on the number of respondents selected for the study. The argument of the theoretical sampling approach is that once the researcher reaches 'saturation point', the data collection exercise he can be halted (Mason, 2002). During the data generation process, I noticed that I had reached saturation point when I observed that data emerging was mostly a repetition

of the information I had already gathered. Despite having no pre-determined limit on the number of respondents, I was able to gather enough data for this research, though undertaking the data analysis was a dilemma. Using an electronic format to analyse the data became unfeasible due to the sheer volume of data gathered and that fact that a lot of analysis had already been done during the period of the field work.

3.9 Ethical Issues and validity

For each interview and observation undertaken for this study, I sought informed consent from the individuals concerned and the gatekeepers' for the settings respectively. The issue of informed consent of social actors was of prime importance during the data gathering exercise. Before observing any site, permission was sought from the gatekeeper of that site. Similarly, all respondents who were interviewed for this study gave their informed consent before going ahead to interview them. I also informed all the participants that their inclusion in the research process was not mandatory and that they could opt out if they have any intentions of withdrawing from the interview process.

During the data collection exercise especially the GD and the interviewing process, participants sought anonymity and confidentiality which was agreed. The participants were cautious of the fact that some vital information concerning some of the issues being discussed especially responses concerning equity and equality concerning community governance spaces, access to resources and their social lives gets to their husbands it may lead to some bad consequences. Consent was always

sought from respondents before tape recording the conversations and writing down responses. Tape recording in some instances made some respondents feel uneasy and in some instances respondents asked me to stop the recording since what they were saying was “off-record and should not to be captured on tape”. Some respondents also did not give informed consent to be recorded on tape as they had some reservations concerning recording their conversation which may limit what information they could divulge to me. The idea of writing down field notes or tape recording conversation was not abandoned as consent was always sought from participants before doing so. While some respondents felt uneasy with the recording of conversation others had no problem with it.

On the issue of the validity of this research, I was informed by Mason (2002: 30) argument that, the research process is not passive or neutral, but “interactive, creative, selective and interpretative”. These elements about the research process causes concern for generalisation and data reliability, especially external validity of the research. Though the ethnographic approach adopted for the study is often critiqued for paying too much attention to a small number of cases, in this research it enabled me to get deeper insights and contextual account of people’s experiences about local governance. While there are limits to the generalisations that can be made from micro-level analysis, detailed community studies offer an opportunity to examine local dynamics driving broader trends. This is supported by Jackson’s (2002) argument that, researchers should focus on the atypical, the unusual and the rare in order to contribute knowledge of some larger picture. This study was more about illuminating how new local government

structures shaped individual participation and social organisation, hence, the findings from the case study are generalisable beyond the specific context, so far as decentralisation reforms similar to the Ghana approach has taken place. Obviously, the findings will limit generalisation to other localities in which new local government reforms have taken place due to the difference in context specificities and the circumstantial uniqueness of Ntonaboma which is embedded in history and culture. Generalisability however was not the goal of this research, but rather this study focused on the practice of decentralisation at the micro-level, to illuminate how the local government structures shape community participation and community management within a specific context.

3.10 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the approaches for primary data generation. The chapter highlighted the rationale, the objectives of the research and the research questions that guided the study. The research design was based an actor oriented approach that views social actors as 'knowledgeable' and 'capable'. The research approach also embraced the dynamic relationship between agency and structure. In order to gather individual experiences with decentralisation, the study employed multiple ethnographic data generation approaches notably the semi-structured interviewing technique, participant observation and the GD to enter into the social worlds of local actors at the community level. The data generated from the field was analysed manually and used to answer the research question for the thesis.

CHAPTER FOUR

INSTITUTIONALISING DECENTRALISATION IN GHANA

4.1 Introduction

Decentralisation policies, like all development interventions, are implemented in an on-going social and political local process shaping the practice of governance and social interactions at local levels. In this chapter, my main argument is that decentralisation reform is a complex and dynamic process that transcends the technocratic and managerial approach pervasive in many policy reforms (Olowu and Wunsch, 2004: 3). Therefore, it is important to highlight the historical, political and socio-economic conditions that shape decentralisation in a particular context.

Specifically, this chapter aims to provide a historical background of initiatives to institutionalise local government in Ghana. An understanding of the different trajectories of local government reforms offers insights into how local government has been reinvented to specifically shape behaviour and social organisation in Ghana. Similarly, historical analysis makes clear the reality of the top-down nature of local government reforms in Ghana. The chapter also discusses the interplay of certain political, economic and external factors that have influenced the trajectory of local government reforms in colonial and post-colonial Ghana. In this instance, my interest is on highlighting the emphasis placed on rationality, effectiveness and efficiency to coordinate human actions in achieving specific functional goals. The chapter also illuminates the changing positions of traditional or customary institutions in these local government reforms.

For an adequate analysis of data presented in this thesis, this chapter is divided into three main parts. The first part presents a historical analysis of the practice of decentralisation in Ghana from 1878 to 1957 focusing on conscious attempts by the colonial state to intervene in rural communities by formalising local government structures. Following Olowu and Wunsch's (2004) review of literature on African history of decentralisation, the first part of the chapter is further categorised into first, second and third waves of decentralisation.

The second part of the chapter highlights the continuities and discontinuities of past and present local government reforms by different political regimes in colonial and post-colonial Ghana. This is to illuminate the varied importance attached to efficiency and power of the central state against underlying issues of democracy, social inequity, power inequality and empowerment. The last part of the section puts the sub-district structures which are very important for this thesis into perspectives.

The final section of Chapter Four discusses the context of Ntonaboma to give the reader insights into the background of the study area. The essence is to prepare the reader for the discussion in the following three chapters.

4.2 Beginnings of local governance in the Gold Coast from 1878 to 1951

The focus of this section is to elaborate on how the rural population in the Gold Coast was incorporated into the decision-making arena of colonial power. Aryee (2000b) traces the period between 1878 and 1951 as

a signpost to illustrate attempts by the colonial authority of the Gold Coast to institutionalise local government arrangements. The period also represents the colonial state's imposition of its claim to control, administer and exercise sovereignty over the Gold Coast territories (Aryee, 2000b, 1994; Nkrumah, 2000). The reorganisation of the Gold Coast by the colonial authorities was guided by the principle of 'indirect rule'. The introduction of indirect rule as a technology for governing the rural population marked the extension of the British colonial state into the rural areas of the Gold Coast (Ray, 2003; Mamdani, 1996). Steps towards institutionalising decentralisation were purposely taken for administrative and control purposes.

Although the colonial government retained many indigenous social institutions in the Gold Coast, it superimposed a new consciously crafted 'monocentric' administrative system of government on the already existing polycentric social and political institutions that governed the complex community interactions and individual actions (Berry, 2002; Ribot, 2008).

The decentralisation of political structures by the colonial authorities was for the effective management of subjects and extraction of wealth (Boone, 1998). In order to effectively shape the government of the Gold Coast, and fully incorporate the rural areas into their local government administration, the colonial authorities relied on the passing of ordinances to regulate the role of chiefs to facilitate the extraction of wealth and also govern the inaccessible hinterland (Ubink, 2008; Ray, 2003). In the attempt to formalise local government and enhance their political and economic goals, the Gold Coast colonial authorities utilised these ordinances to consciously demarcate territorial boundaries. The subject population were

grouped into administrative units under dual hierarchies of traditional and colonial authority and integrated into the overall management of the colony (Ribot, 2008).

An example of the colonial state's formal legislative attempts to institutionalise local government in the Gold Coast was the 1878 Native Jurisdiction Ordinance of the Gold Coast Colony that sought to influence, but not necessarily to determine, in the first instance, the selection and removal of traditional leaders (Meltcafe, 1964: 390 cited in Ray, 2003). Examples of formal law aimed at institutionalising local government were the Municipal Ordinance of 1859 establishing municipalities in the coastal towns of the Gold Coast, the 1878 Native Jurisdiction Ordinance, the 1883 Gold Coast Native Jurisdiction Ordinance and the ordinance of the Northern Territories and Ashanti in 1932 and 1935 respectively (*ibid*). All these ordinances were aimed at consolidating and strengthening the power and authority of the chiefs as local government functionaries within the society and at the same time reengineering the executive, judicial, and financial arrangements in the Protectorate.

The new local government administrative arrangements were grounded in 'legal dualism' of formal and customary law suggesting that there was never a wholesale adoption of the former to shape social exchange (Mamdani, 1996: 17). Ray (2003) writes that alongside these formal laws of the Gold Coast were entrenched customary laws that regulated nonmarket relations, in land, in personal and in community affairs. This suggests that, pre-colonial Gold Coast had existing structures that shaped interaction and collective action. Formal law was deliberately

instituted to narrowly 'govern conditions of law and order, taxation, and justice for the colonial order' within the jurisdiction of urban centers which had European populations (Olowu and Wunsch, 2004: 30).

Mamdani (1996) writes that the deliberate separation of formal and customary law to shape the interactions of the urban centers and native population respectively led to differentiation among the population. Mamdani writes further that, "the emphasis on differentiation meant the forging of specifically 'native' institutions through which to rule subjects" (Mamdani, 1996: 8). But the use of existing customary laws of the Gold Coast in the affairs of the colonial authorities was constrained by the contested understanding and struggles over the interpretation of these customs within the rural societies. Such contestations and struggles over the meaning of custom resulted in either a redefinition or discarding of traditional practices whenever they were considered repugnant in the lights of colonial conception (Berry, 2002).

The new arrangements for local government resulted in the strengthening of ties between the traditional chiefs and the colonial authorities but were more often contested and negotiated in practice. The ordinance transferred most chiefly powers to the crown, but it also allowed tribal chiefs to make by-laws, subject to the Governor's consent. Within the overall structure of the colonial government, the traditional political authorities were placed under District Commissioners who supervised the day-to-day affairs of the protectorate. The chiefs were positioned below the District Commissioner.

Table 4.1 Summary of Ghana's history of decentralisation

It is important to mention that, although the tradition of political authority was basically incorporated into the structure of colonial government, the process of incorporation was embedded, and still is, in tension and conflict, in relation to customary law at the local level. The resistance of traditional authority and native population to colonial rule is also well documented (Ubink, 2008; Ray, 2003). Berman (1998) cites the example that, African society shaped the colonial state formation through acts of rebellion, ungovernability and revolt. Indigenous elites were also noted to have contested the colonial government's claim to lands and resources (Berry, 2002; Mamdani, 1996). The argument here is that, natives had strategies through which they negotiated or contested the policies of the colonial authorities. Thus, the outcomes of colonial strategies of incorporation at the local level were worked out through compromise and struggles in a variety of areas such as taxes and property rights.

Commenting on the dynamics of participation within the new local government arrangements during the era of indirect rule, Mamdani explains that it was signified by a 'mediated - decentralised – despotism' (Mamdani, 1996: 17). He notes how the NA were not democratically elected but handpicked to represent the interests of the British Colonial Government as well as to administer law and order. Mamdani writes on some of the central features of the Native Authority as institutions that,

'..., bore little resemblance to a local administration, say in Britain. Its personnel functioned without judicial restraint and were never elected. Appointed from above, they held office so long as they enjoyed the confidence of their superiors. Their powers were diffuse, with little functional specificity... Native Courts, Native Administration, and a Native Treasury ... crystallized the ensemble of powers merged in the office of the chief...These powers also included a fourth: making rules' (Mamdani, 1996: 53).

The functional strategies of colonial local government was consciously designed as a means of penetration and management of rural subjects but did not place emphasis on the social values of the local population, other existing forms of collective action and patterns of social organisation (Ribot, 2008; Haruna, 2003). The colonial local government arrangements placed much emphasis on rationalising the colonial state by putting in place bureaucratic organisations such as ‘establishing treasuries, appointing staff and performing other local government functions’ (Nkrumah, 2000:55).

The rational strategies of the colonial government placed the new local government arrangements alongside the existing social organisations of the rural areas. Hence, the approach encountered ‘enduring consequences’ at the local level due to the disregard of the heterogeneous nature of most rural societies compromising the possibility for efficient and effective government administration of the rural areas (Boone, 1998: 5-7).

Olowu and Wunsch (2004: 29) trace some characteristics of colonial decentralisation policies as “reflecting the power and perceptions of the colonial powers rather than the reality of cultural forms and norms”. They cite the absence of authentic customs and practices in the colonial administration system of local governance due to the relative ignorance of the ‘context’ by colonial officers. The impact of the relative absence of existing customs and practices was that local government instrumentally and narrowly over relied on existing traditional local organisations while at the same time ignoring the “grain of the social fabric” (Kelsall, 2008: 8). Other existing institutions and norms within the locality that appeared to help solve collective action

problems of the community were ignored. Subsequent post-colonial local government reforms adopted a conservative approach towards traditional authorities. Furthermore, the role of the traditional chief and the participation of local people in governance were ambiguous with much emphasis placed on strengthening the role of the central state for a functional and efficient government.

The next section discusses colonial attempts to transform local governance in the period towards independence.

4.2.1 Colonial efforts at 'modernising' local government, 1944- 1957

Between 1944 and 1954 there were attempts to turn 'indirect rule' in the Gold Coast into a form of 'modern' local government (Aryee, 2000b). During the 1950s, the colonial government in the Gold Coast abandoned the approach of relying on traditional chiefs to mediate rural areas to establish bureaucratic structures. After 1947 a deliberate strategy of decolonisation and decentralisation aimed at abandoning indirect rule was pursued through the establishment of local councils in several parts of the Gold Coast (ibid).

The moments preceding independence saw conscious efforts by the colonial government to reform government structures and introduce institutions that sought to engage directly with the natives. 'Decolonisation' as a policy of the colonial administration rested on the assumption that self-government required democratic legitimacy for central government. The fulcrum of such an approach was to technically craft efficient and democratic local government institutions that placed emphasis on 'efficiency, democracy and the local' and, an enhanced role for African administrators in the affairs

of the state (Olowu and Wunsch, 2004: 31). This period of reforming local government was also the beginning of the decline in the participation and influence of the traditional authorities in local government.

In the Gold Coast the major policy that provided the platform for colonial modernising efforts of local government was the Sir Henley Coussey's Committee on Constitutional Reform presented to the Legislative Council in December 1949. The Coussey's Committee report recommended a three-tiered local government structure based on land mass, population and resource availability suggesting a rational approach to local governance reform (Mohan, 1996). The local government council was made up of two-third elected membership and one-third chiefs, with paramount chiefs as presidents of the council (Aryee, 2003a). The lowest tier was the Village Area Council, which was to provide a wider participation of all sections of the community in the deliberation of the affairs of local authorities.

The Local Government Ordinance No. 29, 1951 led to the establishment of elected local councils which officially ended the colonial policy of 'indirect rule' in Ghana. The 1951 Ordinance had two local tiers namely the Local and Urban Councils and the Town, Village and Area Committees. The District, Urban, and Local Councils superseded the power and authority of the traditional authorities. The progress from 'indirect rule' to modern forms of local governance was still expressed by the notion of African societies as 'closed, corporate and consensual' suggesting the potential for collective action in local development (Ranger, 1983:24 cited in Berry, 2002). The period preceding 1957 saw the multiplication of standard local government council and tiers all over the Gold Coast (Asibou, 2002).

However, the principles underlying these new local government reforms implemented in 1951 were based on state regulation of which were incompatible with the 'grain' of African societies (Kelsall, 2008). The reform focused more on the establishment of macro-structures and economic output at the expense of ethical and cultural values (Haruna, 2001). The outcome for local government reforms were many institutional inventions that in reality were problematic to operate due to the inadequate understanding of the meaning of the social, and the diversity of institutions shaping interactions in rural life (Ribot, 2008; Berry, 2002; Mamdani, 1996).

4.3 Reinventing government - the ambiguity of local government

reforms from 1957 to 1981

The provision of a viable framework of local government in Ghana dominated the post-independent administration's reforms and thinking. In the post-independence period from 1957 onwards, successive governments in Ghana preoccupied themselves with local government reforms that were regarded as a necessary condition for the socio-economic development of the country. These local government reforms sought to remedy some of the negative consequences of centralised planning by crafting local government structures with some degree of political, administrative, and financial autonomy that aimed to harness the abilities, knowledge, and incentives of rural people (Aryee, 2008).

However, efforts to create local government structures between 1957 and 1981 swiftly changed in favour of central planning which sought to concentrate the power around the state by enlarging and strengthening

existing bureaucratic structures of the central state (Chazan, 1999). This was a strategy to achieve the political objectives of recentralisation of state power limiting the scope for democratic participation and a weakening of local government structures (Aryee, 2004; Chazan, 1999).

A review of local government reforms between 1957 and 1981 revealed that decentralisation was promoted to consolidate the power of central state (Aryee, 2008; Olowu and Wunsch, 2004). The motives behind efforts at decentralising power and authority failed to transform the nature of power and participation of local actors within local government (Haruna, 2001). In reality, the reforms failed to redistribute power to those originally excluded by colonial administration. As succinctly captured by Mahwood the orientation of the post-independent state shifted from “local autonomy in favour of central planning and greater control over public resources (Mahwood cited in Olowu and Wunsch. 2004: 33). The outcome of the state’s desire to control power and resources from the national level resulted in a deconcentrated administration similar to, but weaker than the colonial one.

The establishment of a viable system of local government in Ghana since independence in 1957 has proved to be problematic due to considerable political instability and economic decay (Crook, and Manor, 1998; Ninsin, 1985). After independence, attempts at decentralisation reforms were introduced at different times. For example, the Local Government Act 54 of 1961 was enacted during the government of the CPP under Dr. Kwame Nkrumah (Crook and Manor, 1998; Mahwood, 1983). The main features of this Act included a central government body, named as the

Ministry of Local Government (MoLG) which dealt with national issues and the local authorities as central government agencies.

After independence in 1957, the government of the Convention People's Party (CPP) rejected the 1957 constitutional provision for regional assemblies, fearing that such a step would promote regional or ethnic separatism, hence the centralisation of all decision making authority in the nation's capital (Aryee, 2004; Saaka, 2001). The Nkrumah government rather denounced regional structures claiming that these regional structure hindered national unity. Thus, the Nkrumah government reduced the regional (middle) tier of government to a purely an advisory position. According to Aryee (1994), the fragmentation of local government units by Nkrumah was a way of weakening the decentralised structures envisioned by the national constitution.

The strategies and mechanisms for governing rural areas under Nkrumah were 'centralised' and 'deconcentrated', sustained through bureaucratic institutions that enhanced central leadership and consolidated the power of the state (Chazan, 1999). The centralisation of power was justified as a more direct way to achieve rapid socio-economic development. The outcome was the placement of local government directly under the aegis of central institutions and the elimination of regional political bases that could enhance the power and autonomy of regional political leaders who advocated pluralism in national level politics.

The burgeoning administrative structures at the regional and local levels suggest that much effort was placed on deconcentration of local government. The Nkrumah government relied on conscious 'interventionism'

aimed at shaping and micro-managing social processes in towns and villages and linking localities directly to the state (Boone 1998). In February 1966, the CPP government was overthrown through a military coup by the National Liberation Council (NLC). Harris (1983) writes that among the first actions of the NLC was the replacement of the CPP's Regional and District Commissioners and the reduction of the districts from 160 to 144. The members of the 183 urban and local councils were taken over by management committees made up of three civil servants and a public nominee and chaired by the District Administrative Officer (DAO).

This local government reform re-introduced chiefs into the institutional arrangements but with a more subdued role just as a member of the committee (Harris, 1983). The inclusion of traditional rulers was to enable the NLC to assert their legitimacy as a political regime because they lacked popular legitimacy. The Town and Village Development Committees, which were voluntary bodies mainly concerned with community development also underwent re-engineering. These local government arrangements that were temporal continued until 1974, when they were replaced by District Councils.

The NLC introduced a new form of local government structure after constituting three commissions. The proposed reform was a four-tiered arrangement of Regional, District, and Local Councils and Town and Village Development Committees (Aryee, 2004; 1994). These structures continued to form the architecture of local government system implemented in Ghana after the NLC regime. However, the functions and powers inherent in the

new structures constituted a radical departure from that of the NLC (Nkrumah, 2000).

The main features of the new local government structure were District Councils that combined local government functions and political activities of the ruling Progress Party (PP) (Harris, 1983). Beneath the district councils were the local councils whose area of jurisdiction were coterminous with that of the traditional authorities within the district. Membership to these local councils were either elected or appointed. The reliance on appointing the district and regional chief executives by the centre reflects minimal interest in decentralisation as a 'radical project' by the state, but primarily as a means of perpetuating state control. The town and village development committees functioned as the lowest tier of the local government system.

The National Redemption Council (NRC) overthrew the PP government in 1972 through a coup. The local government policies pursued sought to secure the legitimacy of the regime rather than decentralising power and authority to local communities. This was evident in the suspension of the 1971 local government Act. Emphasis was placed on getting Regional Commissioners to take responsibility of the regions while maintaining the management committees in the districts. Later intentions to decentralise local government shifted toward gaining political control over the country due to the economic decline and attempts by other elements in the government to overthrow the NRC regime.

The suspended 1971 Act for local government and decentralisation was re-introduced in 1974 under the regime of Lt. Col Acheampong maintaining the position of DCE. The 1974 decentralisation and local

government reform amended the 1971 Local Administration Act and established 65 district councils (Nkrumah, 2000). Membership in the new local government institutions was again two thirds elected and one-third representatives of traditional councils with the military positioned at the apex as Regional Commissioners and head of all government machinery in the region (Aryee, 1994). The local government reforms introduced were generally characterised by deconcentration, and aimed at strengthening central government control at the local level (Nkrumah 2000).

In November 1978, the Supreme Military Council (SMC) replaced the NRC introducing district council elections. In June 1979, The Armed Forces Revolutionary Committee (AFRC) overthrew the SMC. The AFRC handed over power to the People National Party (PNP), a civilian government in September, 1979. The PNP government initially announced the creation of additional 40 districts bringing the total number of districts in Ghana to 105 (Aryee, 1994). However, another military government, the Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC) on December, 31 1981 overthrew the PNP before the creation of these new districts could be implemented.

The ongoing discussion in this section reveals that, the local government reforms undertaken by successive governments in Ghana between 1957 and 1981 were meant to reinforce the dominant role of the central state. At the same time these local government reforms reflected the desire of the various governments to create democratic structures after independence. Also, the attempts to 'tweak' local government reforms by the state between 1966 and 1982 placed emphasis on perpetuating the dominant role of the central state, improving the deteriorating infrastructure

and tackling the narrow economic base of the country rather than on local participation and empowerment as governance reforms (Aryee, 2000; Nkrumah, 2000; Mohan, 1996). The reforms elaborated a concentration of power around the central state rather than transforming the unequal power relations that shaped governance arrangements within the communities. For example, the various Local Government Acts that were implemented within the period 1957 to 1981 employed strategies that sought to reinforce the power of the central state through forged alliance with local elites. Boone (1998: 7) writes that, “post-colonial fusion of elites” has often been achieved by reinforcing the powers of local notables and neo-traditional bigwigs over the community members often in ways that compromise the bureaucratic efficacy at the local level and appeal to invented traditions of communal solidarity that are discordant with attempts to build individual citizenship identities within a unified nation state”.

In reality, much of post-colonial local government reforms were less relevant and meaningful to the circumstances of the local people especially in establishing structures that enhanced political participation and transforms structures of inequality. Most of these reforms undertaken during the period of 1970s and 1980s resulted in economic crisis and high levels in poverty (Abrahamsen, 2000; Mohan, 1996). The reforms failed to significantly improve the living standard of Ghanaians. It also did not adequately engage with the existing socio-cultural arrangements prevailing at the local level but rather to encourage rational management planning and development associated with the process of institutional reform (Wardell and Lund, 2006; Haruna 2003; Boone, 1998; Aryee, 1994).

4.4 The 'third wave' of decentralisation - Pressure from donors to reform

The third wave of decentralisation was grounded in the PNDC's philosophy of 'power to the people' and shaped by the 'Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) (Haruna, 2003; Mohan, 1996). The decentralisation programme under the PNDC was born out of a process of state restructuring and democratisation inspired by the 'neo-liberal agenda' and designed by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) as a result of unsustainable debt and economic decline (World Bank, 1983: 39; World Bank, 1990). In June 1982, the PNDC passed Law 14 to dissolve the district councils elected in November, 1978 under the People's National Party government. The PNDC instituted management committees and later District Secretaries to replace the district counsellors who later became responsible for the implementation of government policies and also manage the affairs of the rural population, (Mohan, 1996).

The 'Rawlings Revolution' of 31 December 1981 stressed on genuine accountability and popular participation to be the fulcrum of decentralised government. According to Mohan, the first attempt by the PNDC to decentralise power to local people was through the organs of the 'revolution' which was named the Committee for the Defence of the Revolution (CDR). The CDRs as populist organisations were deemed to be robust replacing the existing Village Development Committees that were perceived by the PNDC regime as inefficient and undemocratic.

Later the PNDC government made its intention to decentralise public services for the purpose of efficient administration known through a policy

guideline issued in May 1982 (Aryee, 2004; Mohan, 1996). In this policy guideline, emphasis was placed on the deconcentration of central administrative authority to the various regions, districts and communities to enhance local participation in governance (PNDC, 1983). The overall goal of the decentralisation programmes launched in 1988 by the PNDC regime was to redress the overcentralisation of power at the national level, improve urban–rural imbalance, and enhance local participation in national decision making (Ministry of Local Government 1996; Ahwoi 1992). To achieve this goal, central government ministries, departments, and agencies took more responsibility for policy planning and analysis, while local authorities shared responsibility for policy implementation.

However, as a result of the influence of lender conditionalities, the PNDC government in December 1983, announced a new governance policy, the Economic Recovery Programme (ERP) that sought to minimise the role of the state, and restructure the inefficient public sector leading to new regimes of governance (Aryee, 2008; Batterbury and Fenando, 2006; Ribot, 2002a). Basically the ERP was for economic liberalisation and political restructuring and was implemented in two stages. The first ERP was implemented between 1984 and 1986. The ERP during this phase sought to increase and export a higher percentage of the output from the agricultural sector especially cocoa, control inflation, improve international creditworthiness and rehabilitating Ghana's infrastructure. The second phase of the ERP from 1987 to 1989, also emphasised growth and balance of payments, but stressed improvements in the public sector.

Ghana's decentralisation programme which was a major component of the ERP's political restructuring commenced in 1988 due to strong donor pressure that advocated 'minimizing government intervention' in political, administrative and financial matters of the state (World Bank, 1984). The outcome was a process of state restructuring and democratisation. Decentralisation and local government reforms were recommended by donors and introduced in Ghana as a mechanism to enhance efficiency and optimal management of state institutions. The rationale for reducing the role of the state was to economise on scarce resources, make governance more responsive to the needs of the population and reduce corruption. Local government reforms were advocated by donors due to their potential in raising resources, providing services, expanding rural-urban linkages, stimulating private investment, and implementing national development policies (Olowu and Wunsch, 2004). The potential of local governments through civil society to offer accountable, representative and responsive modes of governance as compared to the central state supported arguments for limiting the role of the state in governance (World Bank, 1991; 1984).

Local government reforms were implemented based on technical issues masking political and cultural preferences (Haruna, 2003). These reforms were consistent with donor prescriptions that suggested that improving the economic performance of the country "requires both policy reforms and strengthened institutions for management" (World Bank, 1984: 39). Hence, decentralisation reforms were introduced as a technocratic project aimed at increasing efficiency and building institutional stability. The reforms placed more emphasis on technical issues aimed at achieving

efficiency than on participation and social justice (Abrahamsen, 2000). Critics argue that the reforms were introduced as 'neutral technologies' placing emphasis on 'technical considerations of economy and efficiency, rather than ideological and political preferences' (Shihata cited in Abrahamsen, 2000: 12)

The reforms initiated under the SAP saw the rationalisation, retrenchment and the divestiture by government of its responsibilities through the deconcentration of large numbers of government ministries to district level and the privatisation of many state owned institutions (Aryee, 2000). This reflected donor intentions to deregulate, separating the provision¹² of services from production responsibility, where the latter was turned over to the private sector. Reduction in government spending on services saw the removal of subsidies and the introduction of user fees on services all in the name of 'cost recovery' (Olowu and Wunsch, 2004; Nugent, 1995).

The reality of the cost recovery agenda was inadequate provision of social services to the poorest and vulnerable resulting in the instrumental use of local institutions and empowerment of citizens to manage basic social services (World Bank, 1989). The inclusion of citizens as consumers still emphasised the cost sharing approach but added a new dimension of empowerment. As stated by the World Bank, the inclusion of citizens was aimed at 'empowering the beneficiaries to demand improved services and of

¹² Provision is used in this case to mean the decisions made on the quality and quantity of public goods and services and how to finance, monitor and regulate the production of these goods and services. On the other hand production has to do with the technical transformation of resources into the delivery of goods and services (Olowu and Wunsch, 2004)

fostering a sense of individual and community responsibility for delivery' (ibid: 86). The ideals of empowerment manifesting in community participation and responsibility were all couched in economist and monetarist sense aimed at both transferring the burden and responsibility of the state onto citizens and making development cost efficient (Larson and Soto, 2008).

Haruna (2003) raises concerns about the governance reform program undertaken by the PNDC for pursuing over ambitious economic growth as a result of the exigencies of economic decline. He argues further that the governance reform program adopted by the PNDC was based on western values and ideas that emphasised methodological individualism and rational explanations and, an instrumental and homogenous notion of 'community' that could not fit fully well into "a culture based on a different kind of localism" (ibid: 343).

The policies underpinning these reforms were overly dependent on aid conditionalities and recommendations from international finance institutions. These recommendations were mostly technical in nature focusing on good government whilst ignoring the complex historical, structural realities of the country (Abrahamsen, 2000; Mohan. 1996). The neglect of internal contextual factors especially the social outcomes of the reforms led to worsened conditions under the SAP programme. The outcome as Abrahamsen puts it was "a merely technical adjustment" that led to increase in poverty levels and social differentiation among the population having serious consequences for political, economic and social development of the country (ibid: 10).

4.5 Continuities in colonial and post-colonial local governance reforms

In this section, I intend to illuminate the continuities in colonial and post colonial local government reforms to show that these reforms have been narrowly concerned with crafting an efficient and effective local government as opposed to wider issues of poverty, exclusion and power inequalities associated with context. Using examples of colonial and post colonial approaches to local government reforms, I argue that both reforms tilted towards technocratic orientation and a continuity of western values and ideals to reinforce the centralisation of state power (Spencer, 2007; Williams et. al., 2003b; Heller, 2001). However, the only fundamental difference between colonial and post colonial mode of governance is the introduction of citizenship, democracy, participation and 'good governance' principles by the latter.

4.5.1 Bureaucratic and top-down nature of reforms

A historical analysis of local government administration in both colonial and post-colonial administration in Ghana reveals a continuity regarding the emphasis placed on rationality, centrality and predictability normally associated with the bureaucratic approach (Haruna, 2003). In Ghana, decentralisation in both colonial and post-colonial reforms has been applied as a 'political project' to reinforce the power of the central state rather than promote the participation of citizens. This continuity in local government arrangements is evident in the replication of centralised and hierarchical organisations by contemporary governments reproducing the

colonialist power relationships (Crawford, 2008; Aryee, 2008; Owusu, 2005; Cooke, 2003).

Cooke (2003) writes that, the reason for successive governments in Ghana to maintain and reproduce centralised and hierarchical organisations could be explained by the desire of the state to maintain control of the rural areas. The approach for effective state control of rural areas, he argues, lies in the reproduction of the design and reform of local government structure through certain “technologies of government” to enable central government to bring rural areas under its surveillance. Although all governments since independence have put forward inefficiency of state structures and socio-economic development of the rural areas as the main argument for decentralisation, it is evident in the literature that the motivation to decentralise was to hold on to power and authority through a network of patronage power (Aryee, 2008; Owusu, 2005; Ribot, 2002).

Significantly associated with the bureaucratic reforms is the ‘top’ down nature of Ghana’s decentralisation programme. The continuity in the top-down approach is reflected in the nature and manner power and authority is generally transferred from central government to the districts. For example, under colonial rule, the decision to appoint district commissioners was made from the top. Similarly, the current local government system appoints DCEs and other DA members from the centre as was done during the colonial period (Asibuo, 2000). Various studies reveal the top-down nature of staff appointments to decentralised departments at district level.

4.5.2 Ambiguous role of chiefs in local government reforms

Exploring the history of local government in Ghana reveals that there has been very little consistency in the roles carved for traditional authorities as an administrative extension of the state. The literature on local government reforms in Ghana reveals how new local government structures are frequently superimposed on existing customary governance structures (Ubink, 2008; Ray, 2003). Most local government reforms since the colonial period did not completely abolish the role of traditional chiefs but accommodated them within the new arrangements as a result of the diverse sources of the legitimacy of their authority and the role they played in shaping the affairs of their communities. The continuous inclusion of traditional chiefs in local government reforms from the 'indirect rule' approach to the current local government framework has been fraught with ambiguities (Ray, 2003; Ribot, 2002a; Lund, 1998; Nugent 1995).

The role played by traditional authorities in shaping the affairs of their respective communities made them an indispensable partner in the affairs of the central government. However, evidence suggests that post colonial governments have consistently lacked a clear policy regarding the role of traditional authorities in local government reforms (Ray, 2003). Various local government reforms all re-engineered the role of traditional chiefs in local government. The nature of their involvement varied with every local government reform. For example, the 1951 Constitution under the CPP government made available 37 out of the 75 seats in the new Assembly to be elected by the Chiefly Territorial Councils (Boafo-Arthur, 2001). The 1952 local government reforms in the Gold Coast, separated traditional councils

from the new local government authorities but the one-third representation of chiefs on the local government authorities was retained (Ray, 2003). In 1954, the role of chiefs in local government was reformed leading to the establishment of an elected local government assembly with membership of 104. Further reforms such as the 1957 Constitution reserved only one-third membership of local government seat for chiefs due to the preference for party officials at various levels to chiefly authority. Traditional chiefs were later banned from taking seats on the local government authorities through the Local Government Act of 1961 (Ray, 2003; Aryee, 1994). Further reforms such as the 1969 constitution made provision for chiefs by not only establishing the National House of Chiefs but also reserved one-third of the membership of District Councils for chiefs. Additionally, a provision was made in the Regional House of Chiefs for the inclusion of not more than two chiefs from the region on to the Regional Councils. Similarly, the 1979 constitution made provision for one-third of the District Councils to be made up of traditional authorities in the district in accordance with traditional and customary usage (Art.183 [i]). The reforms also maintained the place for two chiefs from the Regional House of Chiefs to be on the Regional Councils.

The current Local Government Law (PNDCL 207) of 1988 changed the role of chiefs in local governance by limiting their involvement to only the RCC. The Local Government Act (Act 462) of 1993, section 5 (d) makes provision for the participation of chiefs but they lost their one-third membership on the district councils. The populist approach adopted by the PNDC perceived the active participation of chiefs in the district councils as undermining their 'revolutionary' ideals (Aryee, 2000; Mohan, 1996).

Legislative Instrument 1589 of 1994 also did not make any provision for the automatic inclusion of chiefs in the sub-district structures such as the Urban, Zonal, Town Councils and Unit Committees. Yet the role of chiefs in the affairs of their territories still prevailed at the local level, particularly in more rural areas of the country (Ray, 2003).

The absence of any structured and formalised arrangement that seeks to foster partnership and participation of traditional institutions in local governance affects the reality of the decentralisation process (Ayittey, 1991). In traditional communities claims are made about the potential of traditional authorities to foster inclusion and egalitarian principles to shape interactions (Owusu-Sarpong, 2003). Despite the idealised potentials of traditional chiefly authorities, the catalogue of local government reforms ranging from colonial impositions to contemporary reforms shaped by external imperatives, continue to offer traditional authorities passive roles in the affairs of decentralised institutions transplanted within their territories (Ribot, 2002). Although certain aspects of the development literature view traditional authorities or chiefs as undemocratic and also unrepresentative of the larger population (Ribot, 2002a; Mamdani, 1996), their intimate contact with the local populace provides them with the opportunity to shape activities at the community level. Other authors also maintain that, the relationship between the traditional chiefly authorities and the community is that of inclusiveness, representing the whole community beyond difference aimed at seeking the welfare of their subjects and mobilising them for development¹³. Such claims

¹³ For example, in Ghana traditional authorities still continue to play an important role in the affairs of their locality despite several local government reforms that sought to shrink their

made about the position of traditional chiefs reveal their dynamic and often contradictory nature in local development.

This passive and conservative role given to traditional authorities in the current local government framework has consequences for the legitimacy and authority of the new actors brought into the local governance arena (Juul and Lund, 2002). The authority of the chiefs in the public affairs of the community is legitimised based on tradition, religion and custom, while the legitimacy of official actors in the new local government framework are derived from elements that emphasise legal or formal rules and democratic elections (Ray, 2003; Lund, 2001). Since authority is enacted in practice among diverse individuals there is the possibility for struggles and contestations if there are competing structures and sources of authority. This accounts for the evidence in some districts of the tensions and acrimony between either District Chief Executives and the chiefs on one hand or either the Assemblyman or Unit Committee (UC) members and the chiefs (Crawford, 2008; Ribot, 2002).

The role of traditional chiefs in the affairs of their communities is an outcome of historical and political struggles or cultural processes that need to be taking into consideration in fashioning out a role for them in local government reforms.

authority. For example, people still maintain close ties with their traditional chiefs in order to maintain their native identities. In certain instances, people rely on chiefs to validate the deeds to their land titles after having it documented by institutions of the state such as the lands commission.

4.6 The New Local Governance System in Ghana 1988 to present

This section discusses the institutional arrangements of the current Local Government Act, Act 642 which serve as the main legal framework underpinning the process of decentralisation in contemporary Ghana under the fourth republican constitution. The government reforms in Ghana commenced with the process of state restructuring and democratisation by the PNDC in 1987 with the District Assembly (DA) concept promulgated under a new Local Government Law in 1988 (PNDC Law 207). The PNDC Law 207 introduced a four-tier structure that makes up the current system of decentralisation in Ghana in 1988. The legal provisions of decentralisation lay claim to a democratic and devolved form of decentralisation in which popular participation was encouraged (Crawford, 2008; Government of Ghana, 1992). The DA structure implemented by the PNDC government incorporated the principles of representative democracy (Aryee, 1999; Ayittey, 1991).

In structural terms the new DAs reflected a 'mixed' or 'fused' type of decentralised authority forming part of a single integrated hierarchy of government administration from local to national levels (Aryee, 2008; Crook and Manor, 1998). Each DA brings under one authority, the twenty two line departments and agencies deconcentrated by the new law to the district. The local government reforms undertaken in 1988 created 107 District and Municipal Assemblies that was later increases to 110. They DA were formally recognised in PNDC Law 207 and established individually through legislative instruments. As Law 207 states, "a District Assembly shall be responsible for the overall development of the District and shall ensure the

preparation and submission to the Council for approval the development plan and budget for the District” (PNDC, 1988: 7).

Most of the functions assigned to the DAs were related to the provision of services at the local level. The district assemblies were linked to the grassroots or villages through the sub-district structure notably the unit committees. The unit committees were designed to formalise the relationship between the district and the grassroots.

The institutional arrangement of the local government structure in Ghana is illustrated in Fig 3.2. At the apex of the framework is the central government that frames and shapes the policy for the decentralisation process. The Regional Coordinating Council is an administrative and coordinating agency created in each region to regulate, monitor and supervise the activities of the DAs in that region. It also oversees the use of all funds allocated to each district assembly by any agency of the central government.

Beneath the RCC are the District Assemblies variously labelled as metropolitan, municipal and district assemblies¹⁴ based on spatial and population size. The DAs as district level institutions link the communities upwardly to the state. They were created as the pivot for government administrative and developmental decision-making in the district. Presently there are 138 district assemblies in Ghana made up of 4 metropolitan

¹⁴ The metropolitan, municipal and district assemblies are the political and administrative authorities in the districts which exercise legislative, deliberative and executive functions. The metropolitan assemblies are areas with population of more than 250, 000; the municipal assemblies are areas with population of between 95,000 and 250,000 while the district assemblies are areas with population between 75,000 and 95,000.

assemblies, 10 municipal assemblies and 124 district assemblies (Aryee, 2003).

Membership of the DAs is made up of the District Chief Executive (DCE) who represents the central government; seventy percent (70%) are elected members and thirty percent (30%) members appointed¹⁵ by the state. The appointed members are appointed by the President in consultation with the traditional authorities and interest groups in the district. The government appointees are assumed to complement the elected DA members with technical expertise that is lacking among the elected members.

Each of the elected DA members represents an electoral area in district. The total number of elected DA members is equal to the sum of electoral areas in the district. Members of Parliament (MPs) whose constituencies fall within the authority of the DA are considered as non-voting members of the DA.

The Act that establishes the decentralisation programme requires DAs are supposed to undertake functions that promote and support productive activity and social development in the district. As outlined in the PNDC Law 207, the main function of the DA is their responsibility for the overall development of the district including the provision of services and management of basic infrastructure and district works. They are also

¹⁵ This provision coupled with the appointment of DCEs has been used by successive governments to fill the DAs with party officials and patrons to allow the central government extend its control over the activities of the DAs. In the recent elections in 2008 in which the opposition party won, the first act of the new government after assuming office in 2009 was to revoke the appointment of all government appointed members of the DA.

responsible for effective mobilisation and allocation of resources for the provision of public services in the interest of all the communities.

Beneath the DAs are the sub-district structures¹⁶ established by Legal Instrument (LI) 1589. Though these sub-district structures have been part of the decentralisation framework since 1988, inadequate interest by community members and limited financial support from the state to make these structures operational delayed its implementation since 1993 (Crwaford, 2008; Aryee, 2003a; Ahwoi, 2000). The sub-metropolitan, urban, zonal, area councils and the Unit Committees (UC) constitute the micro mechanisms for political representation and participation at the local level. The sub-metropolitan district councils (sub-metros)¹⁷ constitute settlements that are found in the cities in most regions of the country. The composition of the sub-metros consists of not less than twenty five (25) and not more than thirty (30) members (PNDC Law 207).

The membership of the sub-metros is made up of all elected DA members whose areas of authority fall within the electoral area and presidential appointees' resident within the sub-metro and not more than twelve UC members in the area of authority of the sub-metro. The sub-metros and urban councils¹⁸ are similar in composition and mandate but are only different in spatial size and population sizes. These councils are not

¹⁶ Based on the population size of the settlement the sub-district structures are further characterised as sub-metropolitan district councils, Urban, Zonal, Town, and Area councils. Though they are all suppose to perform similar roles within their area of authority their composition varies but are all made up of the same category of representatives.

¹⁷ The sub-metros are created for settlements with population above 100,000 people. In all there are thirteen (13) sub-metros in the country.

¹⁸ The urban councils are created for settlement with population over 15,000 but less than 100,000. There are currently 34 urban councils in Ghana.

elected bodies but membership to the council is based on appointments made by the DCE as the representative of the President in the district in consultation with the Presiding Member¹⁹ (PM), traditional authorities and other identifiable organised productive economic groupings in the urban area, municipality or town.

The Zonal councils²⁰ however differ in composition made up of not less than fifteen (15) and not more than twenty (20) members. This composition is made up of not more than five elected DA members and not more than ten representatives of the UC members and not more than five appointed members of the DA. The town or area councils²¹ and the UCs constitute the lowest level institutional arrangements that form the sub-district structures of the DA system. The town or area councils have identical composition as the zonal councils. The urban, zonal and area councils are the rallying point of local enthusiasm in enlisting support for DA activities because of their closeness to the people. This reflects the emphasis placed on bureaucratic institutions in Ghana's local government reform programme to achieve functional ends.

The decentralisation legislation also affected local governance at the community level. The PNDC Law 207 defined the rural village or urban

¹⁹ The PM is elected from amongst the DA members at its first session. The PM chairs the general meetings of the DA. He has an ambiguous role as a 'Speaker' of the DA and a respected community leader who mostly have links with the political party in power.

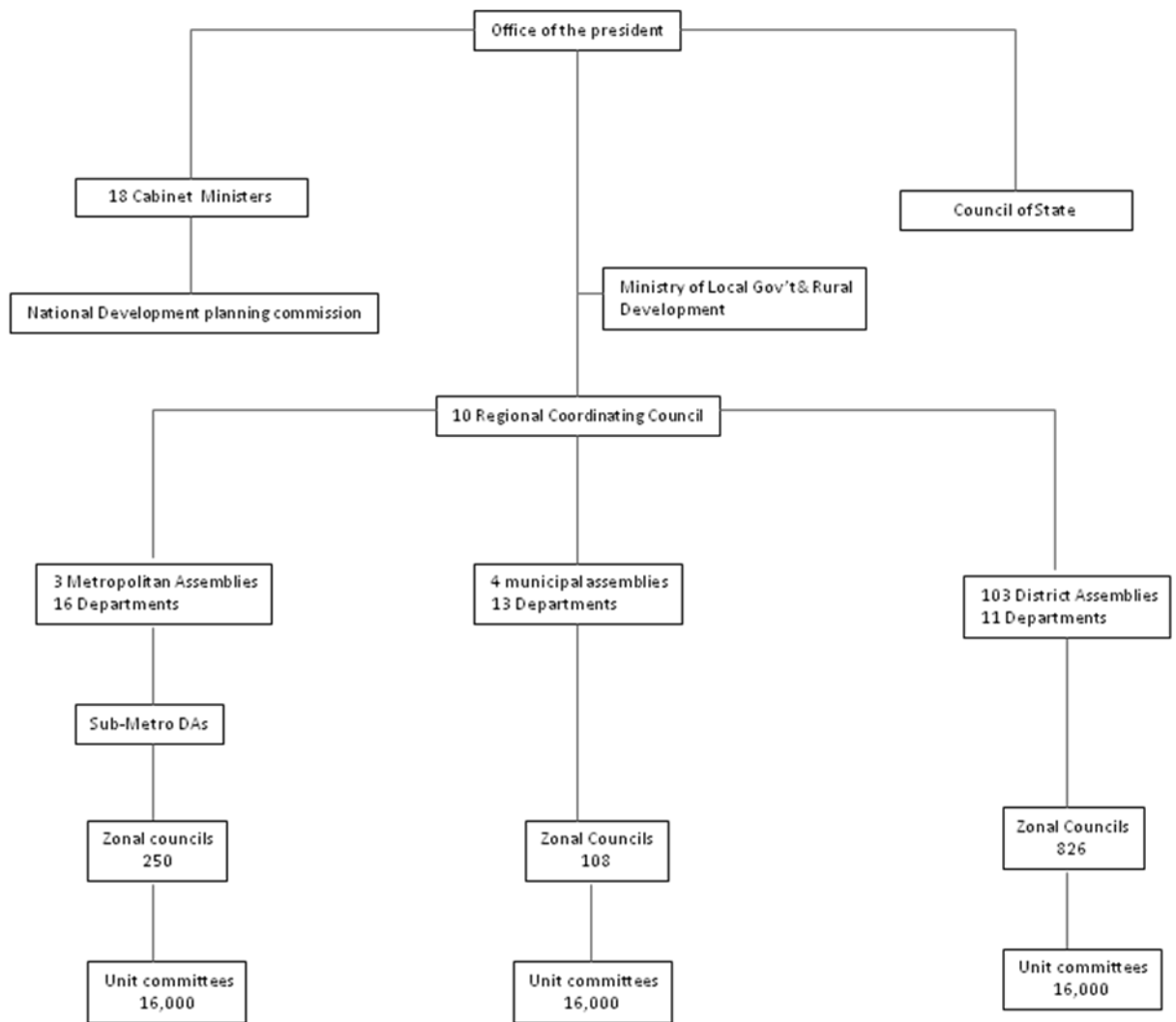
²⁰ Zonal councils are zones in the 'one-town' DAs and are established for settlements with population over 3000. There are 108 zonal councils in Ghana.

²¹ The Town Councils are established for settlements with population between 5,000 and 15,000 whiles the Area Councils comprises a number of settlements with population below 5,000 that are grouped together. The area councils cover villages and rural communities and in some cases can be identified with a traditional authority.

neighbourhood as the lowest level of the central government's hierarchy. The legislation dismantled the Village/Town Development Committees (TDC) for being inefficient and undemocratic and replaced it with the Unit Committees. The UCs are elective bodies consisting of ten members elected through universal adult suffrage and five appointed members selected by the DCE on behalf of the President in consultation with PM and other identifiable groupings in the Unit. The UCs also serves as focal points for deliberation on local issues in order to make recommendations to the DA. The UC's mandate include supervising and monitoring staff performing duties and all self-help projects of the DA in its area of authority. It is also responsible for the organisation of village communal labour work, revenue generation, public educational campaign and registering deaths and births in the Unit.

It is unclear in policy documents as to the extent to which the current decentralisation framework consciously planned and deliberately structured for 'good governance' purposes is effective in meeting the various needs of the locality and its citizens more efficiently. The compatibility of the new formal local government structures, in this case the UC with existing institutional arrangements and the social values of the locality in which it is anchored is adequately clarified.

Figure 2.1 The New Local Government Structure



Source: Aryee (2003).

The next section critically analyse the empirical literature that evaluates the outcomes of the functions of the UCs in Ghana to enable me draw deep insights into the affairs of the UC which is the main object of this study.

4.7 Does crafting institutional solutions to decentralisation lead to effective and efficient governance at the community level?

The decentralisation policy in Ghana optimistically highlights the potential of the sub-district structures in managing the affairs of the community (PNDC Law 207). Based on the institutional arrangements shown in Figure 3.2 the UCs are the lowest formal organisations through which the empowerment and participation concerns of citizens can be pursued in practice. The UCs as a local political institution²² acts as the interface between the central government and the local population. At the local level, the UCs provide the enabling platform that allows social actors to participate in decision-making and articulate their claims for the provision of public services from the DA through their local representatives (Aryee, 2000; Botchie, 2000).

The UC concept is required to operate in a formal and transparent manner to enlist the participation of community members for the socio-economic development of their areas (Aryee, 2008; Boafo-Arthur, 2001;

²² It is built on the 'principles of probity and accountability' of the PNDC regime with an emphasis on rights, transparency, representation and regulation which is parallel to the ideals of the 'good governance' agenda (Mohan, 1996).

Gyimah Boadi, 1994). As stipulated in the legal framework setting up the decentralisation process, the UCs are non-partisan organisations at the 'village to promote popular local participation in local decision-making' (Article 240[2]). The assumption is that it will be effective in mobilising the community for development if it is de-politicised. They are also to replace existing village level organisations responsible for community mobilisation for development. This reveals the evolutionary, 'apolitical' and 'ahistorical' ideals that informed the establishment of the UCs (Mosse, 1997).

Various studies in Ghana focusing on the activities of UCs highlight their non-functional nature and their inability to contribute to the overall national effort towards poverty reduction (Crawford, 2008, 2004; Aryee and Asante, 2003; Botchie, 2000). Some of these studies specifically investigated the causes for the non-functional nature of the UCs. The studies evaluated the UCs based on the static functions prescribed for it in the community within the decentralisation framework (Crawford, 2008; USAID, 2003; CDD, 2003). For example, a study conducted by Crawford (2008: 126) in some selected districts in Ghana discovered that only nine out of the twenty-two UCs were functional in the study area as at 2004, and even the functional UCs were dependent on a small number of activists. Crawford explains further that, "the remaining thirteen though existing on paper had effectively ceased to function" (ibid: 126). Concerns also arise regarding the dearth of human resources and organisational competence to operationalise the UCs at the village level (Botchie, 2000).

As a response to some of these problems encountered at the sub-district level, the NPP government in 2004 reviewed district boundaries

aimed at consciously creating 28 additional district assemblies out of the existing 110. This increased the total number of district assemblies in the country to 138 (Institute of Local Government, 2004). The rationale for creating these additional assemblies was to enhance the efficiency of the district assemblies by reducing their spatial size so that the assemblies would be more proximate to their constituents. Proximity in the decentralisation literature is supposed to make governments vulnerable to citizen pressures, and makes it easier for citizens to become more informed and hence more demanding of good services (Tendler, 1997).

In reforming the decentralisation framework in Ghana there is a renewed emphasis on achieving efficiency by instrumentally creating more new local government units. Reforming the spatial dimensions of the DAs was aimed at an optimal use of the DA common fund for efficient and effective delivery of public services. Such an approach reflects much endeavor on the part of the government towards efficiency than to poverty reduction and equity concerns. However, critics question the efficiency and equity rationale for the creation of the new districts and sub-district arguing that it was rather informed by populist demands of the PNDC activist (Aryee, 2000; Ahwoi, 2000).

Rational explanations for the participation (non participation) of community members in the affairs of the UC are also found in the reasons cited for the non functional nature of the UC (Crawford, 2008, 2004; Aryee and Amponsah, 2003; Aryee and Asante, 2003: 70). Crawford cites the 'unmet expectations regarding payment of sitting allowance' and the 'sacrificial' or voluntary nature of the community representative's role' as

some of the main reasons for the non functional nature of the UCs in Ghana (Crawford, 2008).

Though the rational factors listed may account for the non-functional nature of the UC, inadequate consideration is attached to the realities of the context of decentralisation at the community level; the social processes, relationships, human values and structures shaping decentralisation (Franks and Cleaver, 2007). Difficulties in getting community individuals involved in public processes of the UC are acknowledged in policy narratives but only focusing on incentives sidesteps other social and cultural factors that shapes participation and non-participation in the collective activities. Similarly, the complex and wider motivations for individual participation in the affairs of the UCs are not given adequate attention.

Exploring the literature on decentralisation in Ghana reveals that, studies that explicitly focus on the sub-district structures are lacking²³ The few that were found pay little attention to the depth of social practices and processes that shape the UC. Such partial explanations for the non-functional nature of the UC are based on mechanistic notions that assume a “material rationality and relegates many important issues to the realm of values and norms” (Shepherd, 1998: 63). This is not to say that the functional explanations for the inactive nature of the UCs based on instrumentalities and economic rationality are not important but we have to complement it with an analysis of the ‘social’ to understand more completely

²³ Crawford (2004) acknowledges that there is inadequate research into the activities of the highly localised examples of representative democracy epitomised in the unit committees.

the reasons for the inadequacies of the UCs in undertaking their prescribed full governance roles and responsibilities within the community.

A detailed analysis of the socio-political context will illuminate how social relationships, existing socially embedded institutions, ongoing politics and power shape the UCs, especially in the performance of their functions within the village. It is at the everyday level within the locality that the UC as an institution is subjected to diverse interpretations, adaptations, contestations and struggles by different social actors revealing the complexity of the process of decentralisation in rural life.

The next section provides a contextual background of Ntonaboma, the study area, before moving on to answer the analytical questions guiding the study. This is aimed at immersing the reader in Ntonaboma to provide a deeper understanding of how particularity of history and place enmeshes with local government reforms to shape the processes of social transformation which is the focus of the next three chapters.

4.8 Overview of the study

This section briefly provides a description of the Kwahu North District²⁴ before presenting a detailed profile of Ntonaboma, the study village. The Kwahu North district is about 100km from the Eastern Regional capital. The district resembling a peninsula is cut off from the rest of the country due

²⁴ The district was called Afram Plains by Legislative Instrument 1415 but had the name changed to Kwahu-North district in 2007 by Legislative Instrument.

to limited physical access. It is a remote rural district with high levels of poverty.

As the Map on page 143 shows, the Kwahu North District is located in the northern most part of the Eastern Region of Ghana. The spatial size of the district is about 5,040 sq km making it the largest district in the Eastern Region in terms of landmass (Afram Plains District Assembly, 2001). The district is isolated from the rest of the Region by Lake Volta to the south and east, and the Obosum River to the north. The district can be accessed from the mainland of Eastern region by three main entry points all of which involve a ferry service.

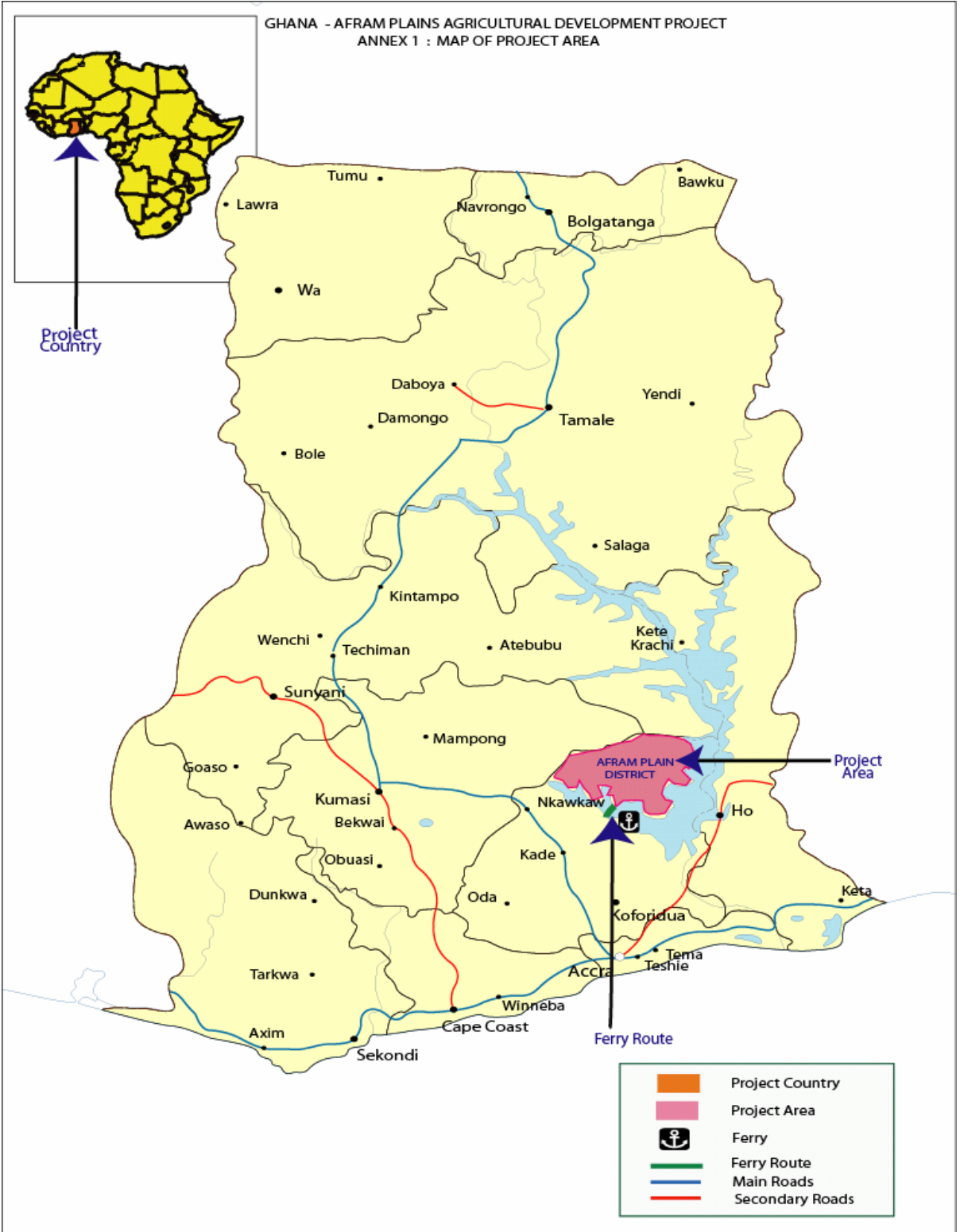
Scarp- lands are a major geologic feature affecting the climate of the Afram Plains. Climatically the district lies within the wet guinea savannah zone which is characterized by double maxima rainfall in June and October. The rainfall pattern which is unreliable is characterised by a main rainy season April through the middle of July then a minor rainy season in August through October followed by a long dry hot season from November to March

According to the 2000 Population and Housing census, The Afram Plains District has a population of 143,950 (Ghana, Statistical Service, 2000).The population is scattered in 544 villages spread over the 5040 sq km land area (Afram Plains District Assembly, 2001). The district has a low population density of 19 persons per square kilometer with a growth rate of 3.6% (Ghana Statistical Service, 2001). The sex ratio for the district is 114.9 indicating a higher proportion of men than women in the area deviating from the nation and regional patterns (Afram Plain District Assembly, 2001).

The Kwahu North district has three urban towns namely; Donkorkrom, Tease and Ekye Amanfrom. The Area Councils (AC) in the district are Donkorkrom, Forifori, Amankwaa, Ntonaboma, Ekye-Amanfrom, Mem-Chemfre, Nyakuikope, Tease and Samanhyia. In all there are forty nine (49) and one hundred and ninety (190) electoral areas and unit committees respectively in the district. The majority of the inhabitants in the district are settler farmers from the Volta and Northern regions of Ghana who have moved southwards to the district due to desertification in the northern areas of the country that lies in the savanna vegetation zone (Deshler and Edmonds, 2004). These groups include the Asante, Krobo, Ewe, Effutu and Ningo, and people from the north of Ghana such as the Dagomba, Konkomba, Dagaba and Fulani (ibid).

The main indigenous tribes are the Akan speaking group predominantly found in the western part of the district. The ewes constitute the second largest group in the district. The nature of their fishing occupation places them mostly along the banks of the Volta Lake. People from the northern part of the country constitute the third major ethnic group in the district. They are found in most of the farming villages due to the nature of their occupation either as sharecroppers or tenant farmers. The Fulani tribe is into livestock rearing and mostly migrates from the northern part of Ghana and other neighbouring countries such as Burkina Faso and Mali. However, the settler farmers appear to be in the majority and they dominate both the farming and fishing industry in the district (GDHS; 2005; King, 1988).

GHANA - AFRAM PLAINS AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT PROJECT
ANNEX 1 : MAP OF PROJECT AREA



The main pull factor attracting immigrants to Afram Plains is the availability of land for both farming and grazing of livestock. Therefore access and ownership rights to resources differ among the various ethnic groups inhabiting the plains. The diverse ethnic groups each following their own sociocultural practices often disrupt and undermine the practices of other ethnic groups. Contestation and struggles occur as a result of the indigenous population's insistence on having their customary arrangements to shape resource and community management arrangements. Two key issues informed the struggles and contestation that occur between the indigenous and settler²⁵ populations. First, the confusion about the status of settlers, and second, conflict between settlers and paramount chiefs in relation to security and tenure of resource ownership and use (King, 1988).

The district has transient population that could be attributed to the high settler population and the migration of natives to urban areas (GDHS, 2005). Young school leavers and immigrants from the North (tenant farmers) are usually the major source of labour but the majority of them leave the plains after accumulating some funds. This phenomenon has resulted in an ageing farming population reflected in the population dynamics of the district (ibid).

The major crops cultivated are maize (corn), beans, rice and yams. Some of these crops especially yam and maize are grown in commercial quantities and serve as a major market attraction to traders from the national

²⁵ Two categories of persons reside in the villages - those considered indigenous to the area and those considered settlers. The indigenes are regarded as natives of the villages and the settlers are migrants from different parts of Ghana.

capital. However, there exist large tracts of teak plantations in the district. Apart from farming, fishing activity is the emerging occupation mostly undertaken by the Ewes.

The study site, Ntonaboma, is about 30km from the district capital, Donkorkrom. Ntonaboma was created as a resettlement town²⁶ in 1968 due to the construction of the Volta Lake²⁷. The name Ntonaboma means '*ato abomaa*' literally meaning we have met the plateau. Since the majority of the villages affected by the construction of the Volta Lake had populations of less than 100 inhabitants, the resettlement scheme was consciously designed in such a way that villages were regrouped into larger population units in order to facilitate efficient and effective provision of social and physical infrastructure and services (King, 1988).

In Ntonaboma four such villages namely Supom, Akroso, Yamuoso and Agyaade were put together to constitute the resettlement town. The population in Ntonaboma as at 2000 was 2819 distributed as follows; Akroso, 1325; Supom, 812; Yamuoso, 363 and Agyaade, 319 (Ghana Statistical Service, 2001). Current projections by the district planning office estimate the population to be 3548 (Afram Plains District Assembly, 2007).

Resettlement strategies were focused on compensation and reconstruction of livelihoods. Houses similar in design and content were constructed and given out to registered households. The resettlement policy

²⁶ There are five such resettlement towns in the district namely; Forifori, Adeemmra, Amankwakrom,

²⁷ The creation of the Volta lake affected an estimated population of 80, 000 people in almost 740 villages scattered over an estimated land area of 7,770 sq Km (Tamakloe, 1994; Quartey, 1969).

adopted was to provide each registered household with a 'core house' irrespective of the household size and complexity and material assistance for the completion of additional three rooms (Gordon and Amatekpor, 1999; Tamakloe, 1994).

In Ntonaboma, resettlement houses were distributed as follows; two hundred and thirty (230) households for Akroso village, fortytwo for Supom, sixty three for Yamuoso and thirty three for Agyaade (VRA, n.d). However, the indiscriminate distribution of the one room core houses irrespective of the size of an individual's original house led to the abandonment of some of these houses in their original form. The perceived inequality by some villagers especially the people from Supom concerning the mode of allocating the resettlement houses and the positioning of some villages such as Akroso and Agyaade on upper areas of the village topography has resulted in some selling their houses and moving to the resettle at the banks of the Obosom River (VRA, n.d).

Unprepared land ranging between five and twelve acres was to be allocated to each registered household based on the nature of farming activity undertaken prior to the resettlement programme. However, the land allocated to each household was not commensurate with the existing lands owned prior to the resettlement scheme. Household ownership rights to both the plot of lands on which their houses were located and the farming lands were not properly worked out, documented and transferred to the re-settlers. According to Gordon and Amatekpor (1999) no re-settler to date had legal title to either their housing plot or to their agricultural land.

Evidence suggests that the struggle over ownership rights of housing plots is minimal and mostly occurs among kin and family members due to the formalisation of ownership rights during the resettlement period (King, 1988). However, there have been considerable struggles and contestation over agricultural land due to the neglect of existing arrangements over ownership and access rights to land. Conflicting claims to land ownership by traditional authorities have exacerbated the issue of land ownership rights among the four villages. Similarly, no arrangements were made for existing fishermen; they were expected to develop their fishing activity themselves (Tamakloe, 1994).

Generally, the family heads and traditional authorities are the custodians of the lands though it is common practice for migrants to pay a regular “user fee” to the native traditional leaders (chiefs) of the land to which they have relocated (ibid). The settlers follow this practice of land acquisition. Land could be obtained through leasehold, renting or outright buying. Natives’ farm on their own land mostly family owned acquired during the resettlement period but most of the lands are undocumented. Some settlers have acquired deeds to land through outright purchase or leasehold from chiefs or family heads though such absolute claim to land ownership is often contested by other families and traditional authorities.

The majority of migrants work as tenant farmers or share croppers involved in either *abunu* or *abusa* farming systems but the prevailing mode of farming system is the *abunu*. The two systems are farming arrangements where the land owner gives out the land to the tenant farmer for cultivation and provides all the inputs. The harvest is shared between three or two for

the *abusa* and *abunu* respectively. While food crops are cultivated in the *Abunu* System, cash crops are mostly cultivated in the *Abusa* System. However, due to the transient nature of labour, especially among the migrant or settler population, land is mostly rented for farming and this has perverse consequences for resource management because the immigrant population do not attach much importance to sustainably managing the land (Afram Plains Development Organisation, 2004). The main concern of the settlers is to continuously cultivate these lands or graze their animals and relocate when resources are depleted.

Agriculture is the main occupation of majority of the inhabitants. According to Lawson (1968), about ninety percent (90%) of the population during the resettlement period comprised farmers with varied incomes, depending on the nature of the crop cultivated. However this trend in occupation has continued with a gradual decline in the farming population due to the increase in fishing and fishing related activities. The major crop cultivated in the Ntonaboma area is yam. Each village has settler farmers and labourers located along the area adjoining the Digya National park where most of the Ntonaboma farm lands are found. Though the settler farmers have established their own hamlets they have still maintained links with the four villages in Ntonaboma in terms of customary norms and other practices that shape the ownership rights to farming lands and other resources.

In the former villages before the resettlement programmes, fishing was not a major occupation among the indigenes. However, relocating near the Obosom River motivated some people to undertake fishing as an

additional livelihood activity. The 2000 housing and population census confirmed the increase in fishing population. However, this could be attributed to the increase in fishing and fishing related activities such as fish smoking and drying in the area. Fish smoking and drying is mostly performed as a family business.

Ntonaboma is characterised by severe erosion due to the lack of a proper drainage system, poor water supply systems, and high incidence of unemployment, low income, poor road network and inadequate housing. The main source of water supply is groundwater usually extracted from boreholes and wells. Public transport to Ntonaboma from Donkorkrom, the district capital is on every Wednesdays.

When the electoral area demarcation exercise for the decentralisation program in Ghana was implemented in 1988, Ntonaboma was carved out of the Atebubu District in the Brong Ahafo region and added to the Eastern Region for administrative proximity, efficiency and functional purposes (Afrma pLains District Assembly, 2001). So administratively, Ntonaboma is in the Kwahu North District of the Eastern Region, but traditionally it belongs to the Brong Ahafo Traditional Council. Prior to the demarcation exercise, Ntonaboma had only one electoral area but it was divided into two electoral areas namely Akroso and Agyade/Yamuoso electoral areas each with its own DA representative. During the demarcation exercise Supom became part of Agyaade village because of its historical and traditional links dating back to the resettlement period (ibid).

However, Agyaade and Yamuoso villages were put together as one electoral area. There have been contestations between Agyaade and

Yamuoso villages over the location of the UC office. Invisible to the outsider, these struggles over official location of office is all about superiority and power over one another. The historical explanation is that the chief of Agyaade is a paramount chief because his ancestors constitute the original settlers of the area with ownership rights to majority of the land in Ntonaboma. On the other hand, Yamuoso village owe allegiance to both Akroso and Agyaade chiefs because they originally resettled on the Akroso and Agyaade lands during the construction of the Volta Lake. The names of the two villages were put together to constitute the Agyaade/Yamuoso electoral area to avoid conflict but as will be discussed in chapter six each village maintains their own form of governance arrangements. However, local governance arrangements provide the platform for the two villages who are in conflict to discuss development projects of mutual interest.

For the purpose of local government representation, there are two elected district assembly members, each for Akroso and Agyaade/Yamuoso electoral areas respectively. Akroso village has two unit committees namely Ahenbrono and Sukuumu unit committees. Agyaade, Yamuoso and Supom villages were put together and divided into two units namely Agyaade/Yamuoso and JSS UC. The Junior Secondary School (JSS) UC comprises parts of Supom and Agyaade villages. This brings to four the number of UCs in Ntonaboma. The other hamlets bordering Ntonaboma were grouped into the Digya electoral area with their own assemblyman and two unit committees.

Traditionally, Ntonaboma is the only community within the Afram Plains district that has two chiefs as '*Omanhene*' belonging to the Brong

Ahafo Traditional Council²⁸. One unique feature of Ntonaboma is that it is a resettlement town comprising four different villages each with its distinct culture, customs and practices in terms of community governance. The four villages are fused together for administrative efficiency and governance purposes as one local government unit. Since the village traditionally constitutes the base for primary organisation and community resource control, each village operates separately from one another and has its own unique traditional system of a chief and elders who attend to their customary and village needs.

4.8 Conclusion

This chapter discussed both colonial and post colonial attempts at consciously re-engineering social organisation through local government reforms in Ghana. The main focus of the chapter was to highlight the emphasis placed on the conscious crafting of local government structures based on external imperatives in local government reforms to mediate the relations between the state and society. A historical analysis of decentralisation reforms in Ghana revealed that decentralisation was not a novelty in Ghana but has traces in colonial history. The review of local government reforms revealed the continuity of the 'top-down' approach to development that reinforces the power of the central state.

²⁸ The Traditional Council is an assembly of Chiefs with the status of a Paramount chief. The paramount chiefs have the highest ranking within their traditional councils. Each region in Ghana has this council which is hierarchical in nature from the national, through to the regional to the district. These traditional councils exist alongside the democratic system.

The chapter highlighted the shifts in the policy orientation of local government from approaches that place the emphases on the active role of the state towards policies that enhance community participation, representation, transparency and accountability in governance. The temporal dynamics of local government reforms reveal the traces of instrumental use of traditional chiefs to make new local government arrangements functional. The discussions in the chapter revealed that the various local government reforms from the colonial period to contemporary times were introduced based on universal and bureaucratic principles. But such principles inadequately focused on the contextual specificities of the local communities to appreciate the relationships, norms, beliefs, values and expectations that have an enduring influence on the choices that people make.

CHAPTER FIVE
INDIVIDUAL AGENCY AND SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION IN
NTONABOMA

5.1 Introduction

This chapter concentrates on the actual workings of new local government structures implemented at the village level as a result of decentralisation. The chapter explores the claims made about participation in decentralisation policy as being able to sufficiently engage in public decision-making and negotiations to shape outcomes of interactions. My intention in this chapter is not to idealise individual agency²⁹ as active, strategic and rational but to see it as a situated practice involving diverse individuals differently positioned within and interacting in a complex social world in which outcomes for each varies. The key argument in this chapter is that, community members in their public engagement with new local governance spaces do not act as autonomous or abstract individuals. Rather, their actions are shaped by social relationships and the dynamics of the context in which they are positioned (Cleaver, 2009; Toner, 2008).

Contemporary approaches to institutionalising decentralisation places an emphasis on citizenship rights in development so that marginal actors can strategically and purposively act to claim their rights and make their voices in part be heard by the state (Hickey and Mohan, 2004; Gaventa, 2002). The claim is that citizenship rights through decentralisation offer individuals a broader form of agency that enables them to participate in

²⁹ Agency is used in this sense to connote the possibilities for individual action.

governance spaces as equal participants (Hickey and Mohan, 2004). Grounded in such notions of 'active citizenship' is individual autonomy and consciousness of action, some sort of power where individuals are conceived of as capable and free enough to challenge inequitable structural arrangements once the right local organisations are in place (World Bank, 2006, 2001).

As illustrated in chapter four, the current decentralisation policy in Ghana, the Local Government Act (Act 462) 1993, draws on an optimistic mode of agency to reflect the empowering and transformative outcomes of participation in new governance spaces which may not be compatible with existing social realities (Aryee, 2008). The Act 462 involved the creation of District Assemblies and sub-district structures (urban/town/area councils and unit committees) that provided a forum at the local level for the people to deliberate, legislate and execute actions necessary for development of their areas. The main aim of the Local Government Act 462 was "to promote popular participation and ownership of the machinery of government... by devolving power, competence and resource/means to the district level" (cited in Map Consult 2002: 35). This is reinforced by Article 240 [2] of the 1992 Constitution of Ghana that 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" Article 240[2][e].

The Local Government Act (Act 462) 1993 assumes that, individuals' are capable of participating in the local government structures to which power is transferred. Inherent in this assumption is the claim that,

decentralisation provides the infrastructure for popular engagement and opening up the state apparatus to new forms of local agency (Heller et al., 2007; Ribot, 2003; Gaventa, 2002).

However, the call for active citizen participation in the Local Government Act 642 tends to over romanticize individual participation and isolate human action in public management from social life. Differential abilities to participate and equity of outcomes for different individuals seem not to be a major concern (Aryee, 2008; Crawford, 2008). The subjective nature of much everyday action and the role of power and social relations in shaping outcomes of individual agency in local governance are side-stepped (Wong, 2008; Toner, 2008; Cleaver, 2005). My argument is that, the actions and choices that people make concerning participation in local government structures are informed by the actual social, cultural and historical peculiarities of context. I argue further that, decentralised structures often interact with local interest and patterns of authority to reinforce or enhance existing or differential patterns of privilege.

This chapter draws on post institutionalist thinking to argue that, positioning individuals within a social world illuminates the extent to which their actions are mediated and shaped by social relations and other socially embedded practices. Specifically, I intend to show how different individuals with varied resources and capacities participate in new local government structures, shape public decision-making processes and demand accountability from representatives. I argue that the factors shaping participation at the local level work in similar ways on different individuals manifesting in varied outcomes. I demonstrate in the chapter that a lot of

contextual factors shape the agency of the poor within their locality, and that exercising agency is much more complex than recognised within decentralisation policy and practice.

I draw from the work of Giddens (1984), Douglas (1987) and Cleaver (2007, 2004) to explore the scope for individual agency in the new spaces of decentralisation. Douglas (1987) notion on routine and habit in mediating individuals' choices, decision-making and modes of social relations allow me to understand how the poor do things' in their everyday lives without necessarily being necessarily transformatory. I will also use Cleaver's (2004) work on institutions and the 'social embeddedness of agency' to illuminate the role of social relations, moral understandings and livelihood interdependencies in shaping the agency in local governance.

The first section of this chapter focuses on issues of representation to specifically find out the reality of who gets elected or appointed into new institutional spaces, what are their characteristics and what resources and opportunities they draw on to get elected or appointed. The role of history, routines, local norms and culture in shaping individual agency to become a representative in the new local governance spaces is discussed to highlight the differing levels of advantage for different individuals. The complex nature of the decision-making process in the community and the diverse motivations shaping action are discussed. Exercising agency to be an active participant in these new local government structures or exacting accountability is shaped by a lot of contextual factors. The last section of the chapter also highlights the various strategies employed by village members to shape final decisions and call leaders to account.

5.2 Questioning individual equitable access in the Local Government Act 462, 1993

The concept of political decentralisation strongly rests on the belief that the selection of representatives from local electoral jurisdictions allows citizens to know better their political representatives and allows elected officials to know better the needs and desires of their constituents. Focusing on the framework for decentralisation in Ghana, I demonstrate that the processes of incorporation espoused in the Local Government Act 642, 1993, fail to give proper representation to the poor and the marginalised. In Ghana, the institutionalisation of representative forms of democracy stipulated by the Local Government Act 462, involved the creation of new governmental structures to which citizens were formally elected or appointed. In Ghana, democratic local elections were introduced under the 1988 reforms, though on a non-partisan basis in which candidates stand as individuals.

Proponents of decentralisation claim that, a representative democratic system of local government provides a constant incentive for representatives to serve the voters because they can be sanctioned by the voters during elections if they fail to meet their expectations. Representation in decentralisation discourse is to make local government transparent and accountable (Smoke, 2003). The underlying assumption is that, democracy will be deepened by the extension of political representation to the local level through enhanced political participation by local civil society actors (Crawford, 2003). The Act gives equal opportunity for local actors to either

compete via elections or be appointed by the president in consultation with certain institutions to become a representative at the DA.

The choice of democratic representative form governance in Ghana's decentralisation programme is informed by the ideals of the new institutionalism that emphasise on explicit fair 'rules of the game' so that new local leaders can emerge through competition, paving the way for such representatives to work in the best interest of the public. The decentralisation literature suggests that, political competition through elections can be an important driver for pro-poor change (Blair, 2000). The process enables voters to sanction their representatives through elections to make local government responsive and accountable to the community.

Although, the Act assumes equitable access for all individuals by making it a non-political activity, in practice it is neutral as it only provides the route for certain individuals up the social hierarchy into the political system. Also, the Act shifts responsibility from the state to the individual to draw on the existing legislation as equal citizens to become a community representative. For example, it is the state that is supposed to provide contestants to the DA with the platform to launch their electoral campaign. Apart from this, the Act does not give an idea as to the resources on which people should draw to access these representative spaces. Yet, in practice the process of gaining access to institutions is shaped by a range of social, economic and legal mechanisms (Berry, 1997).

My argument is that, it is not only legal frameworks that facilitate individual's access to new local government structures. Other factors such as institutional power, social identity, social status, as well as material

resources, customary authority, knowledge and the ability to use institutional mechanisms all shape the process of gaining access to institutions (Benjaminsen and Lund 2002; Berry 1989). The structural factors that shape differential participation in new local government structures are not considered by the Act. Rather, the Act assumes a homogenous community in which individuals can pursue their self-interests and equally participate in local government structures. The Act 642 does not take the socio-economic and cultural heterogeneity of different individuals with different identities within the community into account. In the section that follows, I will use data from Ntonaboma to show how social institutions, habits, routines and 'right way of doing things' mediate individual choices, and decision making to access new local government structures.

5.2.1 Who gets elected or appointed as representative?

This section discusses how access to new decentralised institutions at the local level was acquired. The decentralisation literature claims that political competition through elections can be an important driver for pro-poor change and good governance (World Bank, 1997). In practice participation in representative local government structures normally occurs through voting in elections, standing as a candidate, taking part in election campaigns whether partisan or non-partisan, contacting or trying to influence government authorities such as attending official meetings with representatives (Crook and Sverrisson 2001). However, participating in any of the above activities such as getting elected or being appointed as a formal village representative was observed to be more than an individual rational and strategic act as the

mainstream literature on decentralisation suggests. Becoming a village formal representative was rather a dynamic process in which structural factors shaped outcomes differently for different people. My main argument is that, it is also naive to assume that introducing elections will transform the relationship between citizens and government, or empower the mass poor to participate in local government structures.

By providing the profile of some past and present elected and appointed DA and UC representatives, I intend to analyse the actors involved and the strategies and resources employed to become either DA or UC representative. The analysis will demonstrate that in reality an actor's ability to become a formal representative on the DA or UC is shaped more by the various sorts of allocative and authoritative resources that the individual is able to deploy than on claims to citizenship rights. The argument is that simply establishing appropriate mechanisms for access to enhance social equity is problematic as it may fail to benefit the poor.

Specifically, I will place emphasis on the structuring of relations to argue that the differential ability of actors to draw on resources existing in social relations reproduces inequalities in access to local government structures. The characteristics of these representatives are highlighted below to illustrate the role of patronage relations in shaping access to local government structures. Yet, in the democratic decentralisation literature patronage is seen as contradictory to more democratic forms of political representation (Kelsall, 2008).

Evidence from Ntonaboma suggests that traditional leaders consciously looked out for people with a particular orientation, people with

whom they can easily cooperate, senior members of the village and professionals such as teachers to get onto these new institutional spaces, thus limiting the access of the poor to the UC and DA spaces. The selection process to the DA institutional arrangements at the village level favours people with the resources such as education, wealth and social networks needed for political activity. The examples of the various representatives such as Nana Akuamoah Boateng, *Amankrado*³⁰ and the current DA member for Akroso village; Mr. Apraku Nkansah, the cousin of the Agyaade village chief and the current DA member for Agyaade/Yamuoso village; Mr Gyansah-Ado, a subchief of Agyaade and a former DA member for Agyaade/Yamuoso village illustrate my argument that representative local government institutions at the local level may not necessarily be democratic. Extending the analysis to the UC, Nana Osei-Afram is a local chief but serves as the UC chairman for Supom/Yamusu electoral area. Also, Mr. Nketaia a retired educationist is a member of the Akroso traditional council while at the same time chairman of the Akroso village town committee.

Nana Akuamoah Boateng, 57, Male, Sub-chief and Assembly Representative, Akroso (three terms, 1998 to present)

The current DA member for Akroso is a local chief popularly known as 'Amankrado' who acts in the absence of the substantive chief who is a lawyer and lives in Accra. He has been an assemblyman for the past eleven years from 1998 to the present. He succeeded Raymond Suelo in the 1998 local level elections. Amankrado works with the National Commission for Civic Education (NCCE) and is stationed in Donkorkrom, the district capital. His location at the district capital enables him to follow up on community issues. He is a post secondary school graduate and has worked with the NCCE since its inception in 1992. Among Nana's roles in

³⁰ The Amankrado acts in the absence of the village chief and in Akroso village where the current village chief, who is a lawyer, is based in Accra the national capital, the Mankrado wields a lot of power in day-to-day village interactions.

Ntonaboma as a local chief are to settle disputes and perform customary functions in the absence of the chief. Together with some family heads he also lets land to settler farmers or 'outsiders' who need land to farm. He receives all customary tolls on behalf of the local chief. Nana lives in one of the purposely built houses in the village which is distinct from other re-settlement houses. He has his own toilet and does not use the community toilet provided by the district Assembly reinforcing his status in the village. He has four children who are all located outside the village. His first child has completed university and works with a financial institution in Accra. Nana has paid his NHS contribution and receives a regular income from the state. He also receives extra income from his land rent and farm produce.

As a traditional leader who acts in the absence of the paramount chief of Akroso village, Nana Akuamoah Boateng is very visible in the collective spaces within Akroso area of Ntonaboma. Nana Amankrado also serves on the UC, the tractor committee, the VRA resettlement fund committee and the School Management Committee. He is also the leader of the associational group that recently benefited from the Cashew Project piloted in Ntonaboma in 2008.

Outside Ntonaboma especially in Donkorkrom, Nana Amankrado represents the 'face' of Akroso village in the District Capital. He boasts of supporting members from his community such as securing bail for those arrested by the police, getting placements for Junior Secondary School (JSS) graduates from Ntonaboma at the District Secondary School in Ntonaboma and getting jobs for others. According to him nothing happens in Akroso without his knowledge. He is able to control events due to the social resources at his disposal. It is through these actions in the community that his dominant position in the village is reproduced. Nana Akuamoah Boateng thinks he is the best person to represent the village of Akroso at the assembly.

The other Assembly member for the Agyaade/Yamuoso electoral area is Mr. Apreko Nkansah. He is a native of Agyaade village and a first cousin to the current paramount chief of Agyaade village. He has been a head teacher for more than seven years but is currently pursuing a post graduate degree by distance education. This he claims will enable him to become a director in the education hierarchy before going on retirement. His cousin, the Agyaade village chief asked him to stand for election as the DA representative for the Agyaade/Yamuoso electoral area. This example illustrates how kin networks facilitate access to new institutionalised spaces.

Mr. Apreko Nkansah, 47, Male, Assembly Representative, Agyaade/Yamuoso (first term, 2006 to present)

Mr. Apraku Nkansah is 47 years old, married with two children and the current head teacher of the local Ntonaboma District Assembly JSS. His place at the district assembly is influenced by both his position as a head teacher and relations to the local chief. Apart from his teaching job he has a two acre farm for cultivating yam which he sells to get additional income for the family. He employs labourers on his farm during the main farming season. His wife operates a small supermarket in the town. He also keeps some animals. He is the Lay President of the Methodist church. His wife attends the same church and is the treasurer of the 'Christ Little Band', a women's' group in the Methodist church. He is a member of the Tractor Committee, Area Council and the Funeral Committee. He serves as the secretary to the Area Council. As a head teacher he is also a member of the School Management Committee and belongs to the Parent Teacher Association (PTA). He is also a member of the UC and the AC. He cooperates with village members to find solutions to problems that affect them. His work as an assembly man and a head teacher requires him to keep good relationships with village members.

At the Unit Committee (UC) level, Mr. John Nketia, a retired educationist is an example of village representatives who accessed the new institutional spaces based on the close network with the village traditional leadership. His example also offers insights into how village members draw on human capacities, availability of time and age to become village representative. The same can be said of other representatives who were

mostly retired teachers and bureaucratic civil servant who had returned from the city after retirement. The example of Mr. Nketia the current village committee chairman for Akroso exemplifies the extent to which access to new institutional spaces favours those who are elderly, literate, deemed to have experienced a successful life in bureaucratic office, and respected within the community.

John Nketia, 72, Male, Current UC Chairperson, Sukuumu UC (2002 to present)

Mr Nketia had retired as the Eastern Regional Manager of the Presbyterian Education Unit since 2001. He attended Ntonaboma primary school and continued at St. Peters Secondary School. Upon completion he continued at the University of Ghana where he graduated in Philosophy and Classics. He started teaching at Pope John's Secondary School in Koforidua Eastern region in 1961. In 1988 he went back to the University of Cape Coast to pursue a master's degree in education. He relocated with his wife to Ntonaboma and has since then lived there farming on a parcel of land he owned by the family. As the head of his Aduana family he decided to come home to enable him deal with family matters. All his eight children are working and did not join him to Ntonaboma. He lives with the wife in a renovated resettlement house which belonged to his mother. An eleven year old girl lives with them to support with family chores. During the UC elections for 2006 the village leaders approached him and requested him to stand as a UC member. He got elected as a UC member though there was no election as the number of candidates fell below the required number necessitating an election. During the maiden meeting of the UC members he was recommended to become the chairman of the UC. His nomination was informed by the fact that he had worked as a Regional Manager of an education unit and was the highest ranked person in terms of education, age and work experience among the members present during the inaugural meeting of the UC.

Mr. Nketia's example suggests that village individuals preferentially opt for a certain degree of 'resourcefulness' and 'knowledgeability' on the part of potential village representatives to the DA. Further, interviews with community members revealed the preference for resourceful village representatives who would ensure that their village was not overlooked in the development process at the District Assembly. Participants at the GD with the Akroso Traditional Council re-echoed some

of these sentiments saying that it was better having a knowledgeable individual to represent the community. They used the role of Nana Akuamoah in following up on the external affairs of Akroso village at the DA as an example. This suggested a bias towards people who are wealthier, better educated and politically more powerful. It also reinforces Agrawal and Gupta (2005) argument that institutionalising local government structures in communities that are highly stratified along the lines of power, income, wealth, and social status obscures the internal differences within the village, thereby further marginalising certain disadvantaged individuals.

Not only do village traditional leaders and members look out for resourceful individuals but they do want representatives who are literate and have some form of basic knowledge about the way government works so that they can manoeuvre to bring home some development projects from the state. Instances were cited of a DA representative to the district assembly who was changed during the following elections because he failed to bring any development project to the community during their term of office. Some of these former representatives were alleged to be mute during DA meetings and never brought any development to the down **(interview with Fredrick Asante, 26/3/2007)**. Representation was given a meaning to reflect an individual who can bring something in the form of development projects to the community from the district assembly.

'DA members should have the skills to lobby, negotiate with higher authorities and be presentable to the 'outside world' **(GD with the Akroso Traditional Council on Monday, 26/03/2007)**.

As indicated above, the selection process of village representatives placed much attention on individual characteristics where preference was given to people who had the time and capacity to solve and follow up on diverse and spontaneous village problems. People who do not have to secure permission from someone before being able to do things outside the village on behalf of the village are those that are preferred by the village leaders as epitomized in the interview below;

‘if you have a wage labourer, a tenant farmer or a share cropper who is always going for ‘by-day’ how do you get him to go for assembly meetings and leave his farm work? The village representative or leader job requires someone who is on his/her own and will not later become a burden for the village. Since it is a voluntary work we need people who can sacrifice their time and even possibly afford to do things on their own for the village such as paying for minor expenses especially the UC members before approaching the village for re-imburement.’ **(Interview with Nana Akuamoah Boateng, Mankrado of Akroso on 05/02/2007).**

Evidence from Ntonaboma suggests that the inequitable patterning of relations shaped negatively the ability of some village members to become representatives to the DA. For example, almost all the former and present elected DA representatives in Ntonaboma and the key individuals within the UCs had link to the village traditional leadership suggesting the socially negotiated nature of access to local government structures. This example also highlights how traditional rulers who are barred from active politics consciously recruited certain individuals who represented their interest to populate the new spaces of the DA structures. The UCs and DA as new local governance structures specifically created at the local level to enhance equitable access were filled with community elders, notables and people with strong links to formal institutions of power.

Similarly, political resources from the perspective of the political regime at the national level facilitated the 'room-for-manoeuvre' for some individuals to draw on social relations to become formal village representatives at the district assembly. The example of Mr. E. Y. Mensah reveals how close affinity to a political party and local centres of power facilitated access to formal spaces. He is the polling station chairman and a founding member of the New Patriotic Party (NPP) which is also the ruling government. He has voluntarily supported the activities of the party in the constituency. According to him, the appointment as a DA member epitomises his contribution to the party and the development of the area. His position as the chairman of the AC was little recognised by other AC members such as Nana Akuamoah Boateng who question the procedure for his election as AC chairman. According to them the meeting that voted for his election was not properly constituted. The meeting that elected him as a chairman for the Ntonaboma AC involved only I members who were inclined towards the ruling party (NPP). They accused the DCE of not informing other members when the meeting was convened.

Apart from the political position he is also the vice chairperson of the district farmers association. He is very active in village activities and serves on the village tractor committee and the health committee. He recently rebuilt his resettlement house and has also bought two other houses from two families from Supom who were relocating to settle near the Obosom River. He has given one of the houses to the community to accommodate the National Service personnel posted to Ntonaboma. The example of Mr. E.Y. Mensah illustrates how access to material and non-material resources

interlinked to facilitate an individual's access to institutions. Significantly related to this was his links to other authority figures outside the village such as the DCE.

E. Y. Mensah, Male, Appointed Assembly Member and Area Council Chairman

Mr. Mensah is 71 years old and hails from Kwame Danso in the Brong Ahafo Region. He is a trained psychiatrist nurse and states that he undertook a professional course in Ethiopia in 1973. Upon his return he was posted to the Mental Hospital in Ankaful in the central region. He was later transferred to the Koforidua General Hospital in 1986 where he met Madam Cristiana Mensah who hails from Supom in Ntonaboma. He has 4 children from the current marriage. He was the first medical assistant to work in the community. While working in Koforidua he acquired a 10 acre land in Ntonaboma where he started a yam farm. He used about 6 acres of the land to develop a teak plantation. Upon retirement he came together with his wife to settle in Ntonaboma to continue his farming activities. He then started a cattle ranch near his teak plantation. He stated that his farming activities have made him to remain in Ntonaboma although he visits his hometown in the Brong Ahafo region every year. He is also an elder at the local Pentecost church. He operates the only chemical shop and the only corn mill in Ntonaboma. He employs labourers on his farm and a herder for his cattle. He has received the best district farmer award twice in 1998 and 2003 and the best eastern regional farmer award in 2003.

During the first term of the NPP administration in 2001, the DCE for the Afram Plains district was a native of Ntonaboma which led to the selection of more people from Ntonaboma such as E.Y. Mensah and Madam Acheampong as government appointees to the DA. Though the current appointed assembly members, E. Y. Mensah and Beatrice Acheampong were not forthcoming in stating their political allegiance, their narratives imbued with praises for the New Patriotic Party (NPP) government of President John Agyekum-Kufuor gave a clue to their political orientation. Getting an assembly person with closer ties and links to the ruling government through the DCE and the district assembly enables the representatives to manoeuvre and negotiate their way in the arenas of power to get more development projects for the village. The example of Mr. E. Y. Mensah who has used his links to the DCE and the political party in

government to get the clinic in Ntonaboma renovated in 2004 almost after 7 years of disrepair. During interactions he talks of the number of visits to the DCE in order to get the clinic renovated.

Mr. Raymond Suele (52), Male, Former Assembly Representative, Akroso, 1994-1998

Raymond was the district assembly members for Akroso electoral area from 1994 to 1998. He is married with six children, deals in building materials but has recently turned to fishing as a main occupation. Raymond hails from Bator in the Volta Region of Ghana but was born in *Mankyere* village. Raymond has basic education and was a former activist of the Provisional National Defense Council (PNDC) that governed Ghana from 1981 to 1992. He characterises himself as neither poor nor rich yet he owns a small canoe fitted with motor that operates on the Volta Lake to catch fish. His wife sells the fish to other market women. He owns more than 20 cattle and other animals which he sells for off farm income.

Raymond is not actively involved in the activities of Akroso village due to the problems he had with the traditional leadership in Akroso village. He mentions that he had disagreement with the Akroso village chiefs because they accused him of using his position as a DA member to settle land cases, a function he was not customarily entitled to do. However, he explained that people brought the cases to him as a government representative and not otherwise. He migrated to set up his own village near the banks of the Volta Lake but was accused by the Akroso village chiefs of not attending to the development needs of Akroso. He accuses the village leadership of discrimination just because he was not an indigene. He did not contest the 1998 district assembly elections but is still a UC member.

The example of Anane Gyansah-Ado also illustrates the role of the political context in giving certain people the room to manouvre to get onto new institutions. He was very active during the early days of the PNDC and was a member of the Committee for the Defense of the Revolution (CDR).

He has also travelled extensively within the district and mentions his close links with the former president Rawlings anytime he visited Afram-Plains district. His ties with the district assembly and locus of power made him the obvious choice as a village representative to the district assembly during the early years of the decentralisation system. He decided not to contest during the 2002 district assembly elections partially due to his age and because other village members had shown interest in becoming village representative to the DA.

Anane Gyansah-Ado, 72, Male, Assembly Representative, (two terms, 1998 - 2006)

Anane Gyansah is a retired teacher who was the DA member for Agyaade/Yamuso from 1988 to 2006. He is a native and a sub chief at the Agyaade Traditional Council. He worked as a pupil teacher in the basic schools in and around the villages in Ntonaboma till he came on pension. He is married with seven children, all of whom live outside Ntonaboma and pays him occasional visit. Two of his grandchildren live with him. His wife aged about 63 years recently suffered a stroke and was recovering. He states that he is poor and depends on only his inadequate pension salary and whatever comes from his farm. He has also offered part of his land to some settler farmers' for rent, while others do share cropping on other lands that he owns. He also inherited one of the resettlement houses from his uncle which he has rented out to other settler families to earn more income.

The examples of Raymond Suele and Gyansah-Ado support the earlier argument that access to powerful external political actors facilitated access to new local government structures. Their examples also hint of how both village elders and members reflexively looked out for individuals with political ties with current governments in the selection process of village representatives to the district assembly.

Mr. Stephen Addai's example illustrates how certain individuals who are not natives but resident in the village draw on the personal characteristics to access the UC space to become a village representative.

Corporeal human conduct evidenced through active participation in communal activities and mobility to undertake errands for Nana Akuamoah Boateng facilitated Stephen Addai's ability to become a UC member. He did not rely only on his embodiment but also he had to draw on his close association and expression of respect for the Amankrado.

Stephen Addai, 41, Male, Current UC member (2006 – present)

Has finished form four of the old Middle school and did not continue to secondary school. He attributes his inability to further his education to the early death of his parents. He worked as a pupil teacher in Donkorkrom but was transferred to Ntonabomah in 2003 to help with the primary school. Nana Akuamoah Boateng assisted him to secure a parcel of land from a community member to start a cashew farm in 2004. He was invited to be on the UC by Nana Akuamoah Boateng. He agreed to be a member of the UC so was added to the Sukuumu UC as an elected member. He actively participates in communal labour and help with other village activities anytime he is called upon by Mr. Nketiah or Nana Akuamoah Boateng. He thinks that his hardworking nature and always being available anytime he is called upon to support with communal activities explains why he was asked to join UC. He is also a member of the charcoal task force and a trained fire volunteer.

The accounts of Osmani Fulani for Sukuumu UC and Michael Amponsah, for Ahenbrono UC, illustrate how good social relations with village traditional elites served as a resource to get onto new institutional spaces as appointed members of the Ahenbrono UC. In Ntonaboma is was found out that people who maintained good and stable relationship with power brokers in the community served as a link to domains of power. This brings into question the extent to which power relations and participation transformed as a result of the introduction of new local government structures within the community. The is not to suggest that the poor lack or have no kin networks but they engage within such networks on adverse terms which limit the possibility for them to use such networks to their advantage (Mosse, 2007; Hickey and Bracking, 2005).

On the other hand, Micheal Amponsah, 37, by village classification

can be said to be poor³¹ as he does not own land, is not married and live together with his father in their resettlement house. He worked as a tailor in Kumasi for about five years before returning to Ntonaboma. During the period of my study he did not have formal employment and was mostly found in the Calypso bar consuming local alcoholic beverage. Village members mentioned that they will not have voted for him in any competitive election because he is always drunk. However, Mr. Nketia stated that he was put on the UC because he is “a valuable asset to the UC based on his willingness to deliver a message at all times without complaining”.

Rosinah Akuamoah also served on the JSS UC for the Yamuoso and Supom Villages. She was the women’s leader in Yamuoso and had been co-opted into the UC to help mobilise the activities of the women. She was very active and visible in the collective activities of the village especially organising the women and mediating in their day-to-day misunderstanding.

Rosinah Akuamoah, 43, Female, UC member

Rosinah Akuamoah is 43 years old with two children. She is married to Francis a teacher at the local primary school at Bridgeano. She was born in Ntonabomah but left at the age of 13 to live with an uncle who worked as a fire officer in Kumasi in the Ashanti Region. Upon passing out as a hairdresser she worked briefly in Kumasi before she decided to relocate to Ntonaboma. Back in Ntonaboma she met Francis, a teacher, who she married. Currently she owns the Calipso Bar and sells local liquor and gin. She also sells imported used clothing normally referred to as ‘ofos’ on market days. She is also a member of a group of women who send tomatoes, yam and cassava dough to the Digya area in exchange for fish which is used for their daily household consumption. She is an elder at Christ Apostolic church and a member of the choir group, and serves on the church council. She explained that if you respect others and behave well in the community, other community members will also respect you. She is very vocal among the women and

³¹ In this study, no formal assessment was carried out of the subjects’ income status, or of their relative poverty, and in this sense the status of a poor person remains opaque.

is responsible for mobilising the women of Yamuoso village for communal work. She also intervenes and solves petty squabbles or conflict among the women.

An explanation of the diverse social networks of particular individuals offers valuable insights into how their social positioning and relationships shape an individual's ability to become a village representative. The ability of people to develop and draw on an extensive and diverse social network puts them in an enabling position to become a village representative. The examples illustrate how network and social relationships shape differently people's ability to access the institutional spaces of representation.

Beatrice Acheampong, 52, Teacher, Appointed DA member and Elected UC Member.

Madam Beatrice Acheampong was born in 1953 and has seven children, 3 girls and four boys. She is divorced but has a current partner. She completed Ntonaboma primary and middle school in 1964 before pursuing her teacher training education at Wesley College Kumasi. Her teacher training education was made possible through an uncle who supported her. She started her teaching career at Mpasatia in the Ashanti Region where she taught for nine years before being transferred to Kwahu Tafo. Currently she teaches at the local Catholic Primary School in Ntonaboma. The husband was the former head teacher of the Catholic Junior Secondary School in Ntonaboma but has become a Catechist for the local Catholic Church on retirement. She is an elected UC member and a government appointed assembly woman. She is the chairperson of the Christian Mothers Association of the Catholic Church in the town and their representative to the Diocese. She is also the chairperson of the 'Christmas susu' group operated by the Church. Both Catholics and non Catholics are members of the credit scheme. As the chairperson of the 'susu' scheme she is part of the team that accesses financial request for members. She is very influential in this group. She is also responsible for providing meals for the Parish Priest any time he comes on pastoral visit to the out-station. Mrs. Acheampong serves as the Church Secretary and is one of the two representatives of the Ntonaboma Catholic Church to the Parish Council at Adeemmra. She is also a member of the Prayer group and plays an active role especially visiting members who are sick to pray for them at home. During vacations, she goes together with other women in the village to Donkorkrom on market days to sell yam from her husband's farm.

The example of Mrs. Acheampong the current appointed district assembly member for Akroso electoral area in Ntonaboma revealed that the dynamics and the overlapping nature of the different arenas in which she was embedded provided a useful and enabling resource for her to become

an appointed village representative to the DA. Engagement in multiple arenas with diverse social actors located in overlapping institutional spaces both formal and informal developed Mrs. Acheampong's individual relational capabilities to access the new political spaces. Her multiple networks enabled her to play active role in the local affairs of the community.

Mrs. Acheampong's example also draws our attention to the role social relations and embedded networks played in shaping her ability to act in accessing institutional structures. During the interview Mrs. Acheampong stated that the Chief and elders impressed on her to accept the nomination as an appointed DA member. Initially she was not interested because she was of the view that being a DA member will not enable her to perform other activities that she was already involved in. She would not have accepted the nomination if the chief and elders had not asked her to do so. Even with the support of the elite in the village she still had to seek approval from her current partner³² before going ahead with the decision to accept the appointment. Her reputation as a trusted and respectful village member and her work in the church and the 'susu' (local micro-credit scheme run by the Catholic Church) project in which she was involved and her links with the government in power made her the obvious choice from the village as the district assembly wanted to recruit more women as appointed representatives.

During the interviews she stated that, her decision to accept the nomination to be appointed as a DA member was not a strategic decision

³² In this instance I have used partner because the current spouse had not performed the necessary customary marriage rite so was not regarded as the legitimate husband.

but shaped by obligations to the community and its members. The social position of the chief and elders shaped positively the decision to accept the appointment as a DA member. For Mrs. Acheamong the honour and respect to be earned from being an appointed DA member motivated her to accept the position. As she explains this was her contribution to the development of the community. She stated how during their tenure they have been able to get a new crèche from the district assembly for Ntonaboma. The social value placed on 'doing something for the community' reflecting in her narratives as well as that of some village representatives, demonstrates that her motivation for getting onto these representative spaces in Ntonaboma were not self interest driven but underpinned by other sets of values which were directed more positively towards a sense of commitment to the 'community' than towards the individual gain from the position.

Let us now draw on the characteristics of the individuals who became formal local government representatives in Ntonaboma to illuminate the structural factors that shaped individual participation in local government structures. As illustrated in Table 5.1, structural factors such as age, wealth, gender, social status and power inequalities were essentially dynamic and shaped the agency of individuals to access the DA and UC spaces to become representatives. The analysis revealed that an individual's ability to become an elected DA or UC representative was dependent on age. This was evident in the fact that majority of the representatives, almost 72% were above the age of 35 years. The study also identified only two appointed village representatives who were below thirty years of age. The inadequate

representation of the youth on the local government structures in Ntonaboma could be attributed to the existing cultural norms of respect for elders, the right for elders to lead and poor social networks and relations of patronage of the youth beyond the village. The example of Mr. John Nketia shows how high status professionals returning home on retirement are seen as agents of development and enthusiastically accorded some role in the affairs of the village by village elders.

The analysis also revealed the extent to which financial and human resources shaped access to local government structures in Ntonaboma. I have used financial resources to mean an individual's wealth and control over certain privileged resources in the community, cash, time and well-being³³. The study identified that, all the elected DA representatives for Ntonaboma owned land, belonged to the royal lineage, were formally employed and in context of Ntonaboma had cash. In the study, it was noted that poorest people were not generally village representatives. Poorest individuals on the UC such as Osmani Fulani and Michael Amponsah were drafted in to serve on the committee by Nana Akuampah Boateng and had little influence on decision-making, yet they used their time and labour to compensate for their lack of cash. The village representatives were wealthiest individuals within the village. Whilst poverty clearly correlated with access to local government structures in the village, the study did not undertake a detailed wealth ranking to identify the characteristics of poverty in the area and how this shaped access to local government spaces.

³³ During the group discussion and interviews well-being in terms of good health was mentioned as the most important indicator of wealth. The argument made was that a healthy person is not dependent on people for mundane daily activities.

All the DA members including both appointed and elected were literates and respected among village members. The examples of Mr. Apreku Nkansah, the DA representative for Agyaade Yamuso, Nana Akuamoah Boateng, the DA representative for Akroso revealed how formal education and profession shaped access to local government structures. This characteristic was more evident among both the appointed and elected DA representatives majority of whom were employed in the formal sectors as teachers, nurses or administrators.

The study also identified poor representation of women in the local government structures in Ntonaboma despite government's effort to get more women onto these local governance spaces. During interviews it was noted that time, financial constraints, illiteracy, inexperience and deep rooted cultural beliefs accounted for the low representation of women on the local government structures in Ntonaboma. Majority of women interviewed mentioned time constraints as the single most important factor hampering their participation in local government.

Significant to the above factors is the variety of institutional channels through which DA and UC representatives access local government structures in Ntonaboma. In highlighting the characteristics of the elected and appointed DA and UC members, I revealed how they used resources from institutional channels such as traditional leadership, political and other associational spaces to become representatives. These existing institutional channels may limit the possibilities for certain people who lack the associational and institutional resources needed to conceive action or undertake certain strategies to become local government representatives.

The most obvious examples of people who utilized institutional resources to become DA and UC representatives were Nana Akuamoah Boateng, Mr. Apreku Nkansah and Mr. John Nketiah.

Becoming a village DA or UC member, as the examples have shown depended on people's occupational status, wealth assets, who you are and who are in your networks. I will now turn my attention to the complexity of the selection process to illuminate the accommodations, negotiations, struggles and deferrals taking place. I argue that individuals for a variety of reasons may not act in rational strategic ways as expected of them to become formal representatives due to cultural, social, historical and contextual factors shaping the possibilities for action.

5.3 The complexity of the selection process

Decentralisation as a strategy to enhance equity of access and overcome social exclusion through formal institutions narrowly focus on visible norms and cultural practices that hinder the equitable access of disadvantaged individuals into these institutions. Unfortunately, less attention is paid by the policy makers to the processes that shape the nature of selection and the extent to which the practice offers scope for individual agency. Focusing on the actual practice of selecting formal village representatives to new governance spaces in Ntonaboma reveals the complexity of arenas in which negotiations about who becomes a village representative occurs.

Table 5.1 Dynamic structure/agency framework for understanding differential participation in local government structures

During the district assembly local elections every attempt was made to make the selection process seem democratic by involving all village members even before the formal process of vetting took place. After all that is the intention of democratic decentralisation. When the nomination forms for UC and DA candidates were made available by the electoral commission to the community, the village leadership is informed and conscious attempts are made by them to identify specific individuals within each village who they think are best suited to represent the villages. Since the national constitution debars chiefs from active politics, the chiefs strategically looked out for members who represent their interests to represent their village.

On the other hand, if the incumbent assembly member is conceived as having done a good job and needs to be allowed to continue as representative, every effort is made to dissuade other community members with known intentions of contesting to let the incumbent continue with his/her existing roles. An example is Nana Akuamoah Boateng who has stood unopposed as a DA representative for Akroso for three consecutive elections since 1998. No village member had attempted challenging Nana Akuamoah Boateng in the local level elections. This is not to suggest that other village members would not like to contest, but rather interviews revealed that the effect of exercising agency to contest him was normally unsuccessful. Hence village members had to either accommodate or defer their intentions to contest for the elections.

In the last district assembly elections in 2006, seven, and nine candidates stood for election as UC members in Akroso and

Agyade/Yamuoso respectively³⁴. No competitive elections for UC members were held since candidates standing for election in the two electoral areas fell short of the legally required number of ten that formally mandated the elections to be held³⁵. The last two local level elections in Agyaade/Yamuoso have seen competition for the position of DA members but the eventual winners were the preferred candidates of the local leaders. The decision to vote for a candidate was not influenced by the outcome of the public vetting³⁶ to screen prospective candidates although policy statements suggest that the public vetting was to provide the platform for village members to critically assess the candidates and rationally select the best among them.

In reality, the practice of vetting candidates publicly in each village was just symbolic and rarely informed the choices that village members made. It was always preceded by private encounters between village leaders and various individuals to identify the best possible candidates to represent them. Deducing from the narratives of village members, the public vetting was to introduce village members who had shown interest to become representatives. The decision as to who gets approval to stand for election to represent the community was rarely decided through the public vetting but

³⁴ Only three of them were women.

³⁵ The rules guiding local level elections state that there should be more than ten people contesting for positions on the UC before elections can be held. The first ten people to get the higher number of votes become elected UC representatives.

³⁶ The non-partisan nature of the local government elections requires the provision of a common platform for all contestants to the DA and UC to campaign and also respond to questions from village members. This activity is officially to be undertaken by the district office of the electoral commission but the role has been taken over by the local chiefs in Ntonaboma.

was an outcome of ongoing negotiations occurring among the traditional chiefs and other influential members of the villages in overlapping domains. Interviews suggested that no village member had ever been disqualified as not being eligible to stand for election as a result of the public vetting. It also suggests that the non-political nature of local level elections works and leads to co-operation at the local level.

The informal negotiation illustrates how the legal provision outlined in the Local Government Act 462(6[1]) has been re-interpreted to suit the right way of doing things within the community. So, in the selection process of village representatives to the DA, we see a lot of negotiation, compromise and deferrals occurring among diverse social actors including the traditional leadership of the four villages. For example, the two villages of Agyaade and Yamuso are fused together as one electoral area necessitating the election of one representative from the two villages to the district assembly. In practice, the two villages have an 'unwritten' pact whereby they alternate the selection of representatives to the district assembly. This was the case for the 1998 and 2002 local level elections but a compromise candidate, Mr. Apreku Nkansah was elected in the 2006 election to succeed the representative from Agyaade. This was contrary to the norm of alternating representatives to the assembly. However, the Yamuso village did not contest the nomination of another candidate from Agyaade. This deviation from the routine was accepted by both villages because Apreku Nkansah's father is a native of Yamuso and so has kin networks there. He was also very active in the activities of the two villages. This also illustrates how multiple identities of individuals and plurality of institutions provide

opportunities and resources for certain people to become a village UC or DA representative.

In other instances, candidates with ambitions to become DA representatives are convinced into deferring or accommodating their decisions to contest the elections. In Akroso village, Raymond Suele's decision to stand for a second term had to be deferred because the chiefs of Akroso did not see him as representing their interest. He had moved to resettle in his own village limiting his presence in Akroso village as he spent most of his time in his hamlet. Through the actions of the traditional leadership, Raymond Suele did not contest the DA elections but was however appointed as a UC member for Akroso village. The elders explained that for most people the motivation for aspiring to become a DA member was to facilitate the development of Ntonaboma which could be done through other committees such as the UC. The interplay of certain subjective values especially solidarity, conflict avoidance and peaceful coexistence facilitated the ability of traditional leadership to dissuade other members from exercising agency to contest. But at the end of the day these same people with intention to become village representative such as Eric Agyapong and Raymond Suele were able to negotiate to get appointed to the UC and other village bureaucratic committees resulting in multiple village leadership. This reinforces the claim that diverse institutions interact to shape the outcomes of agency for different individuals. However, the extent to which the plurality of institutional channels offer scope for people to realise their intentions is minimal as well as partial as reflected in the example of Eric Agyapong and Raymond Suele.

Relating the nature of recruiting representatives to other bureaucratic committees in the villages revealed how the selection process to the DA and UC was re-interpreted to suit the routinised way of selecting members onto other village bureaucratic committees. Respondents indicated that historically there were other existing village formal organisations such as the defunct Village Development Committees (VDC) and the VRA Trust Fund in which members were appointed upon consensus from among the four villages to constitute such committees. Therefore, adopting a similar approach in constituting the UCs was just following precedence. For example, community members acknowledged that having more than ten representatives to stand for election as UC members as stipulated in the Local Government Act was not important, but rather in the villages more emphasis was placed on constituting capable individuals to do the work as was done for other village committees³⁷.

Evidence of the membership for committees such as the tractor and the VRA Resettlement Trust Fund committees revealed how they were all dully constituted by appointment rather than election. The manner through which individuals were appointed to become UC members in all the villages reinforces the role of history in shaping the behaviour of community members. People's habits and routinised behaviour including their beliefs in the proper ways of doing things which were shaped by history and local norms may be more difficult to change than the form and content of new

³⁷ There are other externally induced formal committees in the community which are not local elected bodies but are constituted of selected representatives.

institutions of governance implemented at the local level to achieve functional goals.

5.3.1 The role of local norms, history and routines in shaping the selection Process

Evidence from Ntonaboma suggests how the formal process of selection and who gets selected to the UC and DA representative institutions were subtly controlled by the village chiefs and other influential members.³⁸ This may potentially limit the effects of individual agency in shaping the selection process, reproducing the structural inequalities and exclusion already prevailing in the community. I draw on Douglas (1987) to illustrate how the actions of human beings are shaped by habit, culture and historical processes. Douglas writes that people routinely do things over time and space. Berry's (2004) notion of 'two different forms of the past' offers insights into understanding the pervasive role of village traditional leadership in the activities of the UC and DA. Reference to tradition as a timeless past, a reservoir of how things have always done in the past and also reference to the past as made up of actions and transaction are often invoked to justify the action of traditional leadership (Berry, 2004 cited in Lund, 2008).

The leading role of village leaders in the selection process was very apparent in the study. Interviews suggested that village elders not only handpicked who stood as UC member but they also influenced the nomination process to get people they preferred to be elected

³⁸These are the wealthy in the community controlling land with external links to community individuals in authoritative positions and are influential in shaping the day to day governance of the community.

representatives. The example of Nana Akuamoah Boateng who stood as a DA and got elected supports this argument. The decision to control the selection process was informed by earlier contestations between DA members and traditional village leaders during the inception of the district assembly system in 1998. During the tenure of Raymond Suele, the first DA member for Akroso, he purposely abrogated to his office some duties performed by the village traditional elite such as settling cases among disputing village members and meddling in land disputes which according to the chiefs were their responsibility. The first DA member also did not involve the traditional leadership in the performance of his activities which resulted in tension between the two positions.

The traditional leadership's negative experience in their transactions with the first assembly member, Raymond Suele, shaped their decision to get people whom they could trust and coordinate village activities with minimal conflict. My speculation is that the power of the traditional leadership was challenged by Raymond Suele, acting as the DA member, hence the decision to consciously get people to become DA representatives. The action of village elders to consciously look out for people in the village with whom they could cooperate to become formal representatives were justified by moral and customary motivations. Iliffe, (2005) writing on the role of leaders in the affairs of their community in Sub-Saharan Africa explains that, women and youths were taught that older men had the right to rule because of their virility, wisdom and access to other-worldly power. In Africa, leaders are believed to 'mediate[d] the dichotomy between nature and culture' (ibid: 7). All these cultural norms reinforced the dominant positions of the

traditional leadership within the social hierarchy. These norms are also drawn on to reproduce the existing state of affairs within new interventions.

Reasons given by village leadership for guiding the selection process for DA representatives suggest they do not deliberately capture the process but were just customarily performing their function in the village in terms of getting the 'right individuals' to become representatives and also to avoid the acrimonious outcomes of competitive elections. The latent tension between the natives and the settler farmers in Ntonaboma was attributed to political differences. The majority of the natives are Akans most of whom belonged to the ruling NPP. The settlers' are predominantly Ewes mostly belonging to the NDC. This difference in political affiliations has led to a precarious coexistence among the two groups which according to interviews was more visible during periods closer to national elections³⁹.

For the chiefs and other local leaders, local level elections constituted an internal issue, the outcomes of which may affect the existing levels of cooperation in the village. Though the leaders agreed during the interviews that there were political undertones during the local level elections, they preferred to moderate the process and get the best for the four villages. Akroso village had its own Assemblyman while Agyaade and Yamuso villages together had a representative, bringing the number of assembly members in Ntonaboma to two. Therefore, to get a preferred candidate for the election involved a lot of negotiations and contestations among the various villages which, if not well managed, could lead to

³⁹ For example during the 2000 national elections a political rally by the NPP in the Ntonaboma led to serious clashes between the NDC and NPP where three youth were arrested and about five others also got seriously injured.

unintended consequences. According to Nana Asumadu, the Gyasehene of Agyaade village, the traditional authorities by virtue of the historical and lineage alliance with the area have the right and obligation to ensure peaceful coexistence.

“... elections may lead to acrimony and conflict the community leaders in their preference for peaceful coexistence also think they have a role to play in the elections which is among members of their community who may even come from the same family. If we fight among ourselves to elect one resident as a community representative to the district assembly what happens after the election and how can the individual represent the whole community. **(Interview with Nana Asumadu, Gyasehene of Agyaade on 11/02/2007).**”

For Platteau and Abraham (2002: 112), the principle of majority voting in most rural communities ‘is not deemed acceptable’ nor desirable as it may lead to the unintended consequence of conflict and a potential threat to effective enforcement of rules and decisions within the locality. This view deprives community members the choice to re-interpret the policy of majority voting to fall in line with their way of doing things to ensure cooperation. These same personalised relations provided the resources for the social actors to consult with their leaders to shape the voting process and get preferred representatives for the new political spaces. We should also acknowledge the multiple channels through which decisions are taken and conflicts resolved without getting into the public domain.

The selection process in Ntonaboma had some resemblance with the routine and historical mode of getting people to represent the community on bureaucratic committees. As explained by Douglas (1987), precedents and routines shape and guide how individuals do things in their everyday interactions. A common feature of the village was for the chiefs to constitute

representatives for various committees in consultation with their elders. This routine permeated into the formal selection or election process of representatives to the district assembly and the unit committee. The method normally involved selecting specific individuals to undertake certain functions within the village without going through any popular voting mechanisms. This has resulted in the community not having elections for UC members. Membership for the UC since 1993 has always been unopposed since members fall short of the mandatory number required for an election to be held. This should not be interpreted to mean that district assembly level elections within the villages were not competitive but rather it explains how the village members responded to external interventions.

Village leadership stated that the normal practice in the selection and composition of village structures was to routinely select individuals to constitute village committees. This was not to disregard the formal mechanisms for recruitment of village representatives to the DA and UC, but the village leaders had re-interpreted the regulations to suit their way of organising in the village life so that they get 'someone who can go to government to bring development projects for us because other communities are also competing for the same resources and the same projects from the district assembly' (Interview with Nana Asumadu, Gyasehene of Aygaade on 10/02/2007). This reinforces Long's (1996: 47) assertion that, 'local actors never simply adopt technologies and development projects, but, rather, they appropriate and transform them to solve the problems they face and to advance their own particular needs'. This goes to illustrate how village actors respond to change by drawing on and adapting existing norms and

mechanisms in ways that modify or negate the intended outcomes (Barnes and Prior, 2009).

To understand the current process of selecting village representatives, I illustrate briefly to support my argument the historical processes of selecting leaders within the community.

The routine for selecting traditional rulers in the community involves a group of clan leaders who come together to search among individual clan members to identify someone capable of leading the community. Mostly, prospective individuals are nominated by clan or family heads especially individuals who are from the lineage of such families. A consensus mode of deliberation and understanding is used to select an individual from the various nominees to become a village customary leader. Though such a mechanism seems very simple, linear and rid of conflict and politics, evidence abounds in Ntonaboma of how the nomination and selection of the current paramount chief of Akroso was a contested process ridden with conflict. What is important is that all effort is made to avoid conflict.

The re-settlement history of Ntonaboma, the routine of elders getting things done for the village and the habit of purposively appointing village members to serve on the numerous village committees account for the leaders over reliance on putting individuals together to achieve certain functional ends for the community and preference for elders to lead.

“When we were brought to re-settle on this land by the Volta River Authority we had to form a lot of committees to undertake development projects and get other activities done for us. We put people into groups to form committees to pursue everything we had. We had some committees for resettlement and housing allocation, compensation, electrification, Village Development Committee that was in charge of clinic, schools, markets, toilets and community centres. Each of these committees reported to the chief and his elders” **(Interview with Nana Akuamoah Boateng, Mankrado of Akroso on 03/02/2007).**

The routine and norm for selecting leaders run parallel to the formal selection process of representatives to public institutions of the state in the village. The intention of village leaders during the interview process was not to consciously malign or prevent any individual from becoming a DA or UC member but was on doing what was thought to be morally good for the village through the selection of capable individuals. The influence of the village leadership results in a ‘dual process’ of governing where the traditional chiefs continued to maintain their position and roles within the village as informal leaders but also influenced the selection and appointment process of DA and UC members to make sure they had their representative who they can work with. For example, in Akroso, a sub chief, Nana Akuamoah Boateng got democratically elected for three consecutive times as the representative to the district assembly for their electoral area. Bierschenk and Oliver de Sardan (2003:154) refer to such a dual approach for getting other influential members into the political spaces as ‘division of political labour’.

This leads me to the discourse of ‘elite capture’ pervasive in most decentralisation literature (Dasgupta, and Beard, 2007; Mansuri, and Rao, 2004). Interviews with the village leadership on the selection process of village representatives suggested that their having an assemblage of a

capable group of individuals to be on the UC or as a DA to represent the village and '*bring development*' was paramount. Though field evidence suggests the capturing of the selection process by the village traditional elite, further insights from their practices revealed a process of 'benevolent capture' rather than arguments that suggest elite capture as necessarily pernicious. The selection process revealed that traditional elites approached individuals privately and negotiated with them to offer themselves for election or appointment as UC members. Though this may hint at favoritism and the selection of preferred allies, narratives of the elites suggested that they consciously sought competent people to stand for election to follow up on community development needs. During the GD with the Yamuoso Traditional Council, the members supported the need for the traditional leadership to be at the forefront of development in the village because 'failing to get people who can do the job can lead to perverse consequences as things will not get done in the village' (GD, with Yamuoso Traditional Council).

Foyoo, 37 years, Male and a youth activists

'Foyoo is a JSS leaver and currently works as an electrician in the village. He is not married and stays with his parents. He is not involved in any farming activities. He repairs malfunctioning electronic gadgets for a small fee in the village. A vocation he thinks is a God given talent because he has no formal training in electronics. He is a member of the tractor and sanitation committee of Yamuoso. He thinks village leaders work for the good of the people. Foyoo participates in village activities but thinks it is the duty of traditional leadership to select good individuals who can manage the affairs of village for development. He cites the road to Ntonaboma which was formally very bad as an example of bad leadership but then with good leadership and the support of the chiefs the road is now good. Formally the pontoon was too old and often broke down and we had to walk to *Bridgeano* to get lorry to Donkorkrom. He thinks the traditional leaders must get people who can facilitate cooperation and have the time and ability to get development for the village. He thinks he is young and needs to focus on specialising in a skill for his future (Interview with Foyoo, 37 years and a Village Influential Youth on 24/02/2007).

Foyoo's example tells us that, for the youth as well as other village members, the important thing was for decentralisation to result into material benefits to either the individual or the entire village. So if consenting to the preferred candidate of the village traditional leadership has the potential to bring materialistic development then they will not contest the decision of the elites. This suggests that individuals may have the right to stand as elected candidates but they may consent to the choice or preferences of elected leaders because the outcome favours their expectations. Therefore, if new political spaces bring limited or no benefits to the livelihoods of the poor they will make no conscious effort to undertake any sociopolitical practices to become representative. Their focus will rather be on the more important aspects of their life - their day-to-day survival - much of which is mediated through existing traditional leadership. Therefore, becoming a village representative was not as important as being in the 'good books' of the traditional leadership or other individuals up the village hierarchy. Such 'process of elite dominance in the affairs of the community does not obviate all progressive change but they do cast doubt on the potential for dramatic transformation' (Clever 2004:27).

The role played by the village traditional leaders in the selection of representatives especially the DA members has resulted in the 'self disciplining of individuals' especially the youth not to contest DA elections but to cooperate with the older leadership to get good representatives for the villages. If even this reproduced existing inequalities, disadvantaged groups internalised these adverse terms and 'get by' with their daily livelihood concerns of survival. Negotiations over individual decisions to access the DA

spaces were strongly influenced by the traditional values of showing respect to elders, the right of elders to lead, the desirability of cooperation among village members, the ability of elected representatives and traditional leadership to deliver infrastructure.

However, it was not very clear from the interviews whether consenting to the preference of village elders was as a result of 'culturally patterned behaviour', the powerful nature of the elders' position within the community or expectations from material development. Drawing insights from Mosse's (2007: 30), argument that "perceptions, judgments and actions are always made within structures of choices that are already constituted socially" provides insights as to why the preferred candidates of the elites get elected without any overly contestation or conflict. Far from being 'false consciousness', my findings revealed that the interest of the majority of village members such as *Foyoo* lay somewhere else and so had no problem with traditional chiefs leading the development process, which they had done since the resettlement period. Their agency was harnessed in finding alternatives to better their own life within or outside Ntonaboma. Thus, "people mobilise around practices and institutions that are particularly meaningful to them" rather than on those that that does not impinge upon their livelihoods (Bebbington et. al., 2004: 190).

Within the village 'the right of leaders' to manage village functions was a decision that was rarely put under any discursive scrutiny by some members, yet others reflexively used this same excuse to enable them pursue their livelihood concerns. The narratives of Matilda Akuamoah and Akwasi Fosu illustrate how blurred and thin the difference between

conscious discursive scrutiny and non-reflexive acceptance on things that happen around us. While some villagers will accept the right of elders to lead without seeing it as a problem; others reflectively draw from it to exclude themselves from engaging in village activities. Not getting involved was a strategy to enable certain people to undertake their daily livelihood activities while blaming the village elders for being undemocratic.

Matilda Akuamoah, 28, Female, Supports the role of village elders to lead

Matilda Mensah is divorced with one child. She is the niece of the Akroso chief and has completed vocational school in Agormanya in 2002. She was employed as a master apprentice normally referred to as 'work and pay' with a renowned seamstress in Koforidua before deciding to come back to Ntonaboma. She also trades in household items which she normally sells to her clients on credit. She thinks it is morally right to be participating in village activities because no outsider will come to develop the village. Matilda has no problem with the role of the chiefs and elders in the affairs of the village. She thinks that in every locality there are people who are responsible for the day to day activities and that was exactly the role been performed by the village leadership.

'Akwasu Fosu, 38, Male non-participant in local government structures

Akwasi Fosu is a pupil teacher at the local primary school. He is a native of Agyaade and is married with four kids. He participates in village activities such as communal labour and other collective activities. He will not contest elections because the chiefs have their own pekmmmmmmmmmmmghople they prefer. He thinks challenging such individuals will lead to so many problems. He accuses the traditional leadership of putting 'unfit' individuals as UC members. He claims the village leadership has their own favourites with whom they work. He cited the example of how the Amankrado, Nana Akuamoah Boateng has simultaneously taken over the position of Assembly member and all the customary responsibilities in Akroso village. Akwasi Fosu thinks that to get appointed or elected in Akroso village as a DA or UC member depends of the influence of the Amankrado. He claims the DA and UC members are not efficient. He cites the example of UC members employing individuals to burn trees for charcoal in contravention of village bye-laws, yet nothing was being done to stop them.

The majority of village members who did not put the pervasive role of leaders in village activities under any scrutiny were not so passive to accept whoever the elders preferred but interviews suggested that there existed some scope for negotiating or even possibly contesting the preference of village elders. For example, Opananin Afriyie (48 years and a local leader) in

an earlier discussion mentioned that, he challenged the nomination of Obofour (UC member for Akroso Village) as a UC representative. However, he stated that he did not do this openly but had to meet Nana Akuamoah Boateng privately to discuss the issue with him. Other village members also indicated in their account how they have made known their preferences for village representative to the village leadership. This evidence suggests that village members had some 'room to maneuver' by using existing channels to negotiate with the elders on the individuals they preferred as DA or UC members. The elders also informally sought the opinions of village members on the representative they preferred to be on the UCs (Dairy notes). However, focusing on the process of these interventions made by village members to get the traditional leadership to change their preferred representative reveals that, it was done in a more subtle way so as not to imply contesting the choice of village leadership. It is also important to point out that the outcomes of these interventions made by some village members did not make any difference to the choices already made by the traditional leadership.

5.4 Effects of exercising agency to access new institutional spaces

In this section, I argue that despite the nominal formal legal rules stipulating equitable access to representative institutions at the local level, evidence from Ntonaboma suggests that progress made towards equitable election and appointment of marginal local actors to the multiple institutional spaces at both the district and village level was patchy. The regulatory arrangements for selection or election onto the DA or UC, espouse equity

whereby individuals are conceived of as autonomous and equally positioned to exercise agency to become village representative. My argument is that the effects of getting elected vary for different individuals despite the recognition of individuals in policy as capable of exercising agency to change the existing state of affairs.

Understanding individual agency as shaped by social relations and framed by the peculiarities of context within which social actors act, negotiate and struggle reveal its enabling and constraining effects on them. Using evidence from Ntonaboma, I argue that the selection process for representatives reproduce the existing hierarchical social order pertaining in Ntonaboma and resulted in varied outcomes for the agency of different individuals. For individual agency to be transformative, the choices made should reflect real changes in outcomes. Yet, only a few village members were identified in the four villages as having contested the choice and imposition of candidates by traditional leadership. However, the outcomes of the selection process for individuals who reflexively contested local level elections varied and were at times insignificant. I draw on the example of Big Sam to support my argument.

There have been other instances where attempts by certain individuals to get nominated were unsuccessful. It was difficult getting respondents within the four villages who had competed in district assembly elections and lost since 1993. For example, Nana Akuamoah Boateng had stood for three consecutive terms as unopposed and the pact between Agyaade and Yamuoso also makes competition negligible. Based on these occurrences people such as Mr. Suele and Eric Agyapong had to defer their

decision to contest local government elections. Mr. Eric Agyapong's decision to become a DA member was deferred upon the advice of the village leadership of Yamuoso. I interviewed Mr. Eric Agyapong in which he narrated reasons for the persuasion by of the village leadership. However, he was of the view that he could have won the elections if he was allowed to compete.

"The elders told me of their intention to let Mr. Apraku Nkansah the new head teacher to stand as the assemblyman for the Agyaade/Yamuoso electoral area. I was therefore tasked to rescind my intentions and support Mr. Apraku Nkansah. Although the chiefs acknowledged that I was capable of doing the DA work they were of the view that Mr. Apreku Nkansah was more capable. A meeting was convened for the two of us and we discussed the decision for me to stand down thoroughly although some of the leadership present supported me but further discussions led to consensus on teacher Apraku's nomination" **(Interview with Eric Agyapong, 18/05/07).**

When we conceive of agency as not episodic but a continuous social action in much of our everyday social life then it is reasonable to understand Eric Agyepong's decision to accept the advice of the Yamuoso village leadership not to contest the elections. Eric Agyepong's acceptance of the leaders' decision and the subsequent deferral of his intentions to stand for election explain the fact that he will neither want to be seen as being over ambitious in his desire to become an elected representative nor go against the decision of the village elders that be used against him in future transactions.

I also located Sammy, popularly referred to as Big Sam, who lost in his bid to become an assembly member for Agyaade/Yamuoso electoral area. Big Sam's decision to contest the elections was to exercise strategic or reflexive agency to 'get out' and challenge the elders in positions of power

within the village, yet he had to negotiate and pursue his intention within both power relations and structural constraints. This demonstrates how even within the bounds of structural and cultural constraints individuals can exercise agency but the extent to which this reflexive action can lead to transformative outcomes is very important.

Sammy's decision to break bounds with the Village chief and contest the elections illustrate how individuals can exercise agency to overcome the constraints of 'habitus' (Bourdieu, 1977). Similarly, Long (2001) suggests that individuals are hardly ever fully enrolled in the project of others and that individuals can choose different levels of enrolment in the project of others.

Sammy; 35, Unsuccessful District Assembly Contestant for Agyaade/Yamuoso

Sammy popularly called 'Big Sam' is a native of the Agyaade and had completed basic education at Ntonaboma Catholic Primary. He is not married but has a 12 year old son who lives in Koforidua. He migrated to Koforidua to trade but things became very difficult for him so had to return to the village in 2001 to seek financial for assistance from his father. However, the difficulty in getting support from his father has continuously kept him in the village for the past five years. This has led to some quarrel between him and his father which ended up in a serious misunderstanding. At the moment he burns charcoal for sale during market days and is thinking of saving some funds to go back to Koforidua. He is currently a member of the tractor committee of the village and plays an active role in the affairs of the youth in the town. He saw the district assembly elections in 2006 as a platform to become the DA member. He decided to contest as an assembly member for Agyaade/Yamuoso electoral area. Subsequently, he informed his immediate family members who then asked him to inform the Agyaade Chief of his intentions. The chief told him that another candidate had already informed him of his decision to stand for election as the assembly representative. The chief suggested that he abandoned his decision since the other candidate who was a teacher was in a good stead to help the community with development projects as he belonged to and was well known in the ruling party. Sammy was advised that he could support the village in other ways. Irrespective of the chiefs advice he still went ahead with his decision to stand for election since the youth in the town urged him on despite the objection of his father and the elders in the town. He lost the election to the candidate who had the backing of the chief, and the DCE. According to him, while the other candidate had enough resources to print more posters and campaign for support he derived his support from the youth in the town.

Sammy did contest the election to become an elected village representative but the effects of his actions and choices made were not substantially beneficial to him. Sammy's ambition to become a village representative was very clear in his narratives, yet inadequate resources and opportunities cut short his ambition to challenge the role of the chiefs in recruiting candidates for the UC and DA. This supports Lister's (2004) argument that 'ambition is not always absent' but the resources on which to draw to translate this ambition into reality weaken the effects of individual strategic agency (Lister 2004: 146).

Having the formal rights to contest the elections had little significance in shaping the outcomes of the elections for Sammy. He had to enact the 'right' and support this 'right' to contest the election with social relations by informing people who were important within the village hierarchy. This demonstrates how power relations and existing institutions may shape the range of possible actions for individuals in their choice to become village representatives. The decision to stand for the elections was based on the support he had from the youth which may be characterised as his social resources but he lacked adequate financial resources to contest the elections.

Seeking informal endorsement from traditional leadership and from other relations in which an individual was embedded may constrain the agency of specific individuals in assessing the DA and or UC spaces. So, access to new spaces is negotiated through 'sanctioned social arrangements' that may end up reproducing existing inequalities. For example, village members mentioned that if they decided to stand for

election, they had to inform certain opinion leaders in the village who will then have to support their bid before they can even go ahead to make their intentions known to the general community. This process connotes the 'right procedure' when an individual purposively decides to exercise his or her right to become a village representative. Deviating from this 'right way of knocking'⁴⁰ by contesting a representative position in the village means going contrary to laid down norms or being disrespectful to village elders.

Sammy's decision to contest the election was first made in consultation with other individuals illuminating the relational nature of agency. Accessing these spaces was more than just getting a nomination form from the Electoral Commission (EC). It involved interactions that were more complex than simply stated in the Act. The requirement of getting nominations from ten village members involves engaging a variety of actors in multiple processes. Individuals have to negotiate their intentions to stand for elections to become representatives with village leaders or elites who must give their consent. Family members and friends need to support such a personal intention.

Sammy stated that he had to inform the Agyaade and Yamuoso chiefs of his intentions to contest the DA elections without putting it into much conscious scrutiny. He drew on the analogy of politicians routinely seeking the endorsement of certain influential traditional rulers any time they decided to contest for elections as shaping his decision to first inform the two chiefs. Continuously securing the initial consent of people located up the

⁴⁰ Knocking rites is the local norm for making intentions to acquire a position or something known to others.

village hierarchy, in Sammy's example from the Agyaade and Yamuoso chiefs, reinforces the reproduction of the existing structures of inequality.

Sammy's example also illustrates the problem of separating agency in political spaces from other domains of social life. Though the right to contest the elections had been introduced externally by the state through legal provisions, it had to be renegotiated within the locality through multiple actors and diverse spaces each with its own logics. Engberg-Pedersen and Webster (2002) explain that unequal progress in transforming representation to benefit the poor within the locality is due to the neglect of the "pervasiveness of local politics" in which social interaction is excluded from the sphere of politics. They argue that the two are inextricably linked in which "local politics encompasses many spheres" (ibid: 21). Sammy intended to access the new political spaces as a citizen yet he had to re-negotiate within existing social norms based on his identity as a native of Yamuoso.

Exploring Sammy's motivation for contesting the elections to become a village representative to the DA revealed that his decision was shaped by mixed motivation. Sammy explains that he wanted to be a DA member to enable him to represent Agyaade/Yamuoso, work for the village to bring more development and pursue other intentions while at the district assembly. Pushed further to highlight some of the intentions that he would have pursued at the district assembly, Sammy stated that he will be able to probably pursue his dream of becoming a building contractor when he gets closer to both the locus of decision-making and the corridors of influential people in the district. Sammy's intentions of becoming a village

representative illustrate the complexity of motivations that shapes particular actions.

The youth in Agyaade and Yamouso did not vote for Sammy in the elections because they perceived him as a bully and 'unfit' to be a formal village representative. This highlights the importance of social reputation in shaping access to institutions. Sammy's ongoing misunderstanding with his father and his disregard for internal village rules such as his continuous burning of dry wood for charcoal with some other village youth which was a bye-law⁴¹ in Ntonaboma did not make him ideal for an assembly man. Though Big Sam's was perceived as not been ideal to be an external representative of the village due to his disregard for village rules, the local government structural arrangements made it possible for the local leaders to channel him into the decision making arena of the village. As Sammy's example illustrates, negotiating access through existing village elders should not be seen as only constraining, but also facilitated the bids of certain village members such as Apreku-Nkansah of Yamouso village to become formal village DA representatives. Thus, while social structure may be constraining for some people, it was enabling for others within the same context.

5.4.1 The undesirable nature of public disagreement

Local government structures are supposed to facilitate the exercise of 'voice' by the poor and the hearing of those voices by those in authority.

⁴¹ Bye laws are formal rules within the community but emanating from the district assembly.

However, social relations and the specificity of context make such actions problematic on the part of the poor. The key question in this section is that, if voice constitutes 'the variety of ways in which people express beliefs, articulate preferences and advance their interests', then, how do social relations and structural conditions shape the agency of individuals in getting their voices heard during public decision making (Goetz and Jenkins, 2005: 29). Data from my study revealed the undesirable nature of contesting village public decisions which end up reproducing the dominant voices of traditional leadership and other village elites.

The reliance on representatives to deliberate and make final decisions before submitting it to the whole village was problematic. This was because some village members were reluctant to voice or make any alteration to decisions submitted by the formal leadership for discussion. Most suggestions made to village decisions were to approve of what the representatives had already decided with minimal changes here and there. During the field work it was observed that outcomes of public meetings of the villages were more of 'rubber stamping' the decisions made by the '*town committee*' (Diary Notes, 05/02/2006). This made all village meetings more of a 'symbolic' arena where no conscious effort was made to put already made decisions into conscious scrutiny. Village members rarely spoke during village meetings. Members were informed of the final decision made to which further clarifications were sought. Village members made no conscious effort to publicly contest or challenge final decisions in order not to undermine existing relations of cooperation. Just attending village decision-making meetings was not synonymous with exercising agency to bargain or

negotiate final decisions where such decisions were already determined in the committee spaces of the *town committee*.

I will draw on the sitting arrangements observed during all village meetings to illustrate how tradition may be reinvented to reproduce existing power relations. During village meetings I observed that the front seats were still vacant and that all women who were present occupied seats at the rear. My initial speculation was that either the women were shy to sit in the front or will want to leave early before the completion of the meeting. I was proved wrong when later an informant mentioned that by the custom of the village women were not supposed to take a seat in the front row which was reserved for the male members of the village. According the informant though no woman had attempted occupying a front seat, she will see such an attempt by any women as contrary to the tradition of the village. A woman occupying any of the reserved front seats will be categorised as a '*playman*', meaning someone who lacks moral value and manners and, has associated with foreign culture that lacks respect for the elders.

Sitting separately in public was not only during village meetings but also during funerals and other village gatherings where men sat separately from women (Diary notes 08/04/2007 during the Ntonaboma Easter Harvest). However, during committee meetings such sitting arrangements were not observed but women showed the desire to sit nearer to their women colleagues. When asked why they have not challenged such a sitting arrangement some women during the GD with the women, they explained that sitting separately in public does not change the status quo within the village because "within our homes we do not sit separately" As another

woman stated “changing the way we sit in public will not lead to anything”. This suggests that women have internalised the traditional way of sitting in public which is taken for granted though it shapes the possibilities for exercising agency to dialogically negotiate final decision-making. During all village meetings I observed that women sitting separately among themselves were not very attentive to the issues being discussed (Diary notes). This always made the DA member who chaired these meetings to prompt the women to be attentive and listen when an important issue that concerned the women was being discussed.

However, other village members interviewed mentioned that they will not contest decisions in public because they believed that it was undesirable to challenge elders in public. Moreover, they were able to draw on other existing channels to negotiate final decisions in the village. For example, the decision to collect a five hundred cedi toll during market day was not challenged by women during the public village decision making meeting but they refused to pay during the market day. The women told the toll collectors to first collect the toll from the merchants who had come from other areas while they pay their toll later after the day’s market activities.

‘We told the toll collectors that we are now selling our foodstuffs and yet to collect money from our customers. So we ask them to go and come later after the market day. After all we are all in the village and will not be going anywhere’ (Interview with Mrs. Mary Addae Konadu, 15/04/2007).

Drawing on their positive social relationship with the toll collectors as a resource, some women could strategically negotiate the timing of the payment of the tolls with the collectors. However, the same village women

after the market day refused to pay the toll and rather insisted that the toll should be paid by the merchants who had come to the market. Their decision not to pay was based on what pertained in other neighbouring market villages in the district. The argument of the women was that as residents of the village, who pay village dues, maintain the market and pay development levy they should be exempted from paying the market toll. The decision by the women not to collectively pay the market toll made the Area Council (AC) to rescind its final decision. The outcome was that outside merchants and trucks were levied to pay tolls during the market days in Ntonaboma.

The decision by the women not to pay the market toll was made informally among the women after the AC had communicated their decision to them. The irony is that the market women who mentioned that they had difficulty in voicing their concerns in the public presence of the AC members and the traditional leadership were the same women who were vocal in challenging the toll collectors at the market. Openly dissenting or contesting decisions in the presence of village leadership by insisting not to pay the market levy meant being labelled as disrespectful which may not be compatible with the shared ways of engaging the traditional village leadership in public. The transcripts of an interview with one of the market women reinforces my argument

'I am a respectful person and always do not challenge the elders in public or say something contrary to what they say in public. My husband will not be happy... The fact that we kept quiet at the meeting does not mean we had to pay the toll...We know how to do our things as women in this village...you see men do not want to be challenged in public. They do not like that ... when elders finish speaking we do not speak again but there are ways to get them change their decisions. They also

slept⁴² over their decision and so may be willing to change decisions...so we allowed them to have their way during the public village meeting... for those who came to collect the money we always encountered them during market days and knew how to deal with them. It wasn't difficult at all **(Transcripts of Interview with Mrs. Mary Addae Konadu 16/04/07)**.

Publicly telling the AC, DA and the UC members in the presence of the traditional village leadership that they will not pay the market levy may be re-interpreted to mean that they were disrespectful. However, it was not difficult telling the toll collectors that they will not pay. The reason given was that the toll collectors were just ordinary village members with no authority though they had to show them some respect but not to the extent to which they could not purposively object to their demands especially once it was in the market and women were in the majority. This example highlights the fluid nature of agency where some individuals are able to exercise agency within the back stages that are hidden and distant from the gaze of legitimate authority. Other women stated how they were insolent to the toll collectors making the toll collectors avoid them any time they came to collect market levy. Upperman (2000) explains that for women to exercise their right required 'determination, influence and strength' though such qualities were exhibited outside the gaze of public authorities (ibid: 372). Upperman explains further that other forms of agency may be anti-social such as the conscious acts deployed by some of the market women at the market to achieve their intended outcome of not paying the market levy.

The above example also shows how the decision making process was shaped by moral concerns of respect and also by the nature of the

⁴² There is a local proverb that the pillow gives more thought because people while sleeping thought about certain issues that will make them change their mind on certain decisions.

power relations between the multiple actors involved in the decision making process in the village. The AC, DA and UC members are elders of the village and have informal personal networks with the market women through kinship, family and livelihood. Since Ntonaboma is predominantly a farming village, almost all members of the village were involved in some form of interdependent activity during their daily interaction. The market women did not want to be seen as disrespectful to authority and as such did not put the decision to levy them to any discursive scrutiny during the public decision making process. However, they reflexively contested it during the actual collection process which to them was more insulated from the gaze of village leaders. As the women mentioned, they knew that the elders will certainly invite them to state their case concerning their decision not to pay the levy since that was the pattern for resolving disagreement on village issues. Hence, there was no need to publicly challenge such decisions. In these socially embedded spaces they can better state their case and achieve outcomes that were more favourable to them than negotiating with the village leaders in public. Muting and not contesting the final decision during the public decision-making process was not to suggest that these women lacked agency within these public spaces but they preferred to consciously use other informal spaces to shape such final decisions.

Considering their subjective values and reflexivity in negotiating the final decision on the payment of the market levy these women realised that they do not undertake their day-to-day interactions in two distinct spaces. The interdependent nature of social life suggests that exercising agency to radically negotiate the decisions of village elders was not undertaken in

isolation from other spaces where they had to engage village leadership in a more subordinate position divorced from their active citizenship status. As one respondent said "...we know how to do our things as women in this village", meaning they will reflexively not contest the final decisions in public which was undesirable and could damage the social relationships in which they were embedded. They preferred to maintain their existing networks and relationships which may end up reproducing the substance of the existing decision-making arena.

Evidence from my study also suggests that the ability to negotiate the dialogical process of public decision-making varied for different individuals depending on the context as well as the individual's personal characteristics and life history. As shown in the example of the market women, some village individuals were able to negotiate final decisions in village public spaces while others preferred to draw on social relations to shape the decision making process. Interestingly, some individuals who did not contribute to public decisions but went to these meetings to listen to deliberations mentioned that their inability to speak or continuous muteness during such meetings was due to their "sense of fear on how people will perceive their contribution or not being capable of saying something of value to shape final decisions". The anticipated reaction from other members of the village of their contributions as making sense shaped their ability to speak in public spaces to negotiate decision outcomes.

Adwoah Serwaa, 27 year old lady

“There are moments in village meetings that something tells me to speak on what was being discussed but I always think of how to present it or say it in public. I wonder whether what I say will make sense. When people start laughing after someone had finished contributing during village meetings it makes you feel that the individual has not made any meaningful contribution to the discussion. If it happens that people laugh at me after my contribution, I may get offended and insult somebody that will also lead to further troubles or problems for me in this town. They already want me as they say I do not respect but I am careful these days. At times I also feel shy for those who speak when all the people present stare at them when they are speaking... not all the eyes that look at you in this village are good. Some are witches and I do not want them to look at me so I will not even speak” (Interview with Adwoah Serwaa on the 21/05/2007).

The anxiety of being ridiculed or rubbished by other peers on the basis of one's contribution during public meetings shaped negatively individuals ability to negotiate final decisions. Varying shades of that sense of self competency abounds in the narratives of interviewees which seek to suggest that certain members of the village kept mute during public decisions just because they felt other village members 'perceived them as having nothing reasonable to contribute or say during these meetings'. As Gaventa (2002) explains how people perceived themselves have consequences on their ability to shape decision-making processes. I will use the example of Ms. Adwoah Serwaa, a 27 year old lady with two kids and divorced to support my argument that contrary to the idea in institutional theories that individuals can purposively bargain and negotiate final decisions, she consciously muted herself during public decision-making due to the 'sense of fear and negative perception about herself.

5.5 Rethinking agency and accountability in new political spaces

Proponents of decentralisation place greater emphasis on the fact that when government is closer to people, it is easier for citizens to know

what is happening, to have input into decision-making and management, and to hold representatives accountable for their actions (World Bank, 2004). The previous sections considered the issue of participation in representative local government structures. This section explores the extent to which the participation of citizens in local government structures exposed local representatives to a more continuous form of scrutiny.

The literature on decentralisation and local government suggests that, democratic decentralisation requires for its success a civil society capable of holding the state agencies that have gained devolved powers downwardly accountable. Decentralisation reforms place emphasis on individual actors to purposely hold local level representatives accountable (Ribot, 2002a). Implicit in this assumption is a 'specific variety of power' located in the capacity of autonomous individuals to engage someone in representative position to justify his or her behaviour and the capacity to impose sanctions on representatives for poor performance (Goetz and Jenkins, 2005).

My intention in this section is to illustrate how social relations and interdependent nature of livelihood shapes individuals ability to demand accountability at the community level. My main task in this section is to explore the scope and effects of exercising agency at the individual level to demand accountability from representatives especially the DA members. I limit my discussion to vertical accountability mechanisms in local governance focusing primarily on accountability relationships among the DA and UC representatives and village members to illuminate the variations in agency. Focusing on social relation and relations of interdependence, I will use data

from Ntonaboma to illuminate the scope for agency on the part of poor village members to consciously demand accountability from elected or appointed village leaders of both the UC and the DA as local government mechanisms .

5.5.1 Who demands accountability at the local level?

My fieldwork data shows that village members routinely relied on village traditional leadership and other influential members within the village to demand accountability on their behalf. The process of demanding accountability from village representatives was mediated through existing authority structures that were conceived as capable and legitimate to do so. By law the UCs are to demand accountability formally from the DA on behalf of village members, yet in practice the UC members fail to exercise this power as mandated in the decentralisation Act. They leave this function to other existing village structures to demand accountability on their behalf. The UC members mentioned that they left this function to the village traditional hierarchy due to the social positioning of the latter in the village which legitimises them to demand accountability from elected or appointed leaders on behalf of the village members. As the UC chairman said

‘The chief and his elders have their own way of demanding accountability from village members or representatives. When the chief asks individuals to account for their stewardship they comply and rarely get offended but when other people even through the appropriate authorities ask representatives to render account they feel otherwise. So to demand accountability you have to go through a respected person in the village who is also respected by the person involved’ **(Interview with Opayin Addae, 20/05/2007).**

The interview highlights the cautious manner in which village members approached the accountability process in order not to incur the displeasure of the representatives involved. The process may even end at the chief's palace without linking it to the formal institutions in which individuals can be named and shamed which may not be desirable. The perception that no action will be taken against the representatives who misappropriated funds did not motivate local actors to consciously exercise agency to demand accountability from local representatives. The belief among some village actors was that demanding accountability from representatives was not desirable. According to these individuals, representatives are accountable to a higher moral authority, a process of accountability beyond the bounds imposed by formal rules. So if, even they do not exercise agency to demand accountability from them, they are answerable to a higher authority that can even let some misfortune happen to them as a form of punishment for embezzling collective village funds. This resonates with Douglas' (1987: 74) explanation that cooperation abounds in the community since "the transactions balance out because when the accounts are audited and the debts are collected by the way that God or nature furnishes defaulters with disease and death".

The belief of a supernatural authority demanding accountability on behalf of individuals shapes the actors' intentions to hold leaders to accounts. Village members by reflexively not demanding accountability from representatives may be motivated by the belief in a higher moral authority to act on behalf of individuals in sanctioning offenders. Though respondents will not state categorically that misfortunes happened to individuals because of

embezzling village funds they were of the view that such a retribution can occur as a result of some acts on the part of the individual that might not only be related to misappropriating village funds .

Similarly interviews with DA and UC members in Ntonaboma illustrate how they are obliged to consult and answer to the village chief on all their activities and inform them of both village and DA decisions.

“We are all answerable to the chief who is the custodian of the land. Even aside from my current position as an Assembly Member I am a subject of the chief. Before I even became an assembly member there have been instances where the chief had summoned other village leaders to his palace to respond to some issues concerning village funds. Also I depend on the goodwill of the local chief to get village members to provide communal labour for DA and other donor projects. The chief even sanctions individuals who fail to attend village works so I have to be truthful to him and let him know whatever is going on. Finally, the ‘gong gong’ used for mobilising village members for village meeting and collective work is also collected from the chief’s palace and he has to give me his permission before a gong-gong can be beaten in the village. so I am accountable to him both as a community individual and through my position as an Assembly member” (**Interview with Mr. Apraku Nkansah, Agyaade/Yamuoso DA member, 14/03/07**).

The above interview with Mr. Nkansah, the DA member for Agyaade/Yamuoso illuminates the position and authority of the local chief in demanding accountability on behalf of his citizens. However the decentralisation or local government Act fails to recognise such a function of the traditional leadership in village life. Rather, the authority to monitor representatives of the DA and bring them into account is vested in the UCs which is unworkable in the day to day practice at the village level. My observation during the field work shows that most village members channel all their complaints to the village chief and his elders and prefer the chief to intervene on their behalf on village issues and even sometimes on individual social problems.

Similarly, empirical evidence from Ntonaboma also suggested that assembly members preferentially opted to be vertically accountable upwards to the District Assembly rather than to their local constituents. During the GD with the assembly members some members suggested that most often it is the DA that provided them with funds to undertake projects in the villages on behalf of their constituents. According to the DA members they are made to sign for whatever funds and materials they collect from the District Finance Office (DFO) and the store supervisor respectively. Since the DA holds them responsible for the utilisation of all funds and materials collected they owe it as a duty to meet all the financial reporting requirements of the DA than to be responsive to village members. This point is well illustrated by Mr. Nkanasah, assembly member for Agyaade/Yamuoso. He stated that, as the DA member in charge of the maintenance of the Ntonaboma clinic, he had the obligation to formally account to the community members on all funds and resources used for the project. Though the local government Act 642 states that, the DA member shall provide adequate information about their district assembly development projects to their community members. His dilemma was that the source of funds and materials for the project was from the DA rather than the community. His priority was to render accounts to the district assembly who can sanction him if he misappropriates the funds or any of the materials for the project than to village members. He noted that he periodically informed village members about the stage of the project including the funds and materials that he received from the DA but this falls short of accountability as espoused in the rhetoric of good governance. Why

then do village members fail to individually exercise agency to demand accountability from representatives?

5.5.2 Fear of the consequences for demanding accountability

The fear of the negative social outcomes on relationships and livelihoods for demanding accountability from local leaders renders such an activity untenable to the individual members of the village. To avoid conflict situations among kin networks and family members, individuals will consciously not exercise agency to demand accountability from local representatives. I will use the statements of Opanyin Addae from Agyaade village to demonstrate that the anticipated reaction of acting individually to demand accountability from local leaders shapes negatively their ability to demand accountability.

'By not stating your claim very well, demanding accountability from village leaders may mean accusing them of embezzlement. Asking someone to render accounts is very good but it may be re-interpreted to mean individual embezzlement or putting a charge on the representative which has the potential of leading to conflict. In this village we are not plenty so we have to deal with such accusations very carefully so that leaders will be able to do their work' **(Interview with Opanyin Addae 14/02/2007)**.

The fear of the unintended consequences of demanding accountability from people whether at the level constrained village actors from consciously exercising agency to hold leaders accountable. Evidence from my interviews suggested that there have been instances where demanding accountability resulted in quarrels ensuing between individuals which widened to involve their immediate family members. A case was cited where the two families brawled due to one accusing a family member of the

other as allegedly responsible for him being accused of embezzling village funds.

‘when the former UC chairman⁴³ was accused of having embezzled the pontoon funds, the UC chairman blamed the appointed DA member for telling lies about him to other village members that he has misappropriated village funds... when the UC chairman eventually absconded his wife and siblings engaged the DA member and his family in a serious quarrel... their wives are both Christian mothers yet they were not on talking terms’ **(Interview with Nana Akuamoah Boateng, DA member for Akroso).**

The fear of straining or damaging long enduring social relationships that have been either reflexively or unconsciously built over the years limit the ability to act to hold leaders to account. The fact that village members encounter mostly each other in their daily social life limits the ability to exercise agency to demand accountability. Even for individuals equally positioned within the village hierarchy demand accountability from the other within the public spaces if not done with caution may lead to hostilities which have the possibility of spilling over into private and informal domains in which the individuals are interact.

Personalised interactions among village members solidify over time making acting otherwise to demand accountability very difficult at the local level. The example of Obofour illustrates how he was able to act publicly to demand accountability from village representatives though such occurrences were rare within the village. Village members perceived Obofour as a drunkard enabling him to make those allegations in public without any remarkable consequences. He mentioned that his action was intentional rather than accidental and was purposely meant to let the DA officials

⁴³ Name withheld for ethical reasons because I do not have the informed consent to use the real name of the person.

become aware that some members of the village hierarchy were corrupt. Naming the leaders during the public meeting was a conscious act and that though he had taken in alcohol in the morning he was conscious of his actions.

‘Oboufour’ Michael, 39, Village Member, Akroso

Michael normally referred to as ‘*Oboufour*’ meaning angel is seen as a drunkard hence commands little social recognition in the village. Based on his drunkenness Oboufour’s contributions on village issues are deemed relevant. During a meeting between the District Assembly and the entire village members on a proposed Millennium Development Challenge Account (MCA) Oboufour publicly revealed how some village leaders are corrupt. He mentioned the embezzlement of PTA funds by the local School Management Committee (SMC) and misappropriation of tractor funds by the tractor committee. Nana Akuamoah Boateng who chaired the function stopped Oboufour midway through his allegations and informed the gathering that Oboufour was drunk and there was no iota of truth in what he was saying. He was subsequently not allowed to conclude his allegation. However after the meeting some village members congratulated Oboufour on his ability to publicly reveal the corrupt practices of the village leaders. Oboufour stated that if he was allowed to continue with his accusations he would have revealed a host of corrupt practices that were going on in the village.

There are various strands that can be drawn from this example to support my argument. It is clear from the account of Oboufour that though most of the village members especially the youth were aware of these perceived corrupt practices on the part of village leaders, they were not prepared to come out individually to voice out these concerns within the public arena. Their inability to come out publicly on these corrupt practices was due to the fear of incurring the displeasure of village leaders which may be interpreted as showing disrespect to elders or acting in a ways that were inconsistent with the existing common practices of loyalty and acquiescence. Fear in this sense makes rational action to question traditional leadership undesirable (Cleaver 2004; Engberg-Perderson, 2002).

Actions aimed at publicly exposing alleged misdeeds of representative's risk incurring the displeasure of village leaders and damaging existing networks. The dilemma is whether agency can be exercised at the individual level taking into consideration the dense network that pertains in Ntonaboma. Such 'moral rationalities' existing at the village level affects the agency of individuals to name and shame public officials for perceived corruption. Reporting village leaders in the public to outsiders as corrupt is not the 'right thing to do' as the outcomes of such actions may be problematic for the individual. Such individuals may be 'labeled' which may affect their relationships with other village actors.

The second issue is that powerful local leaders positioned up the village hierarchy insulate their colleagues from public disgrace through their actions which shapes what is said and done within the public space. The truncating of Obofuor's story in public was to avoid disgracing the leadership in the presence of outsiders. The notion is reinforced by the local proverb that *'it is not good to wash your dirty linen in public'*. These common moral principles and the power of those in charge of village affairs shape the accountability relationships within the village.

5.5.3 The unequal interdependence of connected livelihoods

Putting livelihood⁴⁴ relationships into agency illuminates the many important reasons why exercising agency by individual village members to

⁴⁴ Drawing on Bebbington et. al., livelihood refers to the "diverse types of assets – human, financial, physical, cultural and social- that can be transformed by individuals into livelihood outcomes to make a living" (2006: 1962).

demand accountability from leaders may seem undesirable especially for poor village members. My observations and interviews during the field study demonstrate that poor village members depended on powerful members in their daily interactions. However, such interdependence existed alongside structural inequality which they will not put under any discursive scrutiny. Recent studies suggest that existing relations of unequal interdependence between the poor and non-poor resist efforts to generate accountability, yet more confrontational approaches seem undesirable especially on the part of the poor whose chronic insecurity aligns them to the interests of the more powerful social actors (Mosse, 2007; CPRC, 2005; Cleaver, 2005).

Evidence of asymmetrical relationship abounds in Ntonaboma, but it served as the basis for which individual interactions took place. Putting such unequal social relationships into perspective illustrates how certain individuals such Fredrick, a farm labourer, depended on his landlord in a patronage relationship constraining him to positively act to demand accountability from him. Apart from his dependence on the patronage of the more powerful actors within the village the powerful individuals were the same people who mediated their access to other social resources. Therefore, his relationship with his landlord was so important to him that he would hardly want to make it fragile. The case of Fredrick below highlights the unequal livelihood interdependencies that exist between him and his landlord made it impossible for him to act otherwise to strain the relationship.

Fredrick, 40 a labourer, UC representative and tenant farmer

Fredrick is about 40 and is a member of the UC. He is married with two small sons, and his household lies within the zongo side of the village. The social relationships on which he draws is very thin. He mentions that he came to settle in Ntonaboma upon the encouragement of his brother Mohammed to work as a farm labourer for Mr. Nketia, the *town committee* chairman for Akroso village. Fredrick's brother, Mohammed is also a sharecropper with no land of his own. Fredrick's primary contact is with his land lord and brother upon whom he depends for access to the supply of agricultural materials, small household commodities, small loans, occasional health care and support especially when he has to return to his hometown. Fredrick also maintains a series of relationships with other households within the zongo area, mainly covering labour sharing and mutual assistance with marriages and bereavement. He works additionally as a labourer on other people's farm especially during the main farming season to earn more income for the upkeep of the family. Though his land lord in principle does not agree to him working on other people's farm during the farming season, he manages to do so. However, he is very careful not to incur the wrath of his landlord as that might lead to him being dismissed from the farm. He normally accepts these jobs as contract but informs his landlord about them. Though, he states that this is not always the case. Fredrick believes that village leaders should manage the affairs of the village because they are the traditional leaders of the community and hence owe it as an obligation to the community to make sure things is rightly done. He thinks it is not his immediate concern to demand accountability from elected or appointed representatives because he came to Ntonaboma to work. He cites instances where they heard some representatives had embezzled finances but nothing happened.

Fredrick's example reveals that, though he is a village representative on the UC, he maintains an unequal relationship with his landlord Mr. Nketia, the town committee chairman for Akroso village. This relationship provides Fredrick with the possibility to interact with his landlord and even run errands for him. However, their different social positioning within the village structure and the difference in the resources at their disposal make Fredrick unable to shape positively their relationship. Transplanting such a relationship informed by livelihood security into the public domain where Fredrick is supposed to act purposively based on his rights bearing identity as a citizen to demand accountability becomes a daunting task. Fredrick's suggestion of an external actor may be interpreted to mean someone from outside the village, autonomous and not embedded in any social relationship and equally powerful.

Exercising active agency within such unequal relationships is shaped by both 'short-term purposes and long term projects' which may not be compatible with the transformative ideals of active citizenship espoused in the participatory governance literature (Giddens. 1995: 35). For the poor and other people in subordinate positions such as Fredrick, it is the 'state' that can hold village leaders to account and not ordinary people. For Fredrick securing a stable livelihood is more paramount to them than being able to equally negotiate in the new governance spaces to transform inequitable relationships. Reflexively, Fredrick will not want to act in any form to alter the existing 'relation of subordination' since such an act may lead to negative consequences for him especially that of his livelihoods. His decision to maintain the status quo reproduces the unequal power relationship in which he is embedded. For Fredrick, the 'ebb and flow' of daily social interaction that stabilises future transactions is more paramount than acting otherwise to transform existing unequal relationship.

5.5.4 Getting village representatives to account through 'off stage' practices

In this section, I highlight how village members were able to act within the structural constraints in which they were positioned to bring village representatives to account. Drawing on Scott's (1985) notion of 'off-stages' practices, I illustrate how village members in exercising agency to demand accountability collectively relied on gossip and withdrawal of labour to achieve their outcomes. Lister (2004) writes that these 'back stage' acts were neither for personal gain nor for anti social purposes but were

consciously used to 'get back' at village leaders who were perceived to be corrupt or unresponsive to the needs of the village.

The location of certain people up the village hierarchy imbued with power does not suppose that they are insulated from the effects of the action of others. For example, certain 'off-stage' practices of ordinary members in the village, such as gossiping about a village representative's perceived corrupt behaviour ended up getting such leaders to publicly render account. When such gossips got into the public domain and leaders concerned got to know they made every effort to address the issue raised even though nobody had categorically requested them to respond to such allegations of misappropriation. Though such gossips were not consciously focused on removing village representatives from office they sometimes ended up unintentionally doing so.

Thus, understanding gossip as a part of village life reveals the unconscious nature of that action. Instances where gossips held committee representatives to account abound in the narratives of village members though such acts did not result in leaders either refunding embezzled funds but in other instances some individuals were reported to the police. The example of the former village water committee responsible for collecting water levies revealed how the 'off stage' practices of village members such as gossips had the potential for achieving some important outcomes manifesting in the water committee members resigning their position.

Evidence from my study also revealed that not only does gossiping bring leaders to account but also withdrawing labour or making the work of village leaders very difficult was a reflexive way of acting within the village to

bring leaders to account. Using the renovation of the Ntonaboma community clinic as an example, I will demonstrate how by withdrawing their labour the skilled youth in the village were able to get the Area Council (AC) chairman to render accounts for funds utilised and provide information on the budgeted funds for hiring skilled labour for the project.

During the renovation works on the Ntonaboma clinic, the Area Council (AC) chairman and the DA member for Agyaade were responsible for the day-to-day management of the ongoing construction work such as taking deliveries from the Assembly and other private supplier and releasing these inputs to the workers on site. The AC chairman drawing on the notion of community ownership requested village members who were artisans to provide free labour for the project as the amount of money budgeted for the project was not sufficient. However, the artisans majority of whom were among the village youth rejected the proposal of the AC chairman and demanded that the AC chairman briefed them of the total funds budgeted for the project and the proportion meant to be used to pay for skilled labour.

According to the skilled artisans, if all village members were providing labour they will do theirs as a village member, but when they are providing their skills while others are at their work places, then they have to be paid for the services rendered. As regards the village skilled artisans, if the AC chairman had employed individuals from outside villages to do the work he would have paid them wages for their services. The AC chairman failed to accept the demands of the skilled artisans, hence the youth decided to withdraw their services from the project. The AC chairman reported the matter to the Akroso and Agyaade village chiefs and the District Technical

Officer (DTO). The DTO requested that a meeting be convened for all village members. At the said meeting, the DTO mentioned the funds budgeted and the amount spent on the renovation works. The DTO negotiated with the skilled youth on the daily wage to be paid them but fixed the rate below the prevailing market price at that time for the fact that they were village members and could not be paid as outsiders.

As the example of the clinic renovation shows, the village youth by coming together were able to exercise agency to get the village DA representative to account for the funds meant for the project and also negotiate for their services to be paid. The example also demonstrates that exercising agency to exert accountability from representatives is a relational activity, yet mainstream views on decentralisation assume that autonomous individuals are capable of exercising agency independently of one another to bring leaders to account. If even certain practices such as withdrawing village labour in a public manner are done to bring village representatives to account it takes place within the existing unequal power relationships.

5.6 Conclusion

This chapter questioned the overly optimistic view of human agency in decentralisation thinking and practice. Drawing on the manifestations of decentralisation and local governance within a specific context, I argued that the conception of individual agency as purposeful is problematic. The chapter demonstrated that in exercising agency in the new local governance spaces of decentralisation, individuals were not only motivated by self-interest alone but were informed by diverse and mixed motives much of

which bothered on social concerns. I provided deep insights into how culture, routine, precedence, social relations and moral reasoning shape the strategies and actions of individuals in the spatial arenas of decentralisation. The study also highlighted how certain structural constraints made certain individual acts to transform existing relations of inequality difficult. In questioning the simplistic and optimistic notion of agency in institutional decentralisation, this chapter illuminated the effects of local norms, social positioning in village hierarchy, gender, age and wealth in shaping the agency of village members at the micro-level.

This chapter also highlighted the recursive relationship between agency and structure. I argued that the assumption regarding local participation in decentralisation policy inadequately fails to embrace the role of social structure in shaping the outcomes of decentralisation for different individuals. I illuminated how individual agency was dependent on social relations, culture, local norms, human capacity, economic factors and the position of the individual within the village hierarchy.

CHAPTER SIX

SOCIAL EMBEDDED PRACTICES AND LOCAL GOVERNANCE

6.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I questioned the scope for active agency in the new local government structures of decentralisation. This chapter follows up on the arguments in the previous chapter to interrogate the extent to which the institutional approach to decentralisation transforms social organisation. This chapter unpacks the dynamics of local governance in Ntonaboma by studying the interactions between formal and socially embedded institutions and how this interaction shapes local governance. In this chapter, my main argument is that, putting too much emphasis on crafting local government structures risk separating formal village level governance from other aspects of social life (Agrawal, 2005; Mosse, 2003).

Decentralisation policy and practice strongly focus on crafting formal local organisations to promote good governance at the local level. The tendency is to consciously design formal local government structures in decentralisation reforms to promote community participation in local governance. However, local governance is a complex and contested site where formal and socially embedded institutions complement and in some instances challenge each other. The failure of decentralisation reforms to weave new local government structures into the organising practices of the locality diminishes its potential for improved levels of local governance. In practice outcomes of decentralisation reforms are shaped by diverse

institutions of varying shades of formality and transparency mediating interactions within the community.

This chapter presents a more holistic picture of UCs in local governance, especially the way in which the UC interacts with existing community governance arrangements by adopting some practices embedded in the community. The chapter also demonstrates how the decentralisation process in Ghana provides a framework for synergies between existing institutions and local government structures.

This chapter draws on post-institutionalist thinking to explore how the over reliance on formal local government structures such as the UCs to govern interactions challenges or complements decentralisation outcomes (Benjaminsen and Lund, 2002; Cleaver, 2002; Metha et al, 1999). Post institutionalist theorists argue that institutions normally elude design, evolving in the dynamic process of social life (Franks and Cleaver, 2005). They argue further that, the mechanisms for local governance are enacted through a complex mix of bureaucratic and socially embedded institutions (Benjaminsen and Lund, 2002; Cleaver, 2002).

The first part of the chapter highlights the complex and multipurpose nature of institutions for local governance. I demonstrate that institutions that shape governance at the community level are ad hoc, intermittent and fragile and may be tinkered by community members to suit the local context. The chapter demonstrates further that, decentralised local government structures such as the UCs coexist with socially embedded institutions and often interact to shape daily interaction and cooperation at the local level. The chapter also highlights how the interaction between the UCs and existing

institutions shapes service delivery. To further illustrate the complex dynamics of institutional crafting, the chapter draws on the delimitation of explicit boundaries to illustrate the gap between the reality of decentralisation reforms and local diversity.

6.2 Does the crafting of new local government structures take local heterogeneity for granted?

The tendency to design local government structures to formalise community participation is persistent in decentralisation policy and practice (Ostrom, 2005; Ribot, 2002b). The concern with the over-reliance on formal local government structures in mainstream decentralisation discourse is its oversimplification of complex local realities. Emerging thinking about institutions in local governance suggests that, community level institutions are less purposeful, ad hoc, historically embedded and mostly elude design (Metha et. al., 1999; Douglas, 1987). The argument made by post institutionalist is that, the process of institutional formation in local governance is a messy and complex endeavor (Mosse, 2008).

The key argument in this section is that, decentralisation reforms focus on addressing the deficiencies of local government structures thereby neglecting the complexity of context. The inadequate consideration of the local context in local government reforms is due to the application of institutional design principles to shape community management. My concern is that, an inadequate understanding of the existing norms and patterns of interaction that shape cooperation at the local level and the different meanings attached to institutions may lead to unintended outcomes. Specifically, I use the problems arising out of attempts to consciously design

administrative boundaries for the purpose of decentralisation to support my argument that, institutional crafting is messier and complex in reality and often manifest in unintended consequences than decentralisation policies tend to suggest. First, I will illustrate how the lack of fit between new local government boundaries under Act 642 in Ghana's decentralisation framework and existing traditional boundaries affects the activities of local government structures. Secondly, I will demonstrate that the creation of local government administrative boundaries is a negotiated process that has the propensity to result in conflict and other unintended outcomes due to the diverse motivations, strategies and actors involved.

6.2.1 Improvisation of local government structures for effective governance

Decentralisation reforms devolve political power to local communities by reforming and formalising local government structures to achieve certain desired functional objectives. These reforms are underpinned by mainstream institutional thinking that suggests that, institutional change proceeds through a combination of evolution and conscious crafting (Ostrom, 2005). The creation of administrative boundaries in decentralisation policy and practice is to make local governance efficient and have the possibility of organising and structuring the public actions needed, and to assure that decision-making processes are effective, reliable and legitimate. Mainstream views on decentralisation also highly recommend that area and population must be delimited in order to break problems into manageable size and to encourage individuals to work with one another over time to resolve these

problems (Olowu and Wunsch, 2004; Ostrom, 1990). For example, the Ghana, Constitution states in Article 241 (2) that “Parliament may by law make provision for the redrawing of the boundaries of districts or for reconstituting the districts.” In the Local Government Act, the President has the dominant role in creating districts (Local Government Act 642, Article 1 [2]). The President considers the advice of the Electoral Commission⁴⁵ (EC) of Ghana in creating new districts in Ghana (Local Government Act 642, Article 1 [3]). The EC applies criteria contained in Local Government Act 642, Article 1 [4] such as area and population to demarcate new boundaries.

However, Owusu (2009) argues that the focus on administrative boundaries inadequately considers the consequences of local government boundaries for local development, especially, in communities where the influence of socially embedded institutions on governance is pervasive. In reality, local level governance institutions often turn out to be deeply embedded in localised social process and in practice may be adapted in ways that suit the locally-specific institutional environment (Lowndes and Wilson, 2003). This section analyse these interconnections between local government structures and socially embedded institutions, and argue that there is more depth and variation, and more structure and patterning, between these two institutions than has been generally recognised so far in the mainstream discourse on decentralisation.

⁴⁵ In Article 2, the LGA gives the following task to the Electoral Commission: “review areas of authority of unit committees, town, area zonal, urban and sub-metropolitan district councils and district, municipal and metropolitan assemblies and make such recommendation as it considers appropriate to the President.”

This section draws on the patching of the two UCs with the TDC for the purpose of local governance in Akroso village to support my argument that, new local governance institutions are adapted to reflect the normal 'way of doing things' within the locality. This view suggests that local level institutions may be improvised and applied in certain other desirable ways within the community than those functions specified in policy documents (Long, 2001).

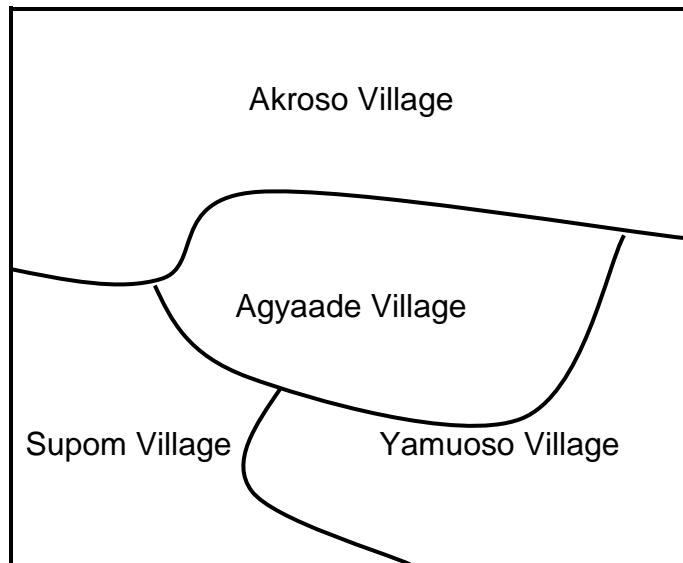
In Ntonaboma the UCs became operational after the 1994 local level elections with clearly defined administrative boundaries for each UC. The delimitation of boundaries is consistent with decentralisation policy and practice. As shown in Figure 5, Supom and part of Yamuoso constituted the JSS UC while Agyaade and part of Yamuoso formed the Agyaade/Yamuoso UC. Akroso village had two UCs namely Sukuumu and Ahenbrono UCs. Field evidence from Ntonaboma revealed that all the four villages preferred to work through their own existing village governance arrangements when it came to individual village collective activities due to the unworkable nature of the rigid administrative boundaries that tends to separate them. The demarcation of the boundaries of the UC in the three villages of Supom, Agyaade and Yamuoso gives cause for concern if local governance is to be considered operational. The views of community members were not elicited during the demarcation of boundaries for decentralisation. The logic of the whole exercise was to simplistically make people, space and resources legible to govern without considering the specificity of context.

The demarcation was done in such a way that the JSS unit committee area was a combination of portions of both Supom and Agyaade

villages which made coordination very difficult. Similarly, the Yamuso/Aygaade UC area also had some portions of Agyaade village fused into Yamuso village. With the exception of Akroso village in which the boundaries of the two UCs were co-terminus with the existing traditional boundaries of the village, the JSS and Agyaade/Yamuso UCs, redefined the exiting traditional boundaries for Ayaade, Yamuso and Supom villages respectively. Due to the misunderstanding between the Supom and Aygaade villages the UC was named JSS Unit Committee in reference to the school building that does not bear the name of any of the two villages to avoid giving different meanings and interpretations to the exercise. In all the four villages, the authority and legitimacy of the town committees were further bolstered by their recognition by the traditional authorities. This enabled the town committee to draw on existing local norms, rules and practices to govern numerous village activities.

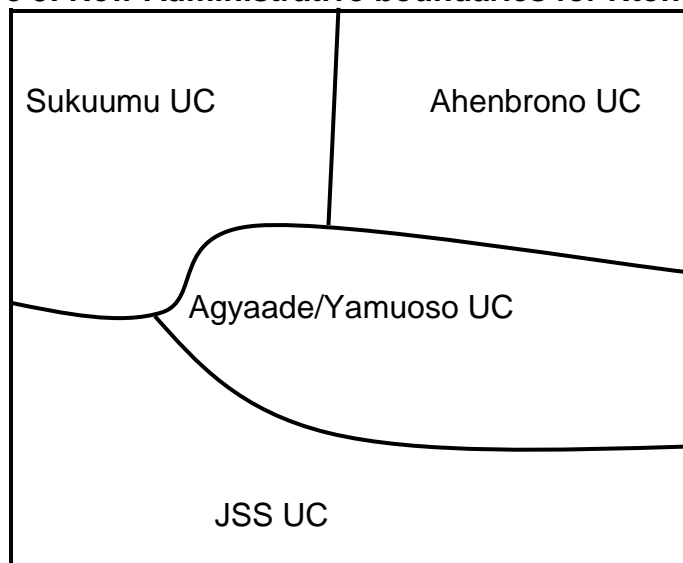
In practice both Agyaade and Supom villages maintained their existing organisation for village management that is the TDCs, but also maintained a link with the JSS UC by putting some village members on the JSS UC. The official boundaries of the UCs did not determine membership to the new institutions. The fluid and permeable nature of boundaries and the dynamic nature of individual identities enabled people not living within a respective boundary to serve on a particular UC. An example is Nana Saaka who was the chairman of the Agyaade/Supom UC but had left his original resettlement home for his children to join the wife at Akroso. This example shows the fluid nature of boundaries. Nana Saaka administratively lived in Agyaade/Supom UC but had moved to live in Akroso village.

Figure 4: Existing traditional boundaries for Ntonaboma



Source : Author's construct

Figure 5: New Administrative boundaries for Ntonaboma



Source: Author's construct, 2007

Combining the Sukuumu and Ahenbrono Unit Committees in Akroso Village

The elders of Ntonaboma merged the Sukuumu and Ahenbrono unit committees to enable them save time on operating two institutions simultaneously. The decision by the community elders to merge the two UCs was due to the fact that the Akroso electoral area of Ntonaboma was not spatially big enough to demand the use of two UCs. The two UCs were operated for about seven months in 1994 resulting in coordination problems between them. This brought a lot of confusion in regulating the activities of the community. People were not attending communal labour activities. Collecting community levy was a problem. Moreover there were not enough people to serve on the two committees so the leaders of Akroso village decided to merge it. Hence for the purpose of effectively managing the day-to-day activities of the community and reducing the transaction cost of operating two UCs a single structural arrangement was put in place to management village activities.

The two UCs were merged into one UC for practical purposes while officially for administrative purposes the electoral area had two UCs. The merger of the two UCs did not involve higher levels of the local government administration but was a community decision that was not made known to the district assembly. The UC elections resulted in two distinct UCs with their respective members for the Akroso area of Ntonaboma with Nana Osei Afram and Mr. Nketia as the chairman for the Ahenbrono and Sukuumu UCs respectively. However, the decision to combine the UCs by the community elders had Mr. Nketia and Nana Osei Afram as the chairman and deputy chairman respectively for the combined committee. Other positions had Mr. Samuel Opoku, the secretary for Sukuumu UC as the new secretary for the combined UC with Mr. S. K. Tano as his deputy. Similarly, Madam Akosua Akyaa became the treasurer while Rosinah Akuamoah was the deputy treasurer.

The formal division of Akroso village into two UCs made it very difficult for the village representatives on the committee to organise and monitor village activities such as communal labour and effectively collect *ntokuatoo*⁴⁶. The fluid and dynamic nature of social life coupled with the permeable nature of boundaries made governing everyday village activities separately between the two UCs problematic. For example, each village had its own set of forage opportunities and restrictions that were not within the remit of the new local government structures introduced in the villages.

Instances were also cited in Akroso Village when on the eve of communal labour some people stayed overnight in the cottage built on their farms which fell within the jurisdiction of Sukuumu UC and return later to

⁴⁶ A village levy paid by all individuals who are more than eighteen years old. This levy is used for village development activities.

their home which were within the jurisdiction of the Ahenbrono UC. They always explained that, they were not present in the village the day before the communal labour. By the rules shaping communal labour, if any person is not in the village on the day preceding communal labour, the person was not deemed to have been absent from communal labour. Also the collection of the *ntokuatoo* became a complex issue because of the difficulty in identifying individuals with particular dwelling units in the village due to extended family and kin networks. The town committee members also highlighted how difficult their job was and the extreme burden it puts on their day-to-day livelihood activities. For example, in the collection of community levies they had to go from house to house which was time consuming and difficult especially if it had to do with recalcitrant village members.

The new UCs had difficulty in fitting into village practices as some village members perceived the UC as external and had been put in the village by the district to do the work of the district assembly. The UCs were conceived by both the representatives on the committee and the village members as a local government institutions that linked the villages with higher official spaces of the district. However, the UCs in reality were reformulated within the four villages constituting Ntonaboma to suit the routine of village public management and local practice due to their ambiguous role within the villages. Motivation to tinker with the UC was shaped by precedence and the sense of the right way of doing things. In Akroso village and in almost all the four villages in Ntonaboma, the UC was embedded in the town committees because the representatives were also leaders and members of the town committee in the various communities.

The town committee members are people who were born in the locality, have lived there most parts of their lives, and, in many cases, also derive their livelihood from there. Therefore, town committee members are so much part of local society that they can neither escape censure if they are seen to be not conspicuously performing poorly, nor ignore representations made to them by village.

When questioned whether the district assembly was informed of the improvisation of the UCs, the town committee members mentioned that this improvisation had not been made known to officials of the district assembly. According to one village representative in Akroso, “on paper there are two UCs but in reality there is one local government unit in Akroso village”. Metha et. al’s (1999: 21) argument that “new conditions provoke active agency which may lead to new sets of more regularised practices” supports the decision of the village traditional elders to purposively alter the UC to suit their way of doing things. According to Nana Akuamoah Boateng having two UCs was irrelevant as Akroso village had always been managed as a single spatial unit and all other committees were not double but rather single. This was not to suggest that the community was rid of conflict or was homogeneous that there was no need for diverse institutions to manage numerous community activities. Rather, his comments go to illustrate how local government structures are open to alteration where appropriate to suit the local context. This explains why some institutions may be stable over their life course while others may be flexible and improvised to meet mundane daily community governance functions. This also reveals how social actors within a particular locality shape external interventions.

Despite the desire of the PNDC government to replace existing village organisations in 1988 with new local government structures due to claims that these organisations were generally inefficient and undemocratic, village organisations continued to play an important role in local governance. Within Ntonaboma the local structure for managing village activities were normally referred to as the ‘town committee’⁴⁷. This committee has been in existence for a long time since their re-location to Ntonaboma. Maintaining the name of the existing structure arrangements for village governance suggests that decentralisation reforms when it encounters complex village realities are re-interpreted to suit the local context. This re-interpretation derives from existing local practices as shown in the interview with the Yamuso UC Chairman which highlights the frustrations and struggles in using the UCs to mediate numerous village activities.

Interview with Yamuso town committee Chairman

Before 1994 the work of the Unit Committees was performed by the Town Development Committee (TDC). We operated both simultaneously in Akroso village and realised that people responded to the call of the TDC better than the Unit Committees. Those days of the TDC people came with their own implements like shovels and cutlasses for communal work, but nowadays people expect the Unit Committees to provide the working tools for communal labour which is non existence. The chief also played a very important role in the TDC but that was not the same for the Unit Committees. The TDC at that time was for all the Ntonaboma community and so it was not for any particular community as it became with the Unit Committee concept. We had four Unit Committees that involved different sections of the villages. Though Akroso village which is the biggest has merged their two UCs it is not the same for the other UCs. Each village operates a *oman* (village) committee that includes the UC. So if one sector of the Unit Committee such as Yamuso decides on something, it does not apply to Supom and the rest. If it is a project from the DA for all Ntonaboma then we work together but through separate structures. We have two paramouncies here and it is also part of the problem retarding development in the area here. When both paramouncies had one single TDC things worked smoothly. We prefer the TDC to the Unit Committee concept

The above interview with the Yamuso village UC/Town Committee chairman reveals that, rather than the new UCs reducing the transaction cost

⁴⁷ The town committee was the name given to institutional arrangements for village governance in Ntonaboma.

of the management of community activities, the time and effort in managing the two new institutions increased. Since the modalities of the new UCs replacing the old Town Development Committee was ineffective in practice they had to remould the formal institutional arrangement in the new decentralisation policy framework to suit the local context. Though this may sound functionalist in nature, the improvisation of the UC was to allow the four villages adapt the new institutions to the existing and common mode of village governance (Benjaminsen and Lund, 2002).

I observed that the improvised UC was referred to by both community members as 'town or *oman*⁴⁸ committee'. The 'town committee' drew its name and meaning from the *oman* but still adopted some of the attributes of the UC such as chairman and secretary which were stipulated in LI 1589 [26(1)]. The town committees was drawn upon by the village members to solve all community development problems and managing all collective activities such as communal labour and collecting community levies. The town committee was drawn upon by the village members to solve all community development problems and managing all collective activities such as communal labour and collecting community levies. This put a lot of pressure on elected and appointed leaders who spent more time and energy in attending to the myriad community problems. This observation reveals that the UCs alone as local government structures did not possess the resources needed to promote community participation and sustainable local governance. Rather, the synergies between the UCs and existing community

⁴⁸ *Oman* in local parlance signifies the nation which in this case means the entire village. It is important to note that *oman* refers to the collective and draws on the social capital inherent in the village.

management institutions produced more positive outcomes for the village's social organisation. For example, in Akroso village, the power to enforce implementation and impose punishments for offending village members were still undertaken by the town committee despite the implementation of the new local government structures

The improvisation of the UC in Akroso village suggests that structural arrangements to govern community activities must move beyond the over optimistic faith placed in formal institutions to govern community activities. More attention needs to be placed on fully understanding how existing socially embedded principles and practices have continuously been drawn upon to shape community management. I will use communal labour in Akroso village to show more explicitly that the Town Committee worked because it overlapped with local authority structures of each village. I also demonstrate further that, the functions of the town committee were shaped by the socially embedded principles of peaceful coexistence, conflict avoidance and desirability of cooperation existing in the villages. However, the use of communal labour is to highlight the extent to which improvisation of new formal institutions to suit local arrangements may also be opaque limiting transparency and reinforcing existing inequality.

The activities of the town committee were very visible through communal labour. There was a clear overlap between the various committees in Akroso village and the town committee. The town committee was mostly called upon to organise communal labour for ongoing projects being undertaken by the various formal committees. These activities took the form of mobilising the community to provide labour such as weeding around

the community clinic, the local school, the cemetery, the public toilet or on the main road that leads to Ntonaboma. These communal projects were intermittent and undertaken to solve routine community problems or other uncertainties that occurred. I draw on the management principles and on the rules governing communal labour to demonstrate the desirability of solidarity in replacing strict rule enforcement, sanctions and legible authority structures.

Communal Labour in Ntonaboma

Communal labour was normally organised on different days normally referred to as fofieda for each of the four communities. Whiles Akroso and Agyaade had their fofieda on every Friday, Supom and Yamuoso had theirs on Thursdays. Communal labour was normally organised to weed around the public areas within the various townships to keep the community very clean and also to provide labour for ongoing projects. There were times that the two villages worked together on their respective fofieda if the communal work had to do with the entire Ntonaboma community. For example during the renovation of the Ntonaboma clinic which was for the entire community they had to provide free labour on every Thursdays and Fridays on their fofieda whiles the remaining days were shared among the various villages. The routine practice was that the 'dawuruboni' (gong-gong beater) went round the day before the communal labour informing community members where communal labour was to take place the next day and what ought to be done. The practice of providing information to community members on where the communal labour was taking place and the nature of the work to be done enabled people to do their part with little or no supervision.

The convention governing communal labour was not too rigidly enforced but was structured in such a way that it fitted into people's daily activities. The underlying feature of communal labour was the belief that other community members will do their fair share of communal work (Interview with Nana Akuamoah Boateng). For example, individuals who wanted to do their share of the communal labour very early enough to enable them attend to other issues were permitted to do so, while others could come later in the morning to do their share of communal labour. Such informal practices provided the poor with a certain freedom and liberty in participating in communal activities.

The flexible nature of communal labour enabled more individuals to do their part very early without the presence of any of the human authority figures and leave. According to Mr. Nketiah, 'if you come early and do just a little bit your own self conscience will haunt you. This and will make you feel guilty, with time your behaviour will be noticed by other village members who will complain to us' (Interview Mr. Nketiah, Town committee chairman, Akroso village). Such informal arrangements also limited the need for continuous monitoring of individuals and clear authority structures during communal labour.

I noticed that the communal work lasted from about six o'clock to ten o'clock in the morning. Attendance to the communal labour was higher. In one instance during communal labour in Akroso village, I counted more than ninety eight males while about fifty females participated (Diary notes, 16/02/2007). The norms and rules that guided communal labour in Akroso village were not interpreted with the same intensity.

Compliance to these rules was not rigid due to the social values of dialogue, consultation and consensus. The flexible nature of communal labour and the generous application of operational rules by the town committee were reflected in the acceptance of children below the age of eighteen to do communal labour on behalf of their parents who were not able to attend. The rules shaping communal labour allowed children to stay away from communal labour yet these same children were allowed to work for their absentee parents. Though the use of children to do communal labour on behalf of their parents was accepted, I noticed it was not always the case as a few individuals drew on that norm. While some children were accepted

to work for their parents others were not allowed. The reason giving was that when some particular children came to work for their parents they refused to listen to simple instructions. This had resulted in conflict among some parents who attempted to reprimand these children.

Others who did not attend communal labour also refused to pay their fines when they were sanctioned. When discussed with the town committee chairman he mentioned that the assembly bye-law allowed individuals who will want to pay for communal labour to do so in order not to attend but this put extra burden on those who have to work during communal labour to compensate for those who do not attend. When asked whether children could represent their parents, village members mentioned that they will not accept a parent always sending children to do communal labour for them but on a few occasions they will accept. Their response also revealed that the nature and depth of the individual's involvement in communal labour will be taken into consideration when allowing children to work on the behalf of their parents.

There were other instances where individuals who did not attend communal labour would negotiate to have their turn later without paying the fine. Berry argues that negotiability of rules and relationships is one of the fundamental characteristics of African societies (Berry 1993). The issue of an offender showing remorse for not attending communal labour was also very important in determining whether to sanction or not. However, the factors that were taken into account in defining 'remorse' were open to the subjective interpretation of Mr. Nketiah, the Akroso village town committee chairperson.

During one *fofieda* (literally meaning off farm day) in which I had gone informally to observe communal labour in Akroso, I heard a woman informing Madam Beatrice Acheampong that her neighbors' (Abena Adade) daughter had convulsion at dawn and had requested her to seek permission for her. After communal labour the explicit nature of community solidarity became evident when I noticed five women (two were family members while three were friends) going to Abena Adade's home to visit her to find out the well being of her little daughter. Abena Adade was exempted from communal labour for that day, yet she later went personally to inform Mr. Nketia, the town committee chairman of reasons for not attending communal labour (Diary notes).

The approximate acceptance of children to undertake communal labour on behalf of their parents demonstrates that the principles and practices underlying the management of communal labour embraced the dynamic and fluid nature of social life and changing nature of individual circumstances. Drawing on Abena Adade's case (the parent whose daughter was poorly and so could not attend communal labour), the Akroso village members mentioned that anything could happen to someone, such as illness, bereavement and sometimes the need to travel unplanned may inhibit people from attending communal labour but such an individual will have to inform the leaders so that they get to know what was happening.

The complex, mutual and interdependent nature of social relationships arising as a result of associational activities and diverse livelihood networks such as existing labour sharing arrangements, attending

church⁴⁹ together on Sundays, the communal and absolute nature of individual involvement in funerals, weddings or naming ceremonies and shared values occurring as a result of living together all play more important roles in shaping interactions around communal labour. The important thing as Mr. Nketia mentioned was to 'get all people in the village attending communal labour which was very difficult, but we want to work in the village as a family by having everybody doing his/her part and the work being done...When we all do our bit the work gets done (*obiaa be ye ne diee*)'. This deviated from the notion of efficiency underlying most mainstream institutional approaches and the explicit use of sanctions as the mechanism to ensure cooperation.

My data revealed that community management through local government structures is not so easy and simple as the mainstream views on decentralisation suggest. It is rather a complex process partially deriving its principles from existing local arrangements. This re-echoes Chanock's (2000: xxiii) introduction to 'Law as a Process', that centrally inspired legal change when understood through its processual characteristics, and not through its apparent structures' illuminates how "proposed changes in the larger system might not translate into the kinds of effects and compliance that had been anticipated' within a particular locality".

In the next section, I will explore the actual practices of the town committee in Akroso village to illuminate how local government structures interact with socially embedded institutions at the community level to

⁴⁹ I noticed three dominant churches, the Catholic, Methodist and Pentecost churches and then others such as the Christ apostolic Church, Seventh Day Adventist and the Mosama Disco Christo Church.

undertake a variety of functions that were spontaneous and solved a host of mundane problems within the communities.

6.3 The socially-embedded nature of village governance

In this section, I focused on the organising practices of the town committee in Akroso village to find out the extent to which it was consistent with those stipulated in the Local Government Act 462. I also used the concept of 'organising practices' to illuminate the centrality of these practices to daily life especially when people have to be mobilised to respond to numerous village problems, how these functions are undertaken and through what mechanisms (Jeppesen, 1998; Nuijten, 1992). I also questioned the faith placed in the conscious crafting of local government structures to achieve desirable goals in decentralisation reforms. I demonstrate that, local government structures interacted with existing socially embedded institutions to undertake multiple functions within the community.

This section illustrates how the town committee in Akroso village as a 'socially sanctioned' organisation was drawn upon to perform multiple functions in the village, both formal and others based on the existing relations of cooperation. These multiple functions undertaken by the town committee were spontaneous and were shaped by socially embedded principles. As I have stated in Chapter two, the UCs are by law the pivot on which all district development activities emanate and their specific mandate is to mobilise their various communities for development activities. In the Local Government Act 642, the UCs are supposed to organise communal labour, undertake revenue collection, ensure environmental cleanliness,

registration of births and deaths, enforcement of district assembly bye-laws, revenue generation and implementation and monitoring of self-help projects (Ministry of Local Government, 1994). How do these functions stated in policy documents relate to other village practices and conventions for social organisation?

The management functions of the town committee in Akroso crosscut the collective and individual domains. Since the UCs in Akroso were improvised to form the town committee, I examined the minutes of the town committee meetings held between 2002 and 2007 to enable me to identify issues discussed during these meetings. This was to examine whether the functions of the UC stated in policy prescriptions reflected the activities of the town committee in the villages. Though their functions are explicitly stated in policy documents, the reality is that, the town committee undertook a host of village functions that are not laid down in the Local Government Act 642⁵⁰.

These minutes of meetings of the town committee showed that such meetings were not on specific issues or related to only their mandated functions but were ad hoc deliberations on issues that occurred in the village. Even though the Local Government Act 642 states that the UCs should meet at least once a month, the dates of the minutes showed that the meetings did not occur regularly but were held whenever the need arose and were mostly follow-ups on 'all village meetings' where final decisions could

⁵⁰ Article 10 (3) (4)(5)(6) provide the general functions and responsibilities of the District Assembly. The Local Government Act, Article 15(1) allows the DA to "delegate any of its functions to such sub-Metropolitan District Council, Town, Area, or Urban Council or Unit Committee or such other body or person as it may determine."

not be made. A lot of meetings occurred whenever there was an ongoing project in the community in which the town committee played a major role. For example, six meetings were held in the month of September, 2005 while no meetings were convened for the following two months. The high frequency of meetings within that month was due to the ongoing re-roofing of the local primary school in which the town committee played an instrumental role in mobilising resources for the project.

Members present during these 'town committee' meetings comprised not only the members of the improvised UC but other representatives such as members of the traditional authorities, the assembly members and other members of other formal bureaucratic committees that had something to do with the issues being discussed. The membership of the 'town committee' was diverse with certain core members. Other individuals invited to attend the meeting of the 'town committee' depended on the nature of the issue or the problem at stake. According to Mr. Nketia, the UC chairman,

'When there is a problem in the community we invited town elders so meet to find solution to the problem. If it demands meeting the whole community we inform Nana [local chief] and then we call for a village meeting but most often we [the town committee members] would have met before we call for the entire village meeting. If it has occurred before in the affairs of the village then we find out how that particular problem was solved and the strategy for solving it. If it requires re-constituting a sub-committee for the issue we do that. Normally what to do depends on the nature of the problem'.

In Akroso village, the functions of the 'town committee' were more ad hoc in nature playing different roles within the village. The institutional arrangements for village management were identified to be highly flexible and entailed constant decisions and responses to 'here' and now contingencies. The scope of the town committee's functions ranged from representing the village at DA programmes, collecting tolls during market

days, sanctioning people who did not attend communal labour, monitoring the implementation of district assembly projects to arresting civil offenders and collecting community levies (*ntokuatoo*). As shown in Table 6.1, the 'town committee' was multifunctional in nature. For example while the UCs were by law responsible for registering any birth and death in their unit, in practice the 'town committee' in Ntonaboma did not perform these functions. This was a continuation of the existing practice in the Ntonaboma where Traditional Birth Attendants (TBA) and the clinic recorded all births while the funeral committee recorded all deaths in the community. The reason given was that the funeral committee collects all funeral levies and gives out dates for organising funerals; hence it is the first point of call whenever someone dies in the village and can easily record deaths in the village (Diary notes, 12/02007). This demonstrates that although it is a good practice to provide a frame for the roles and functions of the UCs, these functions stated in policy instruments may be sidestepped in favour of non-DA roles which are embedded in existing social practices.

The Akroso village town committee members during the GD mentioned that their formal functions were organising members for communal labour, sanctioning individuals who failed to attend communal labour and collecting *ntokuatoo* (community levies), collecting fines and a host of other mundane day-to-day functions emanating from community and individual needs. These mundane functions were ad hoc in nature. The narratives of some of the 'town committee' members regarding their functions suggested that they performed other activities that were often ambiguous and at variance with those spelt out in policy documents. The

roles performed were dynamic and fluid combining specified roles in policy documents with other roles that continued with existing functions or solved uncertainties. The existing roles were regularised practices that were reproduced when similar problems occurred. Other roles were not any fixed set of functions but were dynamic, changing over time as uncertainties occurred.

Table 6.1: Activities undertaken by the Akroso Town Committee

Issues	Subjects discussed
Health	Construction of a new clinic Request to the district assembly for a community nurse to be posted to the clinic
Education	Construction of new primacy block for the Catholic Junior School Management
Transport	Repair of the pontoon and main road Deciding on the operating times for the pontoon Weeding of the edges of the main transport route to the village Collecting pontoon fare
Environment	Sanitation issues Preventing erosion Charcoal burning Grazing of cattle or farm lands
Conflict resolution	Settlement of disputes sanctioning free riders
Other issues	Community levies (oman too or ntokuatoo) Setting of bye-laws Organisation of community Easter dubars Labour mobilization

Source: Fieldwork, 2007

Interviews also suggested that some functions of the UC stated in policy documents such as recommending names for streets were irrelevant to the daily needs of the village. For the UC/town committee to become more relevant to the expectations of village members it undertook other mundane functions less consciously some of which were spontaneous in nature. This highlights the dynamic nature of the town committee's involvement in the daily affairs of the village. For example, the town committees in Ntonaboma

facilitated the transportation of sick people to the district hospital. In times of emergencies, the town committees were informed to mobilise people to attend to the issue. There were instances that they also served as gate keepers to the village. This happened during my entry to Ntonaboma to do my fieldwork. I was sent to the town committee chairman who welcomed and introduced me to the town committee members informing them of my mission to the town. I was later sent to the Amankrado for Akroso village, Nana Akuamoah Boateng who also acted as the assembly member for Akroso village.

There were other instances when the town committee had to mobilise members to perform new tasks in response to problems that arose in the village. It was clear for the study that community members were able to organise around activities that involved extracting benefits from government. The needs around which they organised were largely tangible and related to works that could be accomplished in relatively short time period. For example, during 2004 when the district assembly failed to repair the pontoon linking Ntonaboma to the district for about six months, all the four town committees in consultation with the traditional councils had to mobilise funds to purchase a new boat to be used in crossing the Obosom River to and from Ntonaboma. The boat operated unscheduled, charging a minimal fee to enable village members to cross the lake at any time of the day to attend to their everyday issues.

Mobilising resources to repair the local primary school

During a school vacation in July, 2002 when the roof of the district assembly primary school building in Ntonaboma was blown off by a heavy storm the town committee had to work together with the School Management Committee and the Traditional Council to get the roof of the school repaired before the school year started. The town committee had to mobilize some youth to cut trees from the Digya Forest Reserve to be sawn into lumber for the re-roof the building. The assembly member who is also a sub-chief had to go to the district assembly and the National Disaster Management Organisation (NADMO) to request for roofing sheets for the school. Since the roofing sheets provided by NADMO were inadequate other prominent citizens of Ntonaboma living in the city were contacted for support.

The above example demonstrates that whenever there was an unexpected problem in the any of the villages, there was a complex interplay among diverse stakeholders and multiple institutions in the village to respond to these uncertainties. The competing demands on the resources of the district assembly resulted in delays in responding adequately to uncertainties in most villages in their jurisdiction. In the above example, though the school was built by the district assembly but owned by the Ntonaboma community, yet they did not rely only on the district assembly to solve the problem.

Returning to the functions of the Akroso village town committee, I have demonstrated that their functions or tasks were fluid and dynamic occurring at anytime that an uncertainty or mundane problems occurred in any of the villages. The multiple functions undertaken by the town committee were based on the exigencies of daily life and were aimed at responding to the complexities and dynamics of the locality and individual problems. The spontaneous nature of the functions of the town committee most of them unconsciously driven was evident during the period of the study.

I observed how the town committee mobilised village members to undertake certain functions such as helping in arresting a civil offender who had stolen farm products from a farm and helping a family to transport a sick woman to the district hospital (Diary Notes) The town committee acted as

the 'police' of the community since there was no police station in the Ntonaboma. Arresting civil offenders was not the duty of the UCs, yet the town committee performed this function. During my stay in the community I observed after one heavy downpour how the town committee chairpersons for Yamuoso and Akroso village mobilised some youth to repair the road leading to Ntonaboma. The heavy rain had created a big gully in the middle of the road making it unmotorable. At that time the only vehicle that plied the town was seen loading passengers for Donkorkrom the district capital. Though repairing the road was not the function of the 'town committee' they still mobilised village members to do it (Diary notes, 16/05/2007).

Also, during immunisation programmes such as the polio vaccination exercise, the town committee mobilised the community members for the exercise. On a visit to the local clinic during a post-natal service I saw Madam Beatrice Acheampong, 52, a teacher and a member of the town committee who also served on the clinic committee was there supporting the nurses. She mentioned that if she was on vacation and in town she helped the nurses with both antenatal and post natal services because these services were arranged in an alternating pattern at the clinic on every Tuesday which happens to be market days. Women in the catchment area of the clinic combined their market activities with antenatal or post natal attendance. According to her the district had not responded to the communities request for additional nurses hence her decision as a TC member to help the nurses. Other women were also observed fetching water and weeding around the clinic.

Deducing from the narratives of the town committee members during the GD it became evident that though their official functions were stipulated in LI 1689 (Paragraph 25), in practice majority of their functions were both spontaneous and routinised including solving everyday problems and issues ranging from that of the district assembly and community to individual problems. The flexible nature of the functions of the town committee enabled it to respond to the different and changing village circumstances. However, the nature of the functions performed by UC or town committee members varied for the different villages. These functions performed by the UC were not stated among their official functions but had attained some form of regularity within the villages. The observation was that immediately some problem occurred in the village, people knew the institution on which to draw to get the problem rectified.

The multiple and ad hoc functions performed by the town committee in Akroso village should not be simply conceived of as the efficient functioning of the committee but may be seen as partially emanating from some socially embedded principles and values inherent in social relationships and pervasive traditional leadership. The strong sense of appeal for the elders to attend to village problems and the principle of solidarity pervasive among village members as far back as the resettlement period made it possible for the town committee to perform these functions. This was evident in how the town committee members mobilised collectively in responding to village problems. These social values were reflected in the interview with Mr. Nketia.

'...immediately something occurs in this village you will see people both young and old hurriedly coming out of their homes to find out what is happening. If they come to the scene of the incident and find out that they can do something ...why not...they will help. Or if there is a problem to do with the entire community who ever noticed or identified the problem come over to inform the committee and we go to see what has happened then find ways to solve it. If it needs time to solve the problem we call for a meeting and then decide on what to do. We have an obligation to mobilise the community to find solutions to our problems. That is why we [elders] are there' **(Interview with Mr. Nketia).**

The social obligation generated by village membership drove the town committee members to respond spontaneously to these problems. The resettlement history of Ntonaboma also suggests that their displacement beyond the banks of the Volta Lake made them lonely and detached from other villages⁵¹. So they have always worked collectively and relied on their elders to solve communal problems. Similarly the affinity that exists among them leads to spontaneous responses to individual or community problems. These functions occurred more in family and kinship obligations but extended into other spheres of village life due to a lot of relationships emanating from participation in associational activities, especially church membership, funerals and labour sharing arrangements, collective travelling to market centre among the market women which made individuals to respond spontaneously to such sudden occurrences.

In practice this complex web of relationships drawn upon in times of 'uncertainties', be it at the individual or collective level, should not be interpreted as instrumental or a 'reciprocal obligation' as used by Scott

⁵¹ During a conversation with one of the village traditional leadership that sought to trace the resettlement history of Ntonaboma, he mentioned that they had to move more than hundred kilometers from their original settlements near the banks of the Volta Lake during the construction of the lake. According to him the resettling period was very painful and difficult because they had to leave most of their cash crop, animals and belongings behind. Some family members did not resettle to Ntonaboma but rather moved to other areas. According to him this brought the various families very close together as they had to depend on one another.

(1976: 167) but rather as form of ontological security for village members' uncertainty. For example, interviews illustrated how people consciously and unconsciously reacted spontaneously to unforeseen occurrences. Such principles of responding unconsciously to these occurrences were embedded in community mindednesses, the care for one another, mutuality and reciprocity. It is to do with the social values of shared ways of thinking and community responsibility. I will use the obligation of funerals to individuals to illustrate my point that village members supported one another both in terms of uncertainties.

Absolute nature of cooperation

During funerals you notice poor village members always at the bereaved residence offering social support. Individuals provided diverse forms of support, both social and economic which were unequal in nature. Some women provided the widow with firewood and foodstuff while others came to keep her company spending greater part of the day the home of the bereaved family. Such instances also favoured the poor who came to support the bereaved family as they were also provided with food during their entire stay. While some accepted the meal others rejected it. The funeral of Opanin Asiamah illustrates how village members both poor and rich provided diverse form of assistance such as weeding around the house, putting up tents and arrangement of chairs. The poor members undertook the menial jobs. During the funeral itself, members of the town funeral committee who were not family members sat at the table for the collection of donations from sympathisers. All these are embedded in existing social relationships that conjunct over time

Responding to some of these uncertainties was not a conscious investment in social relations based on preferences but as a routine occurring across life courses, sometimes enduring till death. By consciously refusing to eat food served while at the same time donating to reduce the cost incurred by the bereaved family signifies the extent to which cooperation is not much about direct exchange of anticipation of benefit. Cleaver (2000), explains that the reciprocal action that occurred in social exchange and interaction among social actors are 'unequal, diffuse and less direct occurring over long periods of time'.

The existing cooperation in Akroso village does not suggest that the Akroso village town committee did not encounter problems from members in their activities. It is important to note that village practices built on strong communal norms of solidarity and reciprocity do not suggest the absence of conflict and contestations. Evidence on inter and intra village conflict abound in Ntonaboma (I illustrate this in detail in the next chapter). I have shown in the previous chapter how the search for a successor for the demised chief of Akroso led to a ten year conflict and contestation among two families that had to be resolved by the court of appeal.

Though most policy documents and studies render the UCs as non functional and in some cases nonexistent, evidence especially from Akroso village indicates contrary that the dynamics of the UCs through their improvisation and flexibility made it possible for the representatives to undertake a variety of routine and spontaneous functions in the village. The solidarity and the cooperation enjoyed by members in both their collective activities and daily interactions shaped positively the activities of the town committee. While the criteria for the evaluation of the UC may look out for indicators based on the bureaucratic roles, attention is not paid to how local governance structures are consciously tinkered with to reflect the village's own pattern of organisation which may not reflect the bureaucratic intensions and purposes of the new local government structure (Villareal, 2002; Long, 2001).

All the ad hoc functions undertaken by the town committee were spontaneous, transient in nature and drew on village conventions and beliefs which may be 'invisible' to external agents who evaluate these committees

without understanding the everyday organising practices that are used to resolve community problems. In Mary Douglas' (1987) words "institutions are invisible and they do all the thinking".

6.4 Meaning of boundaries and ongoing negotiations

In this section, I query the over reliance on rigid and static administrative boundaries in institutionalised decentralisation that overlook the dynamic and fluid character of rural life and existing social relationships to advocate for a design view of boundaries as permeable and negotiable. Also, decentralisation may become arenas of debate and struggles over the boundaries of community (Lentz, 2006). I also illustrate how the meaning of boundaries may be re-interpreted within the local arena to mean differing claims to the right to resource use.

The functional approach to decentralisation requires the demarcation of a country into distinct single spatial units that are nested to higher levels of authority to enhance the process of governance administration and service delivery (Ostrom 2005; Shale, 2005). Legally defined boundaries provide an idea about who is included in a jurisdiction; define local arrangements for service provision and production, patterns of economic development, and the exercise of political power (Owusu, 2009). Ostrom suggests that 'the boundaries of the resource system and the individuals or households with rights to harvest the units are clearly defined' (2005:259). Robust governance institutions should therefore have clearly defined boundaries and authority structures to shape the interaction between members.

Critics highlight the permeable, fluid and negotiable nature of boundaries (Wong, 2008; Cleaver, 2002, Berry, 1997; 2004), and the different meanings that individuals attach to new boundaries (Peters et al, 1998). Also the unilinear and conscious crafting of institutional arrangements for governance purpose may be in dissonance with existing patterns of cooperation weakening the new governance arrangements. Franks and Cleaver (2005) suggest that people's lives are organised and constructed through multiple cultural and social networks rather than through jurisdictional boundaries.

Using evidence from Ntonaboma, I will illustrate in this section how the creation of the Digya electoral area out of Ntonaboma resulted in conflict between the Traditional councils in Ntonaboma and some settler villages in and around Digya. This resulted in fracturing the existing network of trust and cooperation among the natives of Agyaade and Akroso villages and the settler communities. I also demonstrate that mapping of administrative boundaries without giving due attention to the existing patterns of interaction could lead to disincentives for cooperation undermining the existing livelihood arrangements. The key argument is that drawing on universal design principles, in this case clear boundaries, may ignore local sensitivities and 'existing negotiated social practices that are located in wider contexts of history, politics and economy' (Cleaver and Toner, 2006: 209).

6.4.2 A case of boundary demarcation

Before the decentralisation programme in 1988, Ntonaboma and surrounding settler villages were part of the Atebubu Local Government in

the Brong Ahafo Region. All development issues for the area passed through the Ntonaboma Council before being forwarded to Atebubu. Other issues such as land were dealt with by the respective traditional Councils⁵². To reduce the transaction cost of doing assembly activities and pursuing all developmental needs in Atebubu which was in the Brong Ahafo region, the new decentralisation policy framework sought to integrate Ntonaboma and its surrounding villages into the administrative set up of the Eastern region. This resulted in Ntonaboma Council being made part of Afram Plains district which was easily accessible and nearer. The decentralisation programme created three assembly member positions for Ntonaboma Area Council inclusive of the surrounding settler villages of Aboabo, Friipon, Dodi Agyaade, Zikpo and Digya. Two of these positions were located in Ntoanaboma (Agyaade/Yamuoso and Akroso) while the other position (Digya) was for the other settler villages that farmed on Ntonaboma lands. Ntonaboma then became the Area Council (AC) for all the electoral areas.

The creation of administrative boundaries that separated Digya and its surrounding villages from Ntonaboma resulted in misunderstanding between the new representatives of the Digya electoral area and the chiefs and elders of Ntonaboma. Prior to the creation of a new administrative area for Digya, the chiefs of Ntonaboma collected land rent from the settler farmers in the Digya area while they performed all necessary customary rites as the custodians of the land around the Volta lake. Having their own structural arrangements of local governance that enabled their

⁵² Agyaade and Akroso traditional councils continue to be part of the Brong Ahafo Regional House of Chiefs though they are officially in Eastern region of Ghana.

representative to attend DA meetings and having a local UC that enabled them to meet and take decisions was misinterpreted as recognition by state authorities of their rights and entitlements to settle on their existing lands.

For example, the new assembly member for Digya in 1992 was a village headman for Aboabo village along the Volta Lake. On assumption of office and the subsequent attendance of DA meetings at Donkorkrom, the new DA member together with other headmen decided to sever their links with the Ntonaboma Traditional Council and pursue all their development needs directly at the district assembly in Donkorkrom. The people of Digya strategically stopped paying annual royalties on all land occupied to the chiefs of Ntonaboma.

In one instance when the Nifahene, a sub-chief of Agyaade village, went to one of the settler villages in Digya to collect annual royalties but the settlers refused to pay. Their reason for not paying was that as Ghanaians they had the right to settle on the land without paying any royalties. The settler farmers later gave some charcoal they had packed for sale to the Nifahene as part of the royalty to which the Nifahene agreed and accepted.

However, the assembly member for Digya upon hearing the incident went to the police station in Donkorkrom to lodge a report that the sub-chief had forcefully seized charcoal belonging to some settler farmers because they declined to pay land rent. The next day the Nifahene of Agyaade village was subsequently arrested in Ntonaboma and sent to Donkorkrom for prosecution. This occurrence heightened the tension between the two contesting Digya area and the chiefs of Agyaade village. Reporting the case to the police and the subsequent arrest of the Nifahene by the police was to

reinforce the claim by the sellers that they had ceded their relations with Agyaade Traditional Council.

The internal conflict between the settler villages of Digya and the Agyaade traditional council had links with wider relations of conflict between Kwahu natives and the Ewes settlers occurring in the Afram plains district during the period preceding the decentralisation programme in 1988. The historical narratives of the Agyaade Traditional council during the GD suggested that the land belongs to them and they had given some portions of their lands, the Digya area, to the settler farmers in 1973. According to the elders during the resettlement period they became an isolated community and as result they decided to accept settler farmers most of whom were Ewes on their land. Some of the settlers rented land to start their own farms while others were employed by the natives of Ntonaboma to undertake share cropping preferably called Abusa or worked as labourers on their farms. A minority of the settlers also worked as fishermen on the lake. Contracts made between the settlers and the land owners were mostly by word of mouth and reinforced by the planting of trees or flowers to serve as visible manifestation of the land arrangements (GD with Agyaade Traditional Council).

The Ntonaboma chiefs and people based on claims to tradition and history regarded themselves as the rightful customary owners of the Afram Plains land. The Ewes on the other hand, were of the idea that the creation of an electoral area with an assembly man and unit committee entitled them as Ghanaians to settle on any land in Ghana without paying royalty. Such thinking had links to politics at the national level. The claim is that events at

the national level, though distant, condition local politics in several possible ways (Lund, 2006; Bierschenk and Olivier de Sardan, 2003). For example, the naming of the district as the Afram Plains by the PNDC government in contrast to the Kwahu North district, as suggested by the Kwahu chiefs gave a wrong impression to the Ewe communities in the Afram Plains. Their thinking was that the failure of the Kwahu chiefs' to reassert their ownership on the lands in Afram Plains had been unsuccessful due to the selection of a neutral name by the PNDC administration. The choice of Afram Plains as the name of the district reinforced the belief among the Ewe settler villages that they could own the land. Various authors write on the inclination of the PNDC government towards the Ewe tribe in Ghana because they relied on the Ewe community for votes during the national elections (Gyimah-Boadi, 1999; Aryee, 1998). Aryee writes that certain pronouncements of PNDC government headed by Rawlings from 1981 to 1992, that 'nobody brought land by birth' further deepened the native-settler differences in several parts of the country including Ntonaboma.

Drawing on such statements, the Ewes villages that formed part of the Akroso Yamuoso and Agyaade Traditional councils contested the right of these traditional councils to collect royalties from them. The contestations and struggles around the demand for payment of royalties by the traditional authorities from the Ewe settlers resulted in tension, conflict and severing of relations. The Agyaade traditional council after exhausting all 'informal' channels at the local level for resolving the conflict through dialogue sent the case to the Brong Ahafo Regional House of Chiefs. However, the Brong

Ahafo Regional House of Chiefs asked that the case be forward to the Koforidua High court in the Eastern Region of Ghana.

During the protracted court case between the settlers and natives, a boat accident occurred on the Digya area of the Volta Lake in which four lives were lost. The custom of the area required the chiefs and elders of Agyaade traditional council to perform some customary rites as a result of the accident on the lake. Due to the ongoing contestations between the Traditional councils in Ntonaboma and the settler farmers, the latter failed to inform the former to enable them perform the 'apayee' (customary rites) to the gods to forestall such future occurrences on the lake. This was because inviting the chiefs of Ntonaboma meant accepting that they were the custodians and owners of the land hence the need to pay royalties. However, when a tragedy re-occurred on the lake within that same period that led to a greater number of deaths, the Digya villages recognised the need to inform the chiefs of Ntonaboma to perform the necessary customary rites to forestall any future disasters on the lake which was central to their fishing and transport activities.

Through the intervention of the DCE of the Afram Plains District, The headmen of Digya apologised to the chiefs and elders of Ntonaboma. The apology was accepted after the imposition of a fine on the Digya headmen. The headmen paid the fine and also agreed to pay royalties on the land they occupied. Subsequently, the necessary rites were performed on the Obosom river area of the Volta Lake. Rather than pursuing the case at the formal courts of law the chiefs of Ntonaboma withdrew the case and rather sent it to the Office of the Administrator of Stool Lands (OASL) for an amicable

settlement. The OASL fixed annual royalties that had to be paid by the Digya settler villages to which both parties agreed. During the period of the fieldwork the Traditional council mentioned that the settler villages upon further education by the OASL have consented fully to the payment of royalties.

Nana Akuamoa Boateng mentioned that ever since resolving the problem of royalties the Traditional Council always invited the headmen of Digya and the surrounding villages to their Akwaesidae⁵³ festival and the Easter harvest. During the annual Easter harvest in Ntonaboma, I noticed that the headmen of some settler villages in Digya brought sheep, charcoal and yam separately to the chiefs of Akroso, Yamuso and Agyaade to use to serve their guests (Field diary). All these activities of exchange illustrate how existing institutions shaping cooperation between the natives and settlers were taken for granted during the conscious process of institutional crafting to delimit the area. Now, let me pull out the main issues that are significant for the purposes of my discussion.

The historical narratives and existing management arrangements regarding the ownership of land and on-going negotiations that shaped the existing resource use arrangements between the natives and the settler villages were ignored during the demarcation exercise in favour of a rational cost-benefit analysis which revolved around issues of efficiency in administration. During the national demarcation exercise in 1988 in which the number of district assemblies were increased from 65 to 110 by the then Provisional National Defense Council (PNDC), three main criteria were used

⁵³ A festival for Akan speaking tribes in Ghana

(Owusu, 2005). These criteria were population size, economic viability and available infrastructure⁵⁴ (Wardell and Lund, 2006; Aryee, 2008). Population size was the most important factor influencing the demarcation of electoral areas for district assembly members and unit committees (Lentz, 2006). The formulae for creating boundaries were divorced from village life and existing social relationships.

Drawing on the contestations and struggles between the Ewe settlers and the natives of Agyaade village demonstrate that over relying on rigid and inflexible boundaries in order to reduce ‘uncertainty’ and provide clarity in government provisioning of infrastructure and other facilities inadequately considers the existing management arrangements and the livelihood networks that are at play within the area. Boundaries according to Walker et al (1998 :19), “may not lie so much in the ways that they divide people and landscapes as in the ways they constitute an arena where these groups struggle to define their respective rights and obligation”.

The existing cooperation witnessed in the area was a reflection of a series of historical negotiations over access and rights to resource use. So, by putting in place an institutional arrangement that focused explicitly on legal administrative boundaries gave little attention to the history of the relationship between the natives and the migrant settlers. According to Dejene (2004), the most basic weakness of delimiting administrative boundaries for decentralisation purposes is that it neglects the complex form of rights that exist in traditional societies. This may displace the historical

⁵⁴ Article 1(4) of Act 462 specifically stipulates the use of population, economic viability and land size as the determining factors in the creation of new districts. See Aryee (2008) for detailed discussion.

resource use pattern in such communities resulting in the breakdown of the socially embedded arrangements that govern interaction over resource use.

We see in the area an existing multiple and overlapping management arrangements which are outcomes of 'a constellation of social interactions' (Berry, 1997: 1228). For example, the Ntonaboma traditional council had ongoing relations with the people of Digya that shaped the access and distribution of resources which were critical to the livelihood concerns of both the natives of Ntonaboma and the settlers of Digya. While some of the natives had employed settlers as farm labourers on their farms, others had given out land for share cropping that fell within the territory of the new Digya electoral area. Other individuals from Digya were fishermen on the Volta Lake whose wives also processed the fish for other markets in the Ntonaboma area. There were other individuals both natives and settlers who owned cattle and so grazed their animals on lands that belong to Ntonaboma. The demarcation exercise was blind to these ethnic differences, movements, negotiations livelihood networks and the management arrangement that existed between Ntonaboma and the surrounding villages.

It also sidestepped the diverse institutional arrangements that supported different people's entitlement and endowments to resources resulting in tension (Leach et al, 1999). The headmen who contested the payment of royalties were all located beyond the Obosom River and had their own farms and villages. However, there were other settlers who either lived closer to Ntonaboma or worked as share croppers for the natives of Ntonaboma. Such individuals were put in an intricate position concerning their simultaneous interactions with their land owners and their own kinsmen.

The boundary demarcation exercise for electoral areas for the purposes of decentralisation was re-interpreted by the settlers to mean the overthrow of all the rules in use. Berry (2004: 85) suggests that official recognition of the rights of certain marginalised groups through governance reforms may lead to 'heightened ethnic tensions' exacerbating any conflict among people who peacefully coexisted before the reforms. For example, after the headman who was elected as an assembly man participated in assembly meetings, he perceived the new institutional arrangements as giving them the entitlement and endowment to the existing resources without recourse to the payment of royalties. The claim by the Digya headmen was that, 'the state had carved out their own land for them; hence there was no need to pay royalties to the land owners of Ntonaboma'. Such claims were inferred from the neutral name given to the district and the statement attributed to the president of the country at that 'no one own land by birth'. Their contestation based on this notion sought to push the intentions of the mapping exercise into new paths which did not reflect the intentions and purposes of the decentralisation exercise. This illustrates how planned interventions may lead to unpredictable outcomes as state policies enmesh with local actors and their projects and the relations of power in which they are structured (Long, 2001; Long and Long, 1992).

The stability that existed before the demarcation exercise was taken for granted, yet it was shaped by diverse social arrangements which were the outcome of bargaining and negotiations occurring over life time. Hence putting in a clearly defined boundary to help in decision-making and the

provision of social amenities may end up promoting uncertainty and conflict over claims to resource undermining rather than increasing cooperation.

On the remote side of the discussion, the example also highlights the use of multiple channels to peacefully resolve conflict (Maganga, 2002; Benjaminsen and Lund, 2002). Both the traditional authorities and the settler headmen relied on the use of formal channels to resolve their claim to resources. While the traditional council drew on the formal court system to settle the conflict, the settler villages used the law enforcement institution that is the police, to settle their difference with the traditional authority. We noticed that the settler villages avoided the traditional council during the first boat disaster due to the ongoing conflict and the breakdown of normal relations between them. However, when the boat disaster reoccurred they had to draw on an existing institution to renegotiate with the traditional council to perform the required customary rites on the Obosom River to forestall any future occurrences of boat disasters. The traditional council also had to draw on another formal institution to support the informal agreement reached on the resolution of the conflict. This reinforces the assertion in the post-institutional literature that people draw on a variety of institutional channels, both traditional and modern to legitimise their claim to resources (Benjaminsen and Lund 2002; Odgaard's 2002).

Drawing on culture to mend their fragile relations with the Agyaade traditional council and to foster future cooperation, the headmen of the Digya settler villages approached the Agyaade Traditional council to negotiate for the pouring of libation on the Obosom River. Their decision to negotiate for the peaceful resolution of the conflict was premised on a belief that a

supernatural being was punishing them for contesting the rightful claim of the Ntonaboma traditional council to the land. The belief among the settler villages that without the performance of necessary rituals by the custodians of the land, in this case Ntonaboma traditional council, other uncertainties in the form of another boat disaster, deaths, or sickness may befall them. Such a negative occurrence will have negative consequences on their livelihood and well being. Such thinking made the headmen of the settler villages to re-negotiate with the Akroso and Agyaade traditional councils. This illustrates the extent to which deeply embedded social arrangements and principles could be drawn upon to shape cooperation.

The institutional design principles advocate for rigorous, enforced and impartial sanctions applied against non co-operators (Ostrom, 1990, 1992), yet in the accounts of both settlers and natives we see the desire for compromise and reconciliation. Though the settlers were fined an amount of money in addition to a sheep and schnapps by the Agyaade traditional council this was meant to foster reconciliation and peaceful coexistence rather than as a form of punishment. The schnapps were used to pour libation and offer prayers to both ancestors and those present to bear witness to the resolution of the conflict and celebrate reconciliation.

Significant to this is the public consumption of the schnapps from the Digya headmen by everyone present. This process served as a sign of bearing witness to the reconciliation process. This also provided the platform for these individuals to be called upon to testify as witness in future

contestations concerning competing claims land ownership⁵⁵ among between the Digya settlers and the traditional council in Ntonaboma. All the individuals present are requested to pass it on to future generation so that they or the generation yet unborn could be called upon to testify during future conflicts. As Berry (1997) explains narratives of past transactions constitute important evidence to substantiate or challenge contemporary claims to land (1235).

The example also illustrates the relationship between people's social, natural and the supernatural worlds which are of prime importance to people's cosmology. The human, natural and spiritual worlds are in dynamic interaction with one another and shape the way individuals interact. Cosmology gives shape to cultural values, ethics, and basic norms and rules of a society (Berkes and Folke, 1998). In Ghana, people perceive a link between ancestors, the living and generations unborn, so libation is offered to invoke the spirits of the ancestors to bear witness to the peaceful resolution of the problem and the agreement reached. The belief in the existence of a supernatural authority facilitated the decision of the Digya chiefs to settle the dispute and have the traditional authorities to pour the libation. The normative sacred significance attributed to land and water influenced the settler Ewe villages in the Digya area to believe that the ongoing conflict with the natives resulted in the calamities occurring to their

⁵⁵ Once the individual drinks the schnapp it signifies the desire to be a truthful witness in times of future contestations between the two parties on the same issue. Traditionally the schnapp is similar in colour to water; therefore drinking the contents signifies your ability to separate the truth from falsehood and to always say the truth anytime you are called upon as a witness to the case.

kinsmen on the Obosom river section of the Volta Lake. All these processes and interactions shaped outcomes for local governance.

6.6 Conclusion

This chapter has illuminated the non-functional nature of institutions in local governance practice within a specific context. The chapter has emphasised on the interplay between bureaucratic and socially embedded institutions to shape the outcomes of decentralisation. The key issue highlighted in the chapter was the diversity of institutions of various forms in local governance. I argued that consciously crafting local government structures to shape community organisation was problematic as everyday village interactions occur in diverse arenas and shaped by multiple institutions channels. Arrangements for community governance as shown in the chapter were less conscious and less functional in nature, occurring spontaneously to solve uncertainties within the community.

Specifically, the chapter demonstrated that flexible and adaptive institutions are very important in the day-to-day management of the community in spite of the marginality of the area. I also demonstrated that the over-reliance on consciously crafting new organisations to formalise community participation in institutionalised decentralisation is inconsistent with the realities of social life as these new organisations fail to provide individuals especially the poor with any ontological security in times of uncertainties. It is difficult to design formal organisations for local governance due to the flexible and dynamic nature of rural life where a lot of interactions occur through socially embedded institutions. Individuals rarely

only depended on specific institutional arrangements to shape their interactions. Rather, they relied on both bureaucratic and socially embedded channels in their everyday interactions. The chapter demonstrated that standard procedures that shape the practice of decentralisation oversimplify the social world and the processes within it. I argued that village boundaries are not static but rather permeable and fluid. Also, the different meanings that people attached to spatial boundaries lead to unintended outcomes for the practice of decentralisation.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE COMPLEXITY OF AUTHORITY IN LOCAL GOVERNANCE

7.1 Introduction

This chapter continues with the critique of the ‘technocratic’ approach to institutional decentralisation. Having discussed the over romanticisation of active citizenship in chapter five and the overreliance on formal local government structures in chapter six, I now shift my attention to the narrow conceptions of authority and power in institutionalised decentralisation. The theoretical literature on decentralisation provides normative discussions on the standard procedures for devolving authority and power to local level communities (Agrawal and Ribot, 2000). Devolving power through citizenship rights to the locality is a top-down managerial process and may not transform the existing power relations that shape interaction and cause social exclusion within a particular context.

In chapter six, the complexity of institutions at play at the local level was illuminated. I demonstrated the complex nature of institutions involved in village governance, many of which were socially embedded, as well as their dynamic and often contested nature. Berry (1993: 20) writes that, institutions “constitute a contested terrain in which different interests are played out, subject to power and authority relations”. Yet, institutionalised decentralisation policy couches authority in simplistic terms, as putting in place within a delimited space a new authority structure “to coordinate individual decisions and regulate their implementation” (Plateau and Abraham, 2002: 109). The assertion that institutions are subject to multiple

interpretations and frequent redefinition in the course of daily practice, makes it very important for the processes through which authority is enacted and legitimated in daily practice to be explored. Furthermore, the state bureaucracy at the rural areas in Ghana is perceived to be weak (Boafo-Arthur, 2001).

Concerns are also raised about the use of authority in institutional literatures as over simplistic and failing to take into account the different claims to tradition and custom as sources of authority (Moore, 2000; Cleaver, 2000). A further argument made in this chapter is that, it is difficult to identify and define simple authority structures that can take overall responsibility for community activities (Franks et. al, 2005). Another obvious problem is the de-politicisation of decentralisation (Geiser and Rist, 2009; Mohan and Stoke, 2000).

I intend to build on the gaps above to demonstrate that the local arena is not so harmonious and devoid of politics and power making it possible for authority to be simply enacted based on legal statutes derived from the state. Rather authority is socially enacted and legitimated through practice often involving negotiation and contestation leading to competing claims to legitimacy and authority. The key issue in this chapter is that decentralisation by its very basic intentions is a political concept hence it is important to re-politicise the practice of decentralisation to highlight the contestations, struggles and negotiations that take place at the local level.

The chapter begins by highlighting the inadequate conceptualisation of the political within the decentralisation framework. The section that follows questions the narrow emphasis placed on roles and positions in local

government arrangements by arguing that just creating roles or templates for action does not constitute the actual capacity to govern. The discussion on differences in authority relations leads me to the issue of legitimacy in decentralisation.

Governments all over the world are transferring power from the central state to local level institutions. For example in Ghana, the local Government Act 642, 1993, transferred the power and authority from the central government to various local government structures for the purpose of improving service delivery, local development and management. Decentralisation discourse simplistically conceives representative authority as legitimised through legal instruments of the state. For example, the mode of implementing authority or local government structures at the community level is through legal administrative instruments of the state. Also, local government structures at the community level are meant to meet the narrow economic and political interest of the state. However, I argue that such a conceptualisation of authority within decentralisation policy and practice is problematic because authority in reality is not fixed and static but a dynamic societal practice that is continuously enacted through everyday encounters among diverse social actors. The chapter continues by highlighting the shifting, dynamic and complex nature of authority in local governance.

7.2 Putting Power and Politics back into Institutionalised Decentralisation

Inadequate attention has been given to the dynamics of politics, power and conflict within local governance, and to the ways in which decentralisation processes intersect with such dynamics (Bebbington et. al, 2004). The issue of politics in decentralisation debates is narrowly focused on elections which inadequately capture politics as essentially being about governing. The political dimension of decentralisation relates to how various stakeholders with diversity of interest, preferences, values and ideas, consciously sort out their differences through cooperation, conflict and negotiation (Leftwich, 2000). Conceptualising politics as a process of governing provides useful insights into the day-to-day accommodation, negotiation and contestation that take place in the decision-making arena which is often sidestepped in decentralisation which is rather benignly conceived as a neutral 'technology of government' maintaining the existing power relations within the community. The examples in this section illustrate how decentralisation did not affect the local power structure and access to resources in Ntonaboma.

In this section, I will first demonstrate that local government arrangements fail to represent the interest of the people down the social hierarchy in the village. Secondly, the conflict over land among the four villages in Ntonaboma favours those who are already powerful within the locality. I finally highlight how the UCs and DAs may further the interest of

the more powerful using the case of regulating charcoal production in Ntonaboma.

7.2.1 Internal struggles over village decisions

In this section, I attempt to illustrate how negotiations about general issues that affect Ntonaboma community are handled differently in each of the four villages leading to variations in outcomes. Evidence from the study revealed how the disbursement of funds from the Volta River Authority (VRA) resettlement trust fund meant to rehabilitate old resettlement houses in 2008 resulted in different outcomes for each of the four villages. The outcomes of decisions were mostly influenced by the local power structures through which negotiation occurred within each village.

The resettlement contract between the Government of Ghana and the four resettlement villages in Ntonaboma required the state to renovate their resettlement houses after every 15 years. However, for the last thirty years the state has not provided the funds for the renovation of these resettlement houses. In December, 2007, the state through the VRA resettlement Fund initiated arrangements to pay all outstanding areas to the four villages. In May 2008, the VRA Trust Fund paid all outstanding arrears for the renovation of the resettlement houses allocated to them by the state in 1958 to all the four villages in Ntonaboma. The outstanding arrears for each resettlement village were paid in full to the respective chief of the four resettlement villages.

While all members of the four villages wanted the funds to be shared individually among the current owners to renovate their houses, the village

hierarchy in Ntonaboma on the other hand, wanted the money to either go into the construction of a police station in Ntonaboma or be shared partially among the original and the current owners. However, the Akroso village leadership failed in their bid to get the leadership of the other three villages to commit to the use of the funds for the construction of a police station. In the two villages of Yamuso and Agyaade, the funds were shared partly among the original and current owners of the resettlement houses because few of the resettlement houses had gone over to new owners. In Supom village the funds were given to only the current owners because the majority of original owners of the resettlement homes had migrated to re-settle at *bridgeano*⁵⁶ due to the continuous flooding of their homes during heavy rains. The majority of the people who constituted the authority structure in Supom village were the current occupiers facilitating the distribution of the funds among only the current occupiers.

In Akroso village, the inability of the assembly man, traditional council, the *town committee*, and some influential village members to arrive at a consensus on how the funds were to be distributed resulted in ongoing struggles and contestations. This issue was deliberately removed from the agenda of Akroso village *town committee* meetings on two occasions by Nana Akuamoah Boateng in March and June, 2008 respectively with the explanation that the funds had already been invested in treasury bills for a period of one year. The funds were invested to enable the traditional council accrue interest for other developmental projects in the Akroso village.

⁵⁶ This is the new settlement where the people of supom had moved to the banks of the Obosom river

Nana Akuamoah Boateng of Akroso village mentioned that the decision to invest the money in treasury bills was not discussed with the village members because that would have taken a longer time. Delaying in investing the funds would have affected the high interest rate prevailing at the time when the decision to invest the funds was made by the village leadership. He explained that the village leadership of Akroso will share the money with only the original owners of the resettlement houses when the Treasury bill matures. Others who bought the houses from original owners will not benefit. This decision has caused tension and resentment among Akroso village members especially those who bought their resettlement houses and have spent some money to renovate their houses.

Another important issue that has been deliberately avoided by the other village leadership is the continuous flooding of the Supom village during heavy rains. The members of the VRA resettlement fund had agreed in principle to support a project to re-house families whose structures get flooded but the paramount chiefs of the other villages whose members constitute the majority on the VRA Resettlement Fund Committee are yet to discuss it and make subsequent follow ups. According to the Supom village chief, before the resettlement they were the first village along the linear settlement but during the resettlement they became the last village situating them at the lower part of the village. Their present position was due to the delay in moving from their earlier village. When they finally resettled at Ntonaboma the other villages had occupied houses on the upper topography. Despite efforts to get the issue resolved by the VRA Trust Fund, they are yet to have the commitment and support of the other three villages.

To avoid any conflict, majority of the indigenous people of Supom village have moved out to re-settle on the banks of the *Obosom* River though they still maintain contact with relatives in Supom village.

7.2.2 Power struggles over ownership rights and entitlement to lands

In this section, I argue that decentralisation is more than just the introduction of new reforms and mechanisms for governance but about negotiation and contestation over resources (*May the reader please turn to appendix II, page 350 to read the full interview with Nana Adade Bekoe II, the paramount chief of Yamuso traditional area, to fully understand the contestations and struggles over land in Ntonaboma and how tension among the four villages shaped the outcome of local government structures*). Understanding property, in this case land, “as the relationship between people about things” helps illuminate the intricate networks that exist between ‘property relations, family obligation, community life and power relations’ (Nuijten and Lorenzo, 2009: 82). Therefore conflict over aspects of property such as the differing claims to land ownership as pertains in Ntonaboma has consequences for multiple dimensions of social life.

My argument is that, local government reforms in Ghana have failed to holistically address other important issues that affect the local political context. Whereas in other countries such as West Bengal, decentralisation reforms were introduced alongside other reforms (Crook and Sverrisson, 2001), in Ghana, decentralisation reforms are normally implemented as a single coherent policy to address issues of governance and service delivery without giving adequate attention to other issues that shape governance

within the locality. Decentralisation reforms in Ghana since 1972 have failed to address the differing claims to land ownership in Ntonaboma. Decentralisation reforms in Ghana are experienced at the local level through the inauguration of local government structures and elections but no conscious effort is made to address the fundamental questions of power, hierarchy and exclusion shaping community participation in the locality. My arguments is that, implementing local government structures such as the UCs without adequate attention to the existing structural factors carries the risk of simply reinforcing existing power hierarchies and generating further frustrations among the general populace of the locality.

For administrative and policy purposes, Ntonaboma has always been regarded as a coherent and homogeneous unit of local government with little attention paid to power, conflict and or perhaps politics among the four villages. However, interviews with traditional authority figures from all the four villages clearly revealed fault lines among the traditional leadership, ongoing contestation and differing claims to control over resources. The full interview with the local chief of Yamuoso village, Nana Adade Bekoe II reveals how the competing claims to land ownership among the four chiefs in Ntonamboma has the potential to lead to conflict if not properly addressed. This misunderstanding on various claims to ownership of unused government acquired lands in Digya among the four villages and the disregard for their concerns has led to some people of Supom village moving out of Ntonaboma to the banks of the Obosom River.

These ongoing struggles have also affected the performance of the local government structures in Ntonaboma. Evidence from Ntonaboma

revealed that all four villages will want to have their own institutional arrangement to manage their respective village activities in contravention to the local government structure implemented by the decentralisation reforms. For example participation among the four villages occurred when it involved petitioning the district assembly for resources or attention to particular issues affecting the entire Ntonaboma villages.

For the purposes of administrative convenience the PNDC government added Ntonaboma to Afram Plains. The Agyaade and Akroso village chiefs are paramount chiefs because customarily they owned the Digya lands. The Supom and Yamuoso village chiefs by custom are subjects of the Kwahu Omanhene. Therefore, they are custodians of the lands that belonged to the Kwahu Omanhene. During the Acheampong government in 1976 the lands in Digya were acquired for the state and compensations paid to the chiefs in Akroso and Agyaade (COHRE, 2006). However, the Akroso and Agyaade chiefs claim the state had not paid full compensation for their lands acquired so customarily and legally they still have control over ownership and entitlements of the lands. This has been a controversial and contested issue among the four village chiefs in Ntonaboma since the 1970s.

Despite several attempts by the chiefs of Yamuoso and Supom villages to deliberate and settle the claim to ownership of land and other resources, the chiefs from Akroso and Agyaade villages have failed to get the issue discussed by the Ntonaboma Traditional Council. The chief of Yamuoso village during the interview suggested that he may have to go to court one day if the government fails to respond to their request for a clarification on payment of royalties to the land owners. The chief mentioned

that at the moment the case was with his lawyers but was yet to be filed in court. We see some principle of conflict avoidance shaping the action of the Yamuoso chief to formally send the issue to court.

Though power struggles are imminent in social life, the four chiefs will not overtly contest each other over control or ownership rights over land within the Ntonaboma community; such a process of contestation took place in other arenas outside Ntonaboma. The principle of conflict avoidance shapes how the various chiefs pursue the matter within the spatial confines of Ntonaboma. The chiefs of Yamuoso and Supom villages have sent a petition to both the government through the Eastern Regional Coordinating Council and the Brong Ahafo Regional House of Chiefs for an interpretation of the law on payment of royalties. At the time of the field study in 2007, no response had been received from the government. The Yamuoso and Supom village chiefs accused the paramount chief of Akroso of using his position and knowledge as a lawyer to re-interpret the issue of land acquisition and payment of royalties in his favour.

The interviews with certain sub-chiefs suggested that the people of Supom and Yamuoso villages want the government to “interpret the meaning of government acquisition, payment of compensation and how it relates to land rights. But up till now no government official has come to explain all these meanings of acquisition, stool land and payment of compensation to us” (Interview on 13/04/2007 with Nana Adae Frimpong, Sub Chief of Yamuoso village). This demonstrates the inability of the Yamuoso village chief to link up with a ‘politico-legal institutions’ at the state level to support his claim to land. Not until the contestations over land is settled by a

recognised and competent institutions, the tension over land right and ownership will continue to persist eventually ending up in conflict.

The struggles for power through the contestation over claims to land ownership affected the local governance process in Ntonaboma. Sikor and Lund (2009) explain that the control and ownership over land and other resources have consequences for the nature of power and authority; yet successive local government reforms pay inadequate attention to these issues. The polarised relationship among the four chiefs permeated into the nature of cooperation for collective action among the four villages. Clear examples are the ban imposed on charcoal burning for commercial purposes and on the indiscriminate grazing of cattle on people's farm.

Disregard for community rules by the powerful

Some of the chiefs have bought cows and employed Fulani herdsmen to rear the cows for them. The cows destroy people's farm and pollute sources of drinking water. The authorities are aware but nothing is being done to stop the menace. There are four chiefs in Ntonaboma but agreeing on how to solve the charcoal problem is a challenge. At least two of the chiefs from Supom and Yamuoso villages have met to discuss the charcoal problem and prohibited their people from engaging in charcoal production. However, the other chiefs disagree with the ban making it difficult to enforce the ban. Recently, one of the chiefs engaged Sisala people from the Northern region to go into commercial charcoal production opening the gate for everybody to do likewise. Community members now do not observe the ban on charcoal production because they don't understand why strangers who do not belong to the community are busily into charcoal production to earn income whilst local people are not allowed to do so. However, village members look up to the District Assembly to enforce the ban through the assembly men and the area councils. The area councils are non-existent and the assembly members will not want to challenge the chiefs. Even if the chiefs agree to the ban, it is the DA and UC members who have to enforce it but they also have their children and nephews into the charcoal business so how do they enforce the ban **(Interview with Seth Ofori, Resident of Akroso Village on the 12/02/2007).**

More so, the current land ownership also favours the people of Akroso village who are in the majority and perpetuate their dominance in the community. For example, the Akroso chief who had ownership of some of the lands in the Digya area had mobilised some settlers to produce charcoal on his land against the bye-laws of the district assembly. This has also

enabled other village members to partake in the charcoal business. Though the other chiefs are against the continuous degrading of the forest by cutting down trees for charcoal production, they have failed in their attempt to enforce the bye-law or get the issue onto the decision-making agenda due to the active involvement of the Akroso village chief. The Akroso village chief is a paramount chief with other sub-chiefs under his jurisdiction. Among the four chiefs in Ntonaboma it is only Akroso and Agyaade chiefs who are members of the Brong-Ahafo Traditional Council.

Also the administrative delimitation for decentralisation in Ntonaboma reveals the reproduction of the existing unequal power relationships among the four villages. Out of the four UCs in Ntonaboma, Akroso village had two whiles Supom, Yamuso, and Agyaade villages shared the remaining two units. Akroso village elected their own DA member whilst the three other villages combined had one representative to the district assembly. Though rational factors were used to delimit the current boundaries in Ntonaboma, different meanings were deduced from the process to reinforce the power and authority of the already powerful villages. Since institutions are highly interrelated a change within one institution, without a corresponding change in the others has little impact in the overall structure of authority. This implies that focusing on the managerial and technical aspects of decentralisation seen in blue print procedures does little to engage with the existing unequal access to resources and the unequal dynamics of power at the 'local' level (Corbridge, 2008; Mohan and Stoke, 2000).

7.3 Do explicit roles or blueprints for action equal power to govern?

Programs to devolve governance to the community level are generally based on the assumption that local people will take on the roles and positions formerly assigned to the state. According to Uphoff (2000) for people to become organised and act collectively, they need to have some recognised roles, formal or informal, along with supporting rules, precedents and procedures to enable them to perform their basic functions⁵⁷. For Lopez and Scott (2000: 30), ...'roles are definitions of those things that people are expected to do...They are blueprints or templates for action...They specify the rights and obligations that are entailed in social positions, and tell us what is expected of us and what we should expect others to do' (ibid: 30). The concentration on roles and the characteristics of the interlocutors occupying these role positions in institutional decentralisation suggest that more emphasis is placed on fixed managerial and technical aspects in constituting authority than on the capability of the role incumbent to undertake these functions in reality.

My concern is with the functions to be enacted by persons who assume these role positions and their ability to act these normative role functions in practice. The claim in most decentralisation policy that local government structures will necessarily be capable of performing the roles and responsibilities assigned to them under devolution programs in the institutional literature is overly simplistic and naive. Simply creating local authority structures and assigning them roles and responsibilities to manage

⁵⁷ These functions include decision-making, resource mobilisation and management, communication and coordination, and conflict resolution that are essential for any organisation and collective action.

decentralised programmes is unlikely to succeed unless there are sufficient support services to build the local institutional capacity of the authority system to function effectively (Cleaver and Franks, 2005; Larson, 2002). The narrow focus on the technical capacities of committee members mask the power dynamics shaping relations of authority. I will use field evidence from Ntonaboma to demonstrate that the UCs and DA as formal authority structures for local government within Ghana's decentralisation programme lack the prerequisite capacity and resources to perform their functions.

During the period of the field study a new UC had been elected into office but the inability of the District Assembly to agree on the election of a presiding member delayed the inauguration of the UCs to enable them to formally operate. However, the new members of the UC were invariably existing representatives, so they were able to undertake their functions even though they were yet to be officially inaugurated. These new members who were few⁵⁸ and were not expected to affect significantly the activities of the UCs in their respective villages. Evidence from my study confirmed the dearth of human resources available within the local authority structures. This manifested in the paucity in the number of qualified or educated individuals who served on the UCs and DA. As shown in Chapter Four, professionals such as Mr. Nketia, Mr. Apreku Nkanasah and Nana Akuamoah Boateng who had knowledge of the workings of government dominated these institutions. The professional members of the UC were a source of information and advised the village members on a range of issues.

⁵⁸ Four from Sukuumu and Ahenbono UCs in Akroso village , two from JSS UC and three from Agyaade/Yamuoso UCs.

In spite of the usefulness of the few professionals among the UCs, their narratives suggested that they continued to lack core competencies in local government. For example, during the preparation of the five year development plan for the district in 2001, all the four villages in Ntonaboma had to rely on an external consultant hired by the district assemblies to support the UCs in the preparation of development plans and other activities that needed specialist know how. Interviewees cited a host of external consultants who were either engaged by the district assembly or other NGOs to perform certain activities within the villages. Examples of consultants mentioned during the GD were the consultants who undertook the participatory needs assessment for the Millennium Challenge Account (MCA) including the consultant who undertook the Urban II Water Project mapping exercise. The paradox of the whole issue is that the government is required by law to appoint five members who possess technocratic skills to the UC in the event that popular election of the majority of UC members failed to produce technocratic competent persons, yet the government appointees to the DAs have tended to be political activists and local notables but hardly technocrats.

Within the authority structure, I observed a process of a 'competent minority' at the helm of affairs of the UC and the 'majority others' who were less educated and had limited knowledge of the functions of the UC. This categorisation of the committee members is for the purpose of analysis and clarity of discussion. The asymmetrical nature of individual resources and skills among committee members reinforced existing inequalities both within the *town committees* and among village members. The argument is that if

individual exercise of agency is tied into relations of power and authority then, certain individuals with allocative or authoritative resources are advantaged to shape the outcomes of interaction among the committee members.

The 'majority others' had very low educational backgrounds and professional experience. Hence individuals with 'authoritative' resources such as the Chairmen of the UCs, in the case of Akroso, the *town committee*, have absolute control of the activities of the committee, thereby shaping the involvement of the other members in the daily management of the activities of the committee. For example, in the *town committee* of Akroso village you could notice the subordinate positions of some of these members, especially Michael Ampoma and Kwasi Owusu who usually come to Mr. Nketia's house in the morning to take instructions to undertake certain functions on his behalf. As a former head of the Eastern Regional Presbyterian Education Unit you could notice the bureaucratic characteristics in his mode of management and the unequal nature of their relations with the chairman. Meetings were either held in Mr. Nketiah's compound or at the Akroso chief's palace. In Agyaade village, the chairman of the UC was Nana Agyei Boateng, Adontehene who worked at the district education office at Donkorkrom. All these reinforced the dominant position of the chairmen of the various committees.

Within the authority structure of the town committee, and other village formal spaces the selection of certain individuals into leadership positions was partly informed by the perception that these individuals had appropriate managerial skills and adequate technical knowledge of the

workings of the state which they could draw on to get 'development' for the village. These factors were also bolstered by the position of these individuals up the village hierarchy. These factors, however, provided the resources for the UC leadership to usurp the activities of the committee. Authoritative and allocative power structures give specific power to some which are denied to others. Some individuals become more powerful in the UC. This tendency contradicts the egalitarian principle that underlies institutionalised decentralisation which advocates for devolution of power to local communities so that decision-making among heterogeneous individuals could be done through open deliberations without the powerful strategically manipulating the other. It is important to note that the new formal structures of authority at the village level were captured by the more powerful local actors who got on to these committees or perpetuated the existing relations of patronage.

Further discussion with the retired village leaders like Mr. Nketia revealed their preference to go it alone in order to achieve tangible results rather than spending much time on arriving at final consensus decision. According to him bringing the entire village together to deliberate on trivial issues was not necessary and only wastes time. These 'elitist conservatives' always do it alone and call for village meetings when they had to inform village members of the outcome of the decision on a project. For them their tenure will be assessed based on the tangible projects they brought to township. However, getting things done in their own ways and relying on informal channels of decisions making had negative consequences for the poor and disadvantaged within the village who were less capable of

negotiating the outcomes of decision-making. The key issue here was the quality of representation which according to village members was really able to get them their developmental needs.

The example of how beneficiaries were selected to benefit from the Millennium Challenge Account (MCA) demonstrates that people who benefitted from external funds were negotiated in a manner that made it opaque eventually benefitting a few people. Commenting on the selection process for beneficiaries, some village members explained that, during the scheduled meeting with the DA member and the MCA official when information about the project was made known, only selected members from the four villages were invited. It was after the meeting that the leadership in each of the four villages informed members in respective village meetings about a fund that will soon be available to village members and they need to form cooperatives in order to benefit. Information on how to form the groups and the procedure for accessing the loans were not well explained. Evidence from the village members revealed that village leaders quickly formed groups with their immediate family members as constituting the members of the groups and registered these groups with a constitution at the Registrars General's office in Koforidua, the regional capital. People with little resources and who lacked the means to engage actively with the application process did not benefit from the MCA loan. Thus, village members who did not have the right connections to the spaces of power were less likely to be included. This reinforces a problem that is well recognised in the literature on decentralisation that the devolution of power will not necessarily lead to

transparency and accountability as in many instances empowered local elites capture a large share of resources often at the expense of the poor.

During village meetings I noticed the village elders especially those of Agyaade were very authoritative in which their 'bureaucratic way of doing things' acquired while working in the civil service was brought to bear in chairing these village meetings. For example during a village meeting in Agyaade the chairperson shouted at a young man for interrupting him in the middle of his speech. The young man quietly walked away from the meeting murmuring as a form of protest to the way he was handled by the chairperson (Field notes, village meeting 13/02/07).

The structure of relations that develops between the 'competent minority' and the 'majority others' within the UC is that of a structure of subordination and inequality where the former were able to consciously shape the character and nature of the UC. So focusing on implementing local government structures in decentralisation reforms by constituting authority structures at the local level blinds the relational differences and the capacity to act among those who may assume these role positions. There may be a tendency for the will of the minority who are the powerful in the committee to reign in the daily deliberations and practices of the committee.

Thus, exercising agency within the UC was of course tied to power and authority. So we see the less educated members of the UCs willingly acquiescing to their subordinated positions within the structure of relations in the committee. The less capable members acknowledged that some members of the UC were more knowledgeable and powerful than them. However, they saw the powerful members within the UC as very

instrumental in getting things done for the committee. But my observations revealed some trappings attached to their subordinate position which made them to accept their subordinate positions. The less capable members of the UC were those who went to the market to collect tolls and performed other functions in the village as may be prescribed by the chairman of the committee. For example, Mr. Michael Ampomah manages the public toilet and collects payment for the public use of the toilet in Akroso village. As I explained in chapter four, these individuals are less respected in the Ntonaboma and that was why the women could tell them that they were not going to pay the market toll.

In an interview with Michael Ampomah, he explained that they were learning from the current leaders who had much to offer the village than them⁵⁹. This suggests that human authority figures may learn on the job. He used the following proverb to support his argument *'akora nkyere opanyin nyame...na akoko ba oben oni no na enya abeben sre ewi'*, literally meaning a toddler does not show an adult where God is, and also a chick that is closer to the mother hen will get that larger part of the meal. The meanings deduced from the first proverb reinforce the notion that social actors are not necessarily transformative agents who will want to alter the unequal structure of relations in which they are embedded but were also prepared to accept their subordinate positions due to the inadequate resource endowments. They were also prepared to learn from the knowledgeable individuals with whom they inter relate. We can also infer from the proverb the reproduction of relations of patronage which does not encourage Michael

⁵⁹ Referring to other less educated members of the UC

Ampomah to challenge the existing power relations. This may account for the reason why the UCs and the DA membership seem to be dominated by the powerful members of the community. Though the decentralisation discourse mentions transformation of the structures of community management, we notice that the existing structures of power were re-affirmed. Ribot (2009) writes that most decentralisation powers devolved to the local level end up in the hands of a few patrons or village elite.

Drawing insights from the second proverb suggests that though within the authority structure the knowledgeable minority interpreted the rules and enforced sanctions, whereas the majority others were those who actually performed these roles within the villages. For example during communal labour in Akroso village, I observed on several occasions Michael Ampomah giving out individual portions to be weeded which was often contested. Some individuals did not always weed the entire portion allotted to them but were not sanctioned. I have also demonstrated that other functions performed by majority others on the town committee in Akroso village, such as the collection of market levies, were challenged and contested. The example of the women's refusal to pay the market toll illustrates the fragile nature of the power of these individuals to implement village decisions and rules. The Akroso village *town committee* chairman mentioned that there were instances that he had to report certain individuals to the chief to make sure such people adhered to community rules.

The relationship among the members of the Akroso village town committee reveals the working of multiple intertwined institutions to reinforce the existing power relations among the members. The skewed authoritative

and allocative resources among the diverse committee members resulted in a practice whereby the less technically endowed members routinely received instructions from the powerful members of the committee that may end up producing 'durable inequalities' (Tilly, 1998 quoted in Bebbington et. al., 2008). For Bebbington et. al., the reproduction of the daily practices that shape the unequal relationship within the committee will perpetuate the inequality among group members.

7.3.1. Inadequate Financial Resources

Claims are made for the devolution of adequate and secure financial resources from the state to new authority structures (Ribbot, 2005; Jutting et. al., 2005). The narratives of the UC and DA members interviewed suggested inadequate financial resources at their disposal to support their activities. This was noted to be a major challenge to the UCs. During the GD for the assembly members, both appointed and elected, they mentioned the financial cost of community organising in areas that are far from their dwelling places. For example the DA member for Agyaade/Supom whose administrative area includes some settler villages near Digya mentioned that *'he walks seven miles to some settlements in the Digya Electoral Area to work. The District Assembly should motivate us with money so as to make us work effectively'*. The resultant outcome is that he rarely visited the villages outside Ntonaboma and relied on individuals whom he encounters in his daily interactions to pass on assembly information to the headmen in these villages that fall under his administrative area.

Due to the burden of undertaking village functions without any motivation from the state, a lot of individuals who were less endowed with human and financial resources will want to pursue their livelihood without bothering much about being part of the authority structure of the UC. Hence we see in Ntonaboma teachers, other professionals in government departments and returnee pensioners taking up most of the positions of district assembly and UC roles. In the UC other less endowed members were invited to join the committee due to the constraint of getting all the requisite members of the committee. So once the more endowed individuals of the various villages are gotten onto the UC, the less endowed members of the villages are enlisted to join them. Due to the difficulty in getting the required number of individuals to work on the various UCs, the appointed members were not removed from the UC even when there was a change in government and their appointment was revoked⁶⁰. So within the UC we notice the enduring nature of the membership of some individuals such as Mr. Nketiah.

Usually the expectations bestowed on UC members to team up with the DA members to bring development to the community became a major challenge to these representatives. Interviews revealed a myriad of developmental problems that needed state support, yet the DA members and the UC members could not offer any hope of getting those development projects for the village⁶¹. In most cases villagers had to be levied through the

⁶⁰ Article 249 of the Ghanaian Constitution allows the President to revoke the appointment of appointed assembly representatives and unit committee members. This provision is exercised by new governments upon assumption of office.

⁶¹ In a study by Crook and Manor (1998: 260) in Ghana they noticed that the expectations or

Ntokuato in other to undertake such as servicing the pontoon, emptying the village septic tank for the KVIP and other uncertainties that occur in the villages. By relying on the villager's own resources to get things done in the village the legitimacy of the UC and DA members become undermined because they cannot meet the expectations of village members.

7.4 Rethinking Legitimacy of Authority in Local Governance

The power and authority of formal authority structures constituted as a result of institutionalised decentralisation to regulate behaviour and enforce collective rules within the community are accorded formal recognition through legal orders of the state. For Lund (2001: 863), the legal attribution of authority to these new institutions is 'obviously not insignificant in the process of local politics and exertion of power' but it does not determine the actual exercise and maintenance of authority. The argument in this section is that state sanctioned recognition of authority through legal registers is problematic for decentralisation practice because it presents authority as a fixed and static entity concealing the 'processual' nature of authority which 'must be continuously re-enacted and claims to legitimacy re-asserted' in practice (Kyed, 2007: 26).

From a relational perspective, I argue for a wider understanding of authority through the various processes in which authority is constructed in the everyday encounters with ordinary people. My focus is to demonstrate the 'processual' and relational nature of authority in governance which is

concerns of community members had not been addressed. Notable development concerns to ordinary citizens—roads, electrification, sanitary and water supplies—had virtually no funds allocated to them during the first three years of the Assembly.

often but problematically conceived as 'static' in decentralisation approach (Moore, 2000). According to Cleaver (2000: 374), "whilst individual political and administrative authority figures are interesting we need to look more carefully at authority,... as expressed through everyday social relations". In doing so, I first demonstrate that even with their legal register of legitimacy the appointed and elected UC and DA members struggle to anchor their positions within the villages. To legitimise their authority in practice, they attempt to draw on symbols of authority from the state to strengthen the recognition of their authority. Even by drawing on such symbols of authority they still have to struggle to negotiate their authority and power day by day within the villages some are successful while others are not successful.

7.4.1 Symbols of Public Authority

My intention here is to illuminate the conscious attempts made by UC and DA members to find legitimising symbols to enable them to cognitively anchor their authority within the villages. The search for and use of the title '*honourable*' as a symbol of authority drawn from the state was to reinforce the authority and power of the UC and DA members who are positioned alongside different registers of competing and overlapping authority structures at the local level. In Ghana, the title '*honourable*' is bestowed on members of parliament and ministers of state, termed the 'big men'⁶² of the society by Lentz, (1998: 48). According to Lund (2006) 'people

⁶² Lentz (1998) uses the term 'big men' in a heuristic sense to connote both ascribed and achieved status but mostly for wealthy, influential individuals and persons in government. The title 'honourable' in Ghana is reserved for august members of the house of parliament or ministers of state or other individuals who are in positions of authority within the state's higher echelons of power. The title 'honourable' evokes dignity, prestige and power.

discursively draw on legitimising symbols or discourses to cognitively anchor new institutional arrangements' (ibid, 691). The local representatives have adopted this title as a symbolic form of authority to express their status within the governance of the district.

When power and authority are, in fact, transferred to local government structures, these usually involve responsibility without authority. The use of the title '*honourable*' by both DA and UC members shows the extent to which people will draw on legitimising symbols from the state to 'bestow the signs of official government recognition' to their authority. The aim is to connect their authority to higher levels of government and decision making. The use of the title *honourable* was to reinforce the legitimising authority of the members of the sub-district structure to strengthen their acquired roles which was a formal local institution of a 'humbler pedigree' (Lund, 2006: 691).

Drawing on the analogy of *honourable* also highlights the extent to which appointed members of the district assembly try to combine their appointment of office with the 'languages of stateness' (Hansen and Stepputat, 2001: 8). To be able to anchor their positions and also enroll fully into the overlapping web of authority within the locale, the appointed members whose authority to govern was stymied by village members claimed authority through 'symbols of public authority' and 'exercising the practical task of governance' (ibid, 691). However, utilising symbols of authority to bolster one's authority or influence within the community is by no way a smooth or linear process, it involves competition and negotiation among the various human authority figures. This suggests that drawing on

legitimising symbols to anchor ones position is not a static but a conflict ridden process.

The legitimacy of appointed members of the DA in Ntonaboma was continuously questioned and challenged by village actors in their attempt to interpret or enforce village rule or manage community infrastructure (Please read Appendix III). Whilst some appointed members were referred to as *honourable* others were not. The elected and appointed members of the sub-district structures constitute two 'politico-legal' institutions with two different bases of legitimacy. Whilst the appointed members draw their legitimacy from the political-administrative hierarchy, the elected members look to the population for their legitimacy. However, the ability to wield power is not dependent on the source of legitimacy but rather as a result of a struggles and negotiations. This also illustrates the partial nature of the authority of appointed members of the decentralisation framework.

I observed that there was an imaginary boundary between the elected members and the appointed members especially the district assembly members but that did not determine who was referred to as 'honourable' by a village member (Diary notes). The authority of elected and appointed members were constantly been negotiated in practice. Some village members preferred to use the symbolic title *honourable* when referring to either the elected or appointed depending on the nature of relationship and the influence of that individual within village affairs. For example, I noticed on several occasions that Mr. E. Y. Mensah was referred to as *honourable* but I never heard Mrs. Acheampong being referred to with that title. This suggest that the title 'honourable' was not a static attribute

but had to be enacted in practice much depending on the individual rather than in the position.

Whilst some village members referred to Mr. Mensah as *honourable* others did not. My speculation was that those who called him *honourable* were either his party members or those who stood to benefit from his patronage activities. By politicising the appointment of government appointees to the DA and the UC, the legitimacy of these appointed members was continuously been challenged especially at the village level by other individuals who belonged to other political parties.

Also among the appointed and elected representatives, the latter felt superior to the former because they thought that they constituted legitimate representatives of the villages. Within the villages both the appointed DA and UC members were perceived as political functionaries and hence had to draw on the analogy of how the Presidents constituted his cabinet to provide meaning to the legitimacy of their authority within the community. For Douglas, the shared analogy is a device for legitimising a set of fragile institutions (Douglas, 1987: 49).

According to E. Y. Mensah an appointed DA member draws on the analogy of an Article in the 1992 Constitution of Ghana that requires the President's to appoint at least seventy percent of his ministers from members of parliament, who are elected and therefore constitute representatives of the citizenry, to explain to those who questioned the legitimacy of his authority. He explains further that his appointment is synonymous to what occurs at the national level (**Mr. E. Y. Mensah appointed DA member**)

However, the reality was that the appointment and further legitimisation of that position by the state does little to anchor the position or authority of the person within the village. The extent to which the appointed or elected members were able to exercise power in the affairs of the village

or to accumulate political capital depended more on the characteristics or the agency of that individual than in the position or mode of appointment. Accumulating power through influence or political capital depended on the ability of the individuals to strategically compete among other individuals in authority positions both state sanctioned and non- state within the village. In the next section I demonstrate that authority structures in Ntonaboma are complex.

7.5 Multiple and overlapping channels of authority

In Ghana, the Local Government Act of 1993 (Act 462) established the current UCs and DAs as formal authority structures for local government. This runs parallel to institutional design principles that advocate for the setting up of robust authority with clearly defined roles to define, enforce and sanction collective decisions (Ostrom, 2005; 1992). The decision to invest absolute authority in a single formal institutional source to regulate village decisions and rules can be queried for narrowly conceptualising authority as static and fixed. It fails to recognise the multiple sources of authority in everyday social relations (Maganga, 2002; Lund, 2006; 2001; Cleaver, 2000). Public authority, according to Lund, is not acquired once and for all but it is 'being constructed in the imagination, expectation and everyday practices and conflicts of ordinary people and their organisations' (Lund, 2006).

At the village level a variety of institutions of different shades of formality and visibility are at play defining and enforcing collectively binding decisions on members of society. Public authority then becomes 'the

amalgamated result of the exercise of power by a variety of local institutions' (Lund, 2006: 686; Cleaver, 2000). I take this further to argue that in Ntonaboma, authority structures were complex and often overlapping in the performance of their functions which suggest negotiation and contestation occur about which authority figure has the right to interpret rules and mediate conflicts.

Community members eclectically chose from both formal and socially embedded authority structures to mediate their interactions especially in times of conflict⁶³ (Maganga, 2002). My argument is that when social actors continuously draw on particular institutions to mediate their problem, solve conflict or claim access to resources, the authority of that institution becomes recognised in village affairs particularly when the decisions and interpretation of the rules are respected and accepted within the village (Sikor and Lund 2009; Lund, 2006a, 2001). However, the decision on which authority structure to use was both consciously and unconsciously done. For example during an interview with Nana Akuamoah Boateng the Mankrado of Akroso village, a village member, Mr. Tieku came to lodge a complaint that some cattle had trespassed on his farm destroying most of his crops. Though the DA had a bye-law that prohibits individuals from letting loose their animals to destroy people's farm Mr. Tieku failed to report the incident to the local UC or any other authority structure. Mr. Tieku mentioned that 'immediately he got to the farm and saw the animals, I just rushed to

⁶³ The conscious search for authority figures to mediate problem or access to resources is termed as 'forum shopping' (Lund 2001; Biershnick and Oliver de Saedan, 2003).

nana's place to inform him...from here I will go to inform Iddrisu, the owner of the animals' (interview with Mr. Tiekku, 03/02/2007).

The decision on which authority structure to draw to settle this dispute was unconsciously done since he had routinely relied on the traditional authorities to mediate his disputes. He drew my attention to the fact that Nana Akumoah Boateng was the *Mankrado* as well as the DA member for Akroso village. The dual position of Nana Akuamoah Boateng as a traditional leader and a DA representative highlights the blurring of the boundary between traditional and modern human authority figures.

Nana Akuamoah Boateng stated that he will later send an emissary to call Iddrisu to enable him listen to his part of the story, after which he will meet both parties to the conflict to solve the problem. Later, when I enquired about the status of the case, Nana Akuamoah Boateng mentioned that Iddrisu had agreed in principle to compensate Mr. Tiekku but the exact amount to be paid as compensation was yet to be agreed upon as Mr. Tiekku was yet to furnish him with the total amount of crops destroyed. Once Iddrisu finally pays for the crops destroyed then the authority and power of the chief becomes further enhanced.

Since the interpretation of local norms and settling of disputes were normally mediated by the traditional authorities and other family heads, the normal practice within Ntonaboma was for disputes bothering on ownership and entitlements rights to resources sent to them. As social actors send their disputes to the traditional authorities and simultaneously accepts and observes their judgments, then the power of the traditional authorities within the village is reproduced and further legitimated. Maganga (2007) draws our

attention to the importance and effectiveness of traditional authority structures in settling disputes. However what is important was for individuals to send their cases or disputes to them for resolution and at the same also adhere to their verdict (Lund, 2006).

The existing practices of the locality in which we are embedded shape how we consciously or non-reflexively draw on authority figures to govern our daily interaction. Douglas (1987) illustrates how some institutions are so embedded in our way of doing things that they are hardly put into any conscious scrutiny. The importance of routine in reproducing certain actions is manifested in the example of Mr. Tieku regarding where to take his cases. Mr. Tieku did not put the decision on which authority to report into any conscious scrutiny. He explained that ever since he came to settle in the town in 1997 he had routinely addressed all his cases that have to do with land issues including ownership and trespassing to the *Mankrado*, Nana Akuamoah Boateng. According to Mr. Tieku he had trust that Nana Akuamoah and his elders were capable of solving the problem. The example of Mr. Tieku also raises questions about the extent to which the conscious crafting of institutions to alter individual incentives to consciously draw on formal institutions to govern their interaction occurs in real life. The multiple identities and diverse subjective values of individuals suggest that people draw on multiple authority structures in their daily lives. Individuals looked out for the appropriate authority structure among the complex authority structure within the village to send their disputes to be addressed.

Sending cases or conflicts to one authority does not render alternative authority structures within that particular locality invalid or

abandoned. The co-existence and the interaction among multiple institutions in Ntonaboma suggests that individuals will undergo 'forum shopping' on which authority to rely on to address certain specific issues. Drawing on a particular mode of authority whether state or non-state has little to do with the source of the legitimacy of that institution but has more to do with that authority providing an effective avenue for the specific situation. Therefore in deciding on which 'forum to shop', a lot factors are taking into account such as 'the nature of the problem, the perceived effectiveness of the human authority figure in being able to deal with it and perceptions of the proper way of going about things'(Cleaver 2000: 374)

Interviews revealed diverse human authority figures that were called upon to address a variety of issues or disputes. An example is the case of a young girl who was accused of stealing a piece of cloth belonging to a neighbour in Supom village. She was sent to the local shrine to swear an oath to substantiate her claim that she was not the one who stole the cloth. She confessed to stealing the cloth when she was going through some rituals at the shrine. Her acceptance of the offence provided the scope for her to negotiate the return of the stolen cloth for an amicable settlement of the issue at the shrine. Once she accepted the offence and pleaded guilty she was not reported to any other authority figure within the village, although other members of the village got to know of it.

I was told of another case in which the culprit continuously denied stealing the item till he got struck by a strange disease after which he confessed to having stolen the money. He had to publicly walk through the four villages in Ntonaboma to acknowledge to the entire community the

acceptance of his guilt. This practice was also meant to deter others from stealing. When the item was refunded he underwent certain rituals for the strange disease to go (Diary notes 13/02/06).

We can also see the super natural world through the authority of the priestess to the local shrine being called upon by some village members to address their problems since it was believed that she had the capacity to see into the unknown to reveal the identity of the culprit and solve everyday problems in the village. However, interviews suggested that some village members will neither accept the authority of the priestess nor 'shop from her forum', but will also not contest her decisions nor challenge the legitimacy of her authority.

In other instances when conflicts or disputes had to do with people located within a certain social relationship, such as attending the same church or belonging to the same family, certain authority figures that were located at the interface of such relationship were called upon. Instances were cited when pastors, family elders and chiefly authorities were mostly mentioned as the human authority figures called upon to intervene in disputes or problems within the village. Though Lund (2006b; 2009) explains that public authorities go 'shopping forum' to find disputes or issues to address in order to further enhance their authority, on this occasion the religious priests and the chiefs were not intervening in disputes to enhance their authority, but were informed of these disputes by third parties.

As I have shown in chapter four, though the UCs as modern organisations are formally accountable to the district assembly based on their institutional arrangements, it was evidenced in the study area that they

also responded to the authority of the traditional chiefs in order to avoid encountering any difficulties from the traditional authorities. During my interview with Nana Osei-Afram, the Nifahene of Akroso, he stated that “*dawuro be to abaa, na ye fa duwuro wo ahenefie,*” literally meaning the stick used for hitting the gong-gong⁶⁴ to call village meetings existed before the invention of the gong-gong. Also, the gong-gong is taken from the chief’s palace. In this instance he was using the proverb to illustrate the authority and power of the village chief. In this analogy ‘*abaa*’ that is the stick’ referred to the existing authority of the chiefly institution which predates the ‘*dawuro*’ in this case the UC and DAs. The use of the other analogy that *duwuro* (gong-gong) was taken from *ahenefie* (the chief’s palace) was to assert the need to keep the chief informed on all community decisions because it was from his palace that the instrument for convening village meeting was collected. All these analogies were to reinforce the authority of the traditional authorities within the village and also to demonstrate the scope for negotiation and interaction with new authorities if only they recognised his authority. Though the district assembly bye-law states that;

‘No Assembly member, Area Council, or Unit Committee shall order the beating of the gong-gong without authority of the recognised traditional Head in any town or village... Where in the relevant town/village community the Traditional Authority stands in the way of the Organizing Authority in the beating of the gong-gong the Organizing Authority may appeal to the (Executive Committee of the Assembly) for a written permission enabling that Organising Authority to be responsible for the custody and the beating of the gong-gong in the community.

Even though the portions on the bye-law above acknowledged the role and authority of the traditional authorities, it still assumes that if the chief

⁶⁴ A flat metal, with the rim turned over that produces a loud sound when struck with a wooden mallet.

was not cooperative the Executive Committee of the District Assembly could intervene and issue a letter that overrides the authority of the chief. Such tendencies have the potential of resulting in contestations and conflicts between the traditional authorities and the sub-district structures in community management. But, as I have stated in Chapter Four, the role of traditional elites in getting their own people to get into these bureaucratic positions within Ntonaboma lessened the occurrence of such conflicts between the traditional authorities and the UCs or DA member. Also the proverbs used by Nana Osei-Afram suggested the possibilities of working together once the authority of the traditional authority in managing or intervening in community activities was recognised by the UCs and the DA members.

The use of this proverb by Nana Osei Afram was to illustrate the authority of the traditional chief over the sub-district structures be it the Assembly Member or Unit Committees. He reinforced his argument that the UC members were inaugurated with no power to call for village meetings and that before they can do so they have to seek his permission to do so. Also for every village meeting to be called, the town members had to discuss the agenda with the chief or the Amankrado of the specific village for his thoughts both before and after the public meeting.

7.7 Conclusion

The analysis in this chapter explored public authority from below to understand how it actually works in the daily social encounters within the contingencies of a particular context. Decentralisation law ostensibly gives

the elected and appointed members of the DA the legal mandate to manage the affairs of the village that had to do with the state. However, there were various institutions that shaped interactions and exercise authority within the locality. This makes the exercise of authority complex. The exercise of authority within the context of Ntonaboma was not clear and consistent, but was contingent on practical interactions occurring between those in authority positions and village members. The legitimacy of human authority figures was derived from diverse sources and not only from the state. Granting authority through the legal instruments of the state failed to provide the appointed and elected members with the exclusive power to shape village interactions. They had to draw on other sources of legitimacy to bolster their authority that was positioned alongside other powerful authority figures within the community. Depending on the particular issue at stake social actors knew which authority figure to go to but that did not prevent them from eclectically depending on multiple authority figures within the community in their daily interactions. Therefore, to understand the recursive relationship between authority and power we do not need to narrowly focus on a specific institution but at the broader processes through which authority is asserted, enacted and legitimised by various authorities within a specific locality. The chapter further highlighted the political nature of decentralisation that is mostly de-politicised in policy documents. The ongoing negotiations, accommodations and struggles taking place among the four village chiefs highlight the political nature of the decentralisation process.

CHAPTER EIGHT

CONCLUSION

8.1 Introduction

This thesis questioned the scope for transformation for institutionalised decentralisation by specifically focusing on individual agency, dynamics of institutions and complexity of authority to understand how decentralisation manifests itself at the village level. The intention of this study was to position the actual practice of decentralisation within a particular context to offer a deeper understanding into the processes and outcomes of institutional decentralisation, especially the extent to which it shapes local organisation and community participation. From such a perspective, this thesis has argued that institutionalising decentralisation through local government structures to promote participation and enhance equity in local governance does not automatically lead transformation in community participation and local governance.

The study has shown that, understanding the practice of decentralisation is essential if the current thinking and practice of the concept is to adequately embrace complexity and heterogeneity of context. The study revealed that at the local level there is a diversity of actors with different values and interests involved in decentralisation. Similarly, the study has shown that individual participation in communal activities occurred through multiple institutions and not only through local government structures implemented by the state to promote participation and inclusion in development. The diversity of actors involved in local governance and the

plurality of channels through which interactions took place within local communities makes decentralisation a complex and dynamic process. However, the policy framework for decentralisation discussed in Chapter Four revealed that decentralisation and local government in Ghana were institutionalised based on legal reforms and bureaucratic procedures shaped by external conditionalities. The method of decentralisation shaped by the World Bank and the IMF placed much value on increasing efficiency and reducing the economic decline rather than on enhancing social equity (Mohan, 1996).

However, there is a growing assertion in the development literature that, the failure of development interventions that are grounded in citizenship rights to manifest in pro-poor outcomes lies in its neglect of complexity and heterogeneity of context (Geiser and Rist, 2009; Mitlin and Hickey, 2009). This thesis has contributed to such debates by placing a strong emphasis on the specificities of context to demonstrate that decentralisation is complex and dynamic endeavour and not a 'technocratic' process that can simply and universally be implemented to achieve the liberal agenda of participation, democratisation and empowerment.

The study, applying an ethnographic approach, argued that institutional decentralisation needs to pay adequate attention to the nature and dynamics of individual participation, the different motivations that shape action and existing socially embedded principles and practices that shape individual actions. The chapter begins by summarising the theoretical arguments made for the study before highlighting the nuances of the actual practice of institutionalised decentralisation. This is aimed at highlighting the

existing gaps between the policy ideals and reality of the actual practice of decentralisation. The chapter ends by recommending an alternative approach to decentralisation aimed at illuminating wider issues that shape the concept of decentralisation in practice and what needs to be considered in policy circles if decentralisation is to be transformative in practice.

Chapter two explored the literature with the aim of searching for a theory that underpinned institutional decentralisation. The chapter demonstrated the significant attention that mainstream views on decentralisation place on the agency of local people and formal organisations. However, exploring the literature revealed that the concept of agency and institutions are naively applied in the theory and practice of decentralisation. The chapter also highlighted how decentralisation discourse oversimplifies and standardises local complexity, allowing for the superimposition of standardised development blue prints without recognising power and difference, and the underlying structural inequalities that shape human action. The prevalence and increasing relevance of new institutionalism in decentralisation thinking and practice at both policy and implementation levels was also illuminated in the chapter.

The new institutionalism literature of both 'normative' and a 'rational choice' persuasion places emphasis on 'getting incentives and institutions right' to shape the complex interactions occurring among the state, market and community. The new institutionalist approach advocates for 'right' institutional arrangements to positively shape the opportunistic behaviour of individuals and deter free-riding through the application of strictly enforced sanctions, contracts and authority systems that monitor and enforce these

sanctions. They apply economic concepts of rationality to the analysis of institutions for collective action aimed at reducing the cost of transaction and providing incentives for cooperation among rational individuals.

The inadequacies of institutional approaches to decentralisation as a governance reform lie in its problematic and narrow conceptualisation of human agency and institutions, and an inadequate understanding of the dynamic relationship between the two concepts. The emphasis they place on the autonomous individual leads to a conception of individuals as detached from society and disembedded from social relations (Cleaver, 2004). The emphasis placed on the 'community' as a homogenous unit and a site appropriate for empowerment masks issues of power, difference and complexity of context (Mohan and Stoke, 2000). The focus on rational factors at the expense of contextual factors manifests in a false dichotomy that seeks to separate private from public action and interest and, bureaucratic institutional arrangements from socially embedded institutions (Metha et al., 1999).

I used ideas from Cleaver (2000, 2002), and Wong (2008; 2004), to show that an addition of the emerging post institutional arguments to the understanding of human behavior and institutions can provide a deeper understanding about 'complexities, the continuities and uncertainties' that shape much of rural life (Cleaver, 2000: 281). Giddens (1984) and Long (1992) ideas on the recursive relationship between agency and structure shaped the discussions on the variations in agency among diverse individuals. In discussing the interplay between formal and socially embedded institutions, I used ideas from Benjaminsen and Lund (2002) and

Metha et. al., (1999) to support my arguments on the dynamic nature of institutions in governance at the micro-level. Douglas' (1987) arguments on the relationship between individual actions and perceptions, and institutions informed the discussions in the thesis. Now, let us move on to identify how I have used these elements of social theory and post-institutional thinking in this thesis to explore institutionalised decentralisation in Ghana, especially the application of the dynamic and complex relationship between individuals and institutions.

8.2 The partial and intermittent nature of agency in Local Governance

The first objective of this study focused on individual participation in new local governance structures. The main areas explored to gain deeper insights on participation centered on the ideals of good governance - representation, decision-making and accountability. However, this is not to suggest that actions towards any one of them was separate and distinct from one another but rather they overlapped and together shaped the outcomes of institutionalised decentralisation within the locality.

The new local government structures technically crafted as a result of decentralisation in Ghana through the local Government Act 462 in 1993 is claimed to offer sufficient agency for people to undertake a host of 'sociopolitical practices' to negotiate in decision-making and participate in numerous village activities as equal citizens. The extent to which these new governance spaces offer scope for purposeful action, the resources on which to draw to substantiate such agency, and the variable nature of the outcomes of agency are little elucidated in policy documents. Little

consideration is given to the relational nature of agency and the societal practice of the concept.

This study explored the motivations for action, the effects of individual agency and the structural factors that shaped agency within a particular context to gain deeper insights into how the concept shapes the action of 'citizen participants' in local governance. The thesis argued that investing social actors with contextual identity and positioning them within a complex life world in which they engage with diverse and multiple actors in plural spaces illuminates the complex motivations and the structural constraints shaping their action (Cleaver, 2000; Giddens, 1984).

This study has shown that institutionalised decentralisation overromanticises the agency of individuals to undertake certain actions to shape local governance. The analysis has shown that such optimistic expectations of active agency, epitomised in strategic and rational action, is difficult to achieve in reality and seems a risky endeavour especially taking into account the role of social relations, difference and social structures in shaping human action. The discussions and the narratives of respondents revealed a link between people's subjective values, interaction and action. This reinforces Agrawal's argument that "attempts to change the way people behave through hierarchical organisations is impractical. Much depends on the subjectivities of those undergoing regulation" (Agrawal, 2005: 17).

The functional understanding of human actions in main stream views of decentralisation assumes that individuals are strategic, active and rational and motivated mainly by self-interest. However, the study revealed that individuals are not always rational but their actions are shaped by social

relations, taking into consideration what is suitable and acceptable in particular circumstances. The study revealed that, direct participation through public meetings does not ensure equity for all. Drawing on the example of the market women revealed the undesirable nature of publicly negotiating final decisions in the presence of traditional village leadership. Rather, they preferred to negotiate or make known any dissenting view outside the arenas of public decision-making through existing channels of interaction. To these women, contacting the village leadership outside the public arena was the 'right thing to do' if they had to voice alternative concerns regarding village final decisions. These same women who will not want to publicly challenge the village leadership were able to contest the collection of the market toll at the point of collection. The different actions undertaken by the same women in each interaction and at a different location revealed how individuals work out what is appropriate to do in different contexts taking into consideration the wider perspectives and effects of their actions. How does such thinking about the particular context, right way to behave and in whose present compatible with contemporary optimistic thinking about agency in decentralisation approaches as a rational and purposeful? These findings resonate with arguments in the development literature that, development approaches such as decentralisation, that emphasises on agency, need to have a better understanding of what it means to be an acting subject in particular circumstances (Agrawal, 2005; Cleaver, 2002; Mamdani, 1996).

I also demonstrated that decentralisation has opened up new public spaces for traditional leaders, on which they skillfully capitalise to shape village affairs. The history of the resettlement process had given the traditional

leaders the 'moral right' to be responsible for the public affairs of the village. This has permeated the mechanisms for access to the new local government structures, reproducing the dominant role of village traditional leadership in the collective affairs of the locality. The support for village traditional leaders as this study found out was not really based on high satisfaction with their activities; rather this support was rooted in culture and reinforced by certain structural factors at play within the locality. This suggests that historical factors and culture are scarcely ever brushed aside in social interactions as they guide moral understandings of action.

The little enthusiasm of village members to become representatives on the local government structures was attributed to the village way of life and expectations on existing traditional leadership to attend to village uncertainties and other communal problems that even permeated the individual level. People were not shy in approaching or petitioning traditional village leadership when they perceived a village problem or identified issues that needed to be addressed, thus reproducing the dominant role of village leadership. Traditional leadership and the DA representatives seemed to have good knowledge about whom they need to contact in order to acquire resources – financial or technical to solve local problems. Traditional authorities did not only petition the state but they also provided resources and committed their time and energy to village problem solving, they also donated land and other financial resources in order to partner with local government for development. However, this should not be interpreted as lack of participation in local government structures but as an expression of 'the right thing to do' which was the outcome of cultural, historical experiences and context. Hence village

traditional leadership despite governance reforms still continued to play important roles in the everyday affairs of village life.

The study observed that certain individuals within Ntonaboma deliberately did not challenge the predominant role of the traditional leadership in village activities limiting the possibilities for them to become village representatives. Yet, other individuals also consciously excluded themselves from accessing these new political spaces to become formal representatives accusing the village traditional leadership of monopolising village public affairs and consciously recruiting their favorites to become DA and UC members. The important issue is that such people, though they were aware of the dominant role of traditional leadership in the affairs of the village will not consciously act to challenge their dominant role. This may be seen as a risky endeavour because certain actions could be interpreted to mean insolence to the chiefs that may have its own repercussions. However, Others such as the youth had their agency located elsewhere and were more interested in securing their livelihood concerns than exercising agency to shape existing state of affairs in the locality.

Not only has my analysis revealed how certain individuals will not participate in local government structures in Ntonaboma because they see the role of the chiefs as natural and reinforced by custom, but it has also shown that people who purposively wanted to become local government representatives had their ambitions curtailed by inequitable structural factors such as age, gender, knowledge and wealth. This accounts for the asymmetrical representation in decision-making bodies within the four villages. The UC and DA membership was dominated by influential and

village members who were up the village hierarchy or had certain forms of knowledge or skills. Other individuals who acquired these knowledge and skills through education left Ntonaboma to seek work in more developed areas of the country. This dearth of educated and highly skilled individuals within Ntonaboma reinforced the dominance of certain few individuals in the new local government structures.

We see the varied outcomes for different individuals in their attempts to become DA representatives. Whiles some were successful in achieving their intentions others were not. The study revealed that despite the legal provision in the Local Government Act 462 (7[1]) for nominal equality in access to the new governance spaces, people with thin allocative and authoritative resources 'had little room to manoeuvre' to access these new political spaces. Younger members of the village had to defer their ambitions to become village representatives due to the influence of other actors on them. This illustrates the effects of power relations, conflict avoidance and respect for elders simultaneously shaping the actions and choices of individuals. In some instances certain people considered not only their self-interest but the stability of the social relations in which they were embedded in order to achieve cooperation. The examples of Eric Agyepong and Raymond Suele in Chapter Five support this finding.

The above findings suggest that exercising purposeful agency is a much more complex and dynamic endeavor occurring in overlapping arenas involving multiple and diverse social actors with different intentionalities influenced by certain 'styles of thinking'. All these perspectives had wider implications for understanding the agency of the poor within new interventions

if decentralisation is to be pro-poor in orientation. I will elucidate on the assumptions made about motivations and action, and the constraints to purposeful human action which are often either over romanticised or glossed over in institutional approaches to decentralisation to illuminate some conceptual flaws therein.

Much theorising of agency in local governance depicts the individual as active, rational and strategic, conscious of his or her intentions to purposively act to transform existing inequalities. Discussions of agency also raise the issues of the capacity to exercise agency and the resources on which the individual can draw. Linking such abstract conceptions of agency to citizenship rights and the reality of participation can generate ambivalence because governance is not an individualistic endeavor but is rather socially-shaped in practice (Wong, 2009; Cleaver, 2004, Engberg-Pedersen and Webster, 2002).

My argument is that the relative differences in power within social relations reinforced by the existing social practices may render the exercise of agency ineffectual because individuals may act or make choices within existing unequal relationships. A clear example was the desire by the settler farmers to exercise agency within their subordinate positions to halt the payment of royalties to the Agyaade Traditional council after the institutionalisation of decentralised local government structures. But employing such agency to alter the existing unequal relationship proved unsuccessful. Certain occurrences like the boat disaster on the Volta Lake in the area that had consequences on their livelihood made the settler farmers

abandon their initial intention to draw on the new LG arrangements to contest the payment of royalties.

The study also revealed that cosmology and existing social practices shaped the interactions between the settler farmers and the two Traditional Councils. The settler farmers had to renegotiate within socially acceptable norms alongside formal conflict resolution mechanisms to both stabilise their livelihood and also forestall any boat disasters on the Volta Lake.

People thought profoundly about the implications of the outcomes of their actions and how beneficial such actions would be to them in terms of existing social relations. Maintaining good neighbourliness, avoiding conflict, respecting village traditional leadership and acquiescing to their right to lead in village activities suggest some form of 'moral rationalities' shaping agency. This suggest that social actors are not always 'utility maximisers' aimed at 'getting out' to achieve their intentions aimed at transforming wider relations of structural inequality but consider the appropriate action given the situation and the context contradicting the ideals of active participation espoused in decentralised governance literature. Maintaining their existing social networks, especially relationship with existing traditional elite, was more important to village members because it had consequences on their livelihood and other benefits to be accrued from maintain such relationship. Individuals take actions by considering the demands of everyday social life and how to secure their immediate livelihood.

Therefore, if local government structures through decentralisation bring limited or no benefits to the livelihoods of the poor they will make no conscious effort to access these spaces to become representative or contest

decisions made. The focus will rather be on the more important aspect of their live - their day-to-day survival - much of which is mediated through existing institutions. Contesting elections to become a village representative was not as important as being in the 'good books' of the traditional leadership or other individuals up the village hierarchy. This demonstrates that social actors were motivated by conceptions of what they believe to be appropriate than conceptions of what is effective and efficient. The study revealed that even with the introduction of a new local government structures, the public power of certain people remained intact, providing them with the resources and legitimacy necessary for them to become DA representatives.

This thesis has revealed that agency is rarely achieved through normative political reforms of the state but is shaped through societal practice and supported by social relations. The study also revealed how decentralisation reforms pay inadequate attention to the role of social norms, cultural values, and complex motivations in shaping individual behaviour in local governance. For example, placing an emphasis on purposive action plays down the structural constraints which people face in exercising agency. In the absence of the social, physical and material assets required to actively engage with the political spaces of the state, the poor will acquiesce or self 'discipline' themselves and let existing traditional elites shape the selection and decision-making structures. The opportunities offered by decentralisation vary for different individuals. Whilst social relations may be constraining for some people and rid them of any opportunities to become a village representative it also enabled others to become village representatives.

Bringing the characteristics of village representatives on the DA and UC into perspective reveals the facilitating features of social relations. The enabling role of social relations, manifested in the notion of linking social capital, explains the existence of a 'powerful minority' who were disproportionately involved in multiple governance spaces. Though incentives are used to enlist the participation of actors in collective action, the literature is silent on the resources needed to participate in governance. Individuals are assumed to invest in social relations to participate in local governance. However, resources acquired through formal organisations, kinship or other socially embedded relations facilitated access for some few individuals. Such influential village DA and UC representatives were retired public servants, teachers and individuals with access to locus of power and wider networks.

The asymmetry of power relations and access to resources within Ntonaboma manifested in multiple leadership roles. Multiple networks reproduce and reinforce locally specific power relations, leading to village dependency on the same individuals such as Nana Akuamoah Boateng and Mr. Nketiah of Akroso village. Therefore, introducing local government structures without critically engaging with the existing power relations at work may lead to outcomes that reinforce prevailing power differentials.

The above finding also leads to another implication whereby those without power or who are positioned down the village hierarchy bear the burden of the LG work. The devolution of uniform power to heterogeneous individuals at local levels masks differences in status and power in structure of relations. Within the structure of authority relations some UC or town committee members had to go to the home of Mr. Nketiah (the town

committee chairman for Akroso village) every morning to receive instructions on what to do for the day. They had to go and summon people who have gone contrary to village rules and if possible collected the fines, an activity they received lots of chastisement. These same individuals had to also beat the gong to call for village meetings. However, the power devolved from the state to the local institution was intended to be equitably applied by all members. However, the devolution of power did not elaborate on how this power should be redistributed and applied among the various members who constituted the UC.

Fulfilling these roles within the new structure of authority, that is the UCs, placed heavy time demands on the members who had inadequate resources within the committee. The call by certain members of the UC on the state to pay them for the services they rendered to the village shows the negative effects of participation in governance on the livelihood for certain members. However, these same individuals sought to differentiate between community roles that were socially motivated and as such voluntary from those roles that needed remuneration from the state. Thus, local governance approaches that place emphasis on citizenship rights and responsibilities need to embrace the fluid identities and mixed motivations of community representatives.

8.3 The socially embedded nature of local governance

The second objective of the thesis explored the relationship between bureaucratic local government structures and socially embedded institutions and how the two institutions overlapped to shape village governance. The role

of traditional leadership in the affairs of the village, especially in demanding accountability from DA and UC representatives and consciously recruiting village representatives revealed how existing institutional arrangements continued to endure despite the implementation of new institutions within the community.

In Chapter Six, I questioned the 'institutional design principles' inherent in decentralisation policy and practice to illuminate the inadequacies of the institutional arrangements for decentralisation. The claim according to Olowu and Wunsch (2004: 13) is that "institutions in local governance are valuable because they provide organisational infrastructure that helps people to solve their problems, gather information they need to make and implement decisions" to reduce fragmentation in public action. The thinking is that the realisation of a pro-poor decentralisation framework lies in the conscious design of robust organisational structures to involve and represent the needs of the poor. The institutional solutions to decentralised governance broaden the understanding and analysis of the factors shaping the economic and the social content of decentralisation. The concern is that the instrumental utilisation of social institutions to make local governance functional underplays the 'messiness' and 'complexity' of institutional formation (Wong, 2009; Cleaver and Franks, 2005; Mehta et. al, 1999). The processes through which local actors draw on history, socially embedded principles to solve numerous problems and achieve cooperation is sidestepped (Mosse, 2003).

The main argument in Chapter Six was that the current policy framework enshrined in the Local Government Act 642, 1993 takes a functional and instrumental perspective on local government structures. The

approach adopted in Ghana's framework relied heavily on formalised arrangements in meeting its local governance objectives making it incompatible with diversity and context. Just focusing on crafting robust local organisations based on standard principles to make local governance optimal makes the socially embedded institutions at play within the locality opaque. Such an approach also inadequately caters for issues of 'uncertainty and complexity' (Mehta et. al, 2001:1).

Drawing on Douglas (1987), Cleaver (2000, 2002), Cleaver and Franks (2005), Wong (2004) and other emerging post-institutionalists theorists such as Benjaminsen and Lund (2002) and Mehta et al (1999), I interrogated the institutional approach to decentralisation by exploring how bureaucratic and socially embedded institutions shaped local governance. My claim was that bureaucratic and socially embedded institutions interplayed to shape outcomes of community level interactions.

In Ntonaboma, we see a collage of local practices and arrangements that shaped village management and responded to village uncertainties. Institutions that shaped community interactions were 'less functional' and underpinned by a host of socially embedded principles. The study revealed that, the flexibility of governance arrangements resulted in greater effectiveness in solving village needs. An example was the use of several institutional channels to mobilise resources to get the local school building re-roofed after a heavy rainstorm ripped the roof off.

The findings of the study has drawn attention to the imaginary distinction between new bureaucratic and existing socially embedded institutions by arguing that they are interrelated and often overlapping in their

mundane functions within the locality. In Chapter Six, attention was drawn to the existing solidarity in the village embedded in associational life making it possible for the *town committee* to respond to a host of unexpected village problems. A clear example of such socially embedded principles was reflected in some women going to see village members who could not attend communal labour because her daughter was poorly. Though a neighbour informed the chairman of the town committee on behalf of the woman whose daughter was poorly, she had to personally go to inform him. This suggests a pattern of social embedded principles underpinned governance practices within the village making it effective. Similarly, such socially embedded principles enabled the town committees to respond spontaneously to a host of uncertainties and other mundane problems occurring in the village. Therefore, explicitly designing formal organisations and instrumentally drawing on socially embedded institutions as a 'resource bank' oversimplifies village life which is more often than not complex, fluid and spontaneous than institutionalists assume.

Focusing on how village governance occurs in practice reveals the significant and numerous village activities that occurred outside the local government structures. For example, sanctioning people who did not attend communal labour were shaped by socially embedded principles and occurred outside the main formal structures of village governance. However, sanctioning village members outside the purview of all village members may be applied unevenly among village members by the town committee. Some village members were unable to negotiate to do their part of communal labour at a later date or even get their children to do their part for them. This illuminates the constraints that certain village members faced in negotiating issues in their

favour. For example, the subjective nature of rule application fell unevenly on different members of the village reinforcing the argument that socially embedded institutions may not necessarily be equitable for all (Wong, 2007; Cleaver, 2002).

The study also illustrated the extent to which pre-existing institutions took on new roles prescribed for new formal organisations, thus blurring the distinction between bureaucratic and socially embedded institutions. Yet, within mainstream decentralisation policy and practice, local government structures are specifically crafted to enlist and formalise community participation suggesting an institutional vacuum or ‘a community waiting to be mobilised’ by the new intervention (Williams et. al, 2003). Existing modes of participation were spontaneous and ad hoc in nature. Such modes of participation were embedded in existing social relationships drawn upon to shape village collective and individual activities. The multiple functions of the ‘*town committee*’ were identified to be resilient in the face of social change which illuminates the extent to which it could be adapted or drawn upon to undertake numerous roles within the village.

The role of the ‘*town committee*’ in the affairs of the village reflected in the ad hoc, spontaneous and multiple and overlapping functions undertaken brings to the fore the extent to which historical factors and social practices shape local level organisations. This also illustrates notion of institutional bricolage where old and new institutions could be combined and reinterpreted to solve community problems (Cleaver, 2002).

Drawing on the concept of ‘institutional bricolage’, the chapter demonstrated that local actors subjectively reinvented new institutions to suit

their own local context maintaining some elements of the new bureaucratic institutions while certain aspects were discarded. This reveals the interplay between actors' subjectivities and institutional arrangements. Combining new and existing elements enabled the *town committee* to undertake multiple and ad hoc functions within the village, confirming the constraining as well as the enabling role of local institutions. This shows that social actors as 'knowing active subjects' call on numerous collective arrangements, some less regularised and others more structured, to solve numerous problems within the village which is at variance to what pertains in development intervention where specific local organisations are crafted purposively to perform certain functions.

Though local government structures have played an important role in formalising local level arrangements for governance my query is on the homogenisation and standardisation of local level arrangements through an emphasis on 'conscious crafting' disregarding the complexity and diversity of context. Focusing on the heterogeneous nature of the lowest politico-administrative units of Ghana's decentralisation framework, this thesis has shown the messy and contested nature of institutional crafting highlighting the constant process of negotiation among conflicting interests within communities, and between their members and other actors (Metha et. al, 2001). The internal struggles over village decisions, the variations in outcomes of decision among the four villages, and the contestations and struggles over ownership rights and entitlement to resources revealed the political nature of decentralisation.

My findings also illuminate a lack of congruence between attempts to make society legible by consciously crafting clear and fixed boundaries without concern to the existing social arrangements which may result in unintended

consequences. Attempts to clarify boundaries as fixed and static purely for administrative and development purposes misses the dynamic and fluid nature of boundaries and the different meanings that people associated with the practice of territorial delimitation. The unintended consequences of institutional formation requires that development approaches need to examine the existing patterns of interactions and complex form of rights within a particular locality before transplanting any new institutions based on bureaucratic ideals.

The chapter also re-echoed the argument that inadequate attention is paid to people's culture beliefs and life-worlds in the process of translating development into practice. The process of institutionalising decentralisation at the behest of external donors, such as the Ghana example, placed much emphasis on local government structures to enlist participation thereby depoliticising the concept. The practice of decentralisation the study revealed was not a technical activity implanted in a 'homogenous' community but rather a political process the outcome of which reflected in the ongoing contestations struggles and conflicts that arise as a result of differences and tensions among social actors with different interests and values. Placing much emphasis on community organising practices, on how decisions are made and implemented within the locality, reveals that public participation is not separate from other spheres of people's social life. The reality is that in rural life individuals are positioned in multiple ways to one another making the separation of public processes of governance from the everyday lives of village members problematic. Though individual life worlds are complex, my argument is that, there are generalities in these different life worlds. Therefore, decentralisation

policy and practice should focus on addressing the inequitable arrangements that keep certain group of people outside the institutions of local governance.

Decentralisation policies sometimes call for establishing new structures, participatory mechanisms and accountability systems. However, the option of strengthening existing traditional structures should not be totally discounted. The study has shown that certain contextual factors are central in shaping the outcomes of decentralisation reforms. Therefore, decentralisation policy practice need to focus on the *longue durée* in order to understand what is feasible for particular localities at particular points in time. Plateau and Abraham (2002: 119), writes that development approaches that draw on participation may fail to transform the way things are done within the community due to the underlying socially embedded institutions that are “informed by values, beliefs and practices that have to do with the mode of social relations”. This suggests that these socially embedded principles that shape collective action and other community practices have historical and cultural roots that have endured over time. If institutionalised decentralisation is to achieve its intended goals and purposes, it needs to embrace the positive aspects of these ‘deep-rooted’ institutions that have consequences for political authority and governance arrangements.

Furthermore, local government structures should be made more flexible and context specific to enable them weave into the fabric of local community organising practices and embrace the complexity of rural life. Flexibility in local government structures means that local representatives can respond to the wishes of community members and adapt new ways of involving them in decision-making. My argument is that, certain elements of the local

government structure needs to be selected and combined with indigenous strengths to create workable hybrids of local government structures that are flexible, adaptive and receptive to the needs of the locality. These sentiments resonate with theoretical arguments to the effect that, a society's formal institutions must resonate with its shared habits and widely understood practices if they are to promote stability and development (Shivakumar, 2005). However, exclusive dependence of local government structures on local norms may have negative consequences for transparency and accountability, thereby affecting the democratic potential of decentralisation.

8.4 The complexity of authority in local governance

The last objective of the thesis questioned the manner in which power is devolved to local communities in decentralisation approaches. The study also sought to find out how the devolution of power to a particular locality through the legal instruments of the state transformed power relations manifesting in egalitarian structure of relations among diverse social actors

In Chapter Two, the study illustrated how authority structures lie at the heart of the mainstream approach to decentralisation. Ideas in mainstream views on decentralisation claim that devolving power and authority to local government structures results in "reversing existing power relations in a manner that creates agency and voice for the poor" (Mansuri and Rao, 2003: 2). However, as this study has shown, such a conceptualisation of authority is problematic and narrow as it fails to recognise the multiple authority structures at play within the locality and how authority needs to be legitimated and enacted through practice. The use of the symbolic title 'honourable' by

appointed members of the DA reveals the practical and relational nature of authority. It also illustrates the conscious attempts made by authority figures to locate and legitimise their authority in the village through diverse mechanisms. However, drawing on such legitimising symbols to exercising authority does not make such authority to be accepted by others.

The arguments in Chapters Six and Seven further questions the technocratic approach to decentralisation by arguing that authority is complex and that legitimating and institutionalising authority through legal instruments of the state fails to acknowledge the existing authority structures within the locality. The study revealed that the authority of a particular institution needs to be enacted in practice and much depends on the village members drawing on that authority structure to mediate their interactions. However, the decision of the authority structure also needs to be accepted in practice through some form of compliance further reinforcing the legitimacy of that institution.

The study highlighted the diverse authority structures that individuals consciously or unconsciously eclectically draw from in their daily interactions. The authority that an individual uses to mediate his /her interactions depends on the expectations and the belief that the individual has in that particular authority. The study has shown that people consciously or non-reflexively relied on diverse authority structures to solve their disputes. An example is the role of the priestess as an 'informal' authority figure drawing on certain attributes to solve mundane problems in the village, which made her authority to be accepted in practice. Her authority was accepted because certain individuals went to her whilst others also accepted her judgment on issues. This reinforces

the argument that decentralisation reforms need to consider how authority is diversely located and highly contextualised in reality (Wong, 2007: 187).

The discussion revealed the complexity of authority structures within the locality and how authority needed to be legitimated through social relations and enacted in practice. Rather than viewing individuals as solely drawing on the state to derive their legitimacy, this study revealed that individuals within the village hierarchy had multiple attributes and relied on diverse registers of legitimacy to anchor their power and authority. The example of Nana Akuamoah Boateng, a traditional chief and at the same time the formal representative to the DA for Akroso village, and Mr. E. Y. Mensah, the appointed DA representative, illustrates the multiple registers that people draw on to consolidate their authority within the community. Also, within the town committee we see how age, wealth and social position enabled the 'powerful minority' within the committee to shape the affairs of the committee. These individuals combined status with skills and technical knowledge to consolidate their position and authority within the group. Despite the new forms of authority structures in the villages the powerful members of the committee still relied on their human attributes to reinforce their authority. These attributes also enabled the other members of the group to acquiesce to the power of those in authority.

Therefore, technically designing new institutional arrangements through decentralisation to devolve power and authority to new authority structures to regulate behaviour and organisation within the locality fail to transform the existing power within the structure of relations. Such a process of legitimation also fails to embrace the practical nature of authority which is partially reliant on some subtle form of power to attain compliance and partly

dependent on the belief in that authority to meet the expectations of village members.

8.5 Widening the narrow gaze on institutionalised decentralisation-

Recommendations

This thesis has identified the limitations of institutional approaches to decentralisation but acknowledges its potential to promote participation and enhance social equity. An example is the introduction of new players onto the political landscape and the role of village members in inputting into the selections of village formal village representatives to the DA structures. At least this deviates from the traditional practice of a few king makers deciding on who becomes the new leader and village representatives. The role of these new governance institutions in service delivery was also noticed in the study. Furthermore, the example of the women refusing to pay market dues shows the positive effects of decentralisation. The women's actions were experienced directly by members of the local government unit which could then respond with good information signifying the presence and ability of local level institutions to intervene in the affairs of the locality. However, this study identified some of the shortcomings of institutionalised decentralisation based on its underlying elements that placed 'strong' emphasis on efficiency, rationality and bureaucratic factors over social and contextual factors.

Therefore, the study recommends that decentralisation policy should be based on a deeper understanding of the wider processes that shape local governance within the specificities of a particular context. Thus, widening the

gaze on decentralisation has the propensity to make decentralisation have positive outcomes for both individuals and their community. Specifically, this section focuses on recommendations for policy by raising some important issues that will have positive consequences for decentralisation policy and practice. The Recommendations include more active role for the state in decentralisation approaches, finding the possibilities and potential for participation in the places that they occur and strengthening existing governance arrangements.

8.5.1 Rethinking the state-society relations in institutionalised

Decentralisation

There is an ongoing debate in policy circles on the appropriate role of the state in development in this case decentralisation (Corbridge, 2008; Johnson and Start, 2001; Evans, 1995). Based on the findings of this research, this study recommends that decentralisation policy should put more emphasis on an active role for the state. The prevalent role of traditional leadership, of structure in shaping individual acts and the plurality of overlapping institutions at play at the local level call for a more vibrant role for the state in decentralisation and local governance. The active role for the state recommended is at variance with the neo-liberal thinking of a 're-emerging active state' within a good governance perspective (World Bank, 2000). The comment of one of the respondents Fredrick, "that the state should hold village leaders to account" rather than village members coupled with the reliance on the same state for the provision of services such as the re-roofing of the school building and the micro-credit funds, illuminate the "ineradicable' necessity of the

state in contemporary rural life” (Evans 1995: 2). Yet, the current approach to decentralisation shift focus to the individual and away from the state.

This is not to advocate for a state that is repressive and “powerful as those of the gods” (Desai, 1991:3 quoted in Evans, 1995), but one that is more committed to and goes beyond decentralisation as a wider radical political project where much attention is paid to the ‘participation of marginal and subordinate groups’ aimed towards a process of pro-poor social change (Hickey and Mohan, 2005: Evans, 1995). Specifically, an approach that goes beyond the technical and managerial aspects of decentralisation to a more radical political process in which the state gets more marginal actors into governance. Then, decentralisation policy and practice may have to engage with Hickey and Mohan’s (2005: 256) ‘critical modernist project’.

However, Giddens (1994) asked that “if even there should be an agenda for radical politics in development who is to implement such an agenda” and “whose values is to shape such an agenda of radical politics”. Giddens’ assertion is that the plurality of values makes the context very important in shaping the radical political agenda. This study has shown that contextualising decentralisation will manifest in a deeper understanding of how underlying structural factors, power and ‘politics’ keep certain people out of governance and which processes reproduce and perpetuate inequity and exclusion. However, my concern is on how such an enhanced and active role for the state towards ‘a pro-poor minority action’ can be realised when historical and contextual factors and ‘hegemonic elites’ interplay to shape social organisation and the actions of several individuals. Such a project will be beneficial to the poor if it adequately considers the complex and dynamic relationship between

individual agency, institutional dynamics and structural constraints surrounding the poor within the locality. This calls for the introduction of politics, social relations and context into the discussions on a 'radical political citizenship approach.

Decentralisation as a governance reform will then be able to fully comprehend people's subjectivities, how and why they undertake certain choices, through which institutional mechanisms, with what resources, and the underlying structures and processes that shape their participation in governance. The power relations at play within a particular locality, especially existing relations with the diverse agents that constitute the state, need to be adequately considered. Decentralisation done this way may positively shape marginalisation and exclusion thereby transforming the enduring patterns of power and inequality. The dilemma is whether the African nation state such as Ghana operating within the imperatives and logics of globalisation, the neo-liberal challenge and the ever present discourse of inadequate public resources will be more inclined towards such a perspective.

In all these, the profundity of the state's presence in the affairs of the local arena that is deemed sufficient is little explored. This thesis recommends further studies into the perception of what the state means to local actors, the depth of the states presence in the locality and the nature of the role that the state should play in the texture of village life.

8.5.2 Exploring the possibilities and potential for participation

Specifically, the study has shown the diverse and mixed motivations that shape human actions, especially, what drives people to participate in local

governance arrangements. The study has also demonstrated the importance of understanding the subjective meaning that individuals attach to their decisions and the different ways in which individuals take advantage of and also respond to the effects of structure. The subjective nature of action goes beyond the economic incentives for action to understand people's subjective values and goals. The differences in culture between particular contexts suggest that individual values informing action will be context specific and will differ from place to place. Therefore, development approaches that rely on participation should consider human agency in the places that they occur. The emphasis should be on how people undertake certain actions taking into consideration their social location within the society and their relationship with others. Therefore, this study suggests that local governance approaches need to adequately consider the relational and contextual characteristic of agency and to consider the impacts of existing institutions that shape interactions among interdependent individuals.

Significantly related to the above recommendation is the need for development policy interventions to engage with the underlying factors that prevent certain people within the community from exercising agency to shape the affairs of the community. The analysis in Chapter Five revealed how the history of cooperation enabled the traditional leadership to play an active role in the affairs of the village though they are not part of the official institutional arrangement for decentralisation. The elite capture problem suggests that central intervention is always needed to ensure progressive outcomes for decentralisation. Analysing the relationship between local social structure and which particular individuals shape decentralisation revealed that

decentralisation reforms do not benefit the disadvantaged in the community who are normally incapable of using the structures provided by decentralisation.

Similarly, local cultures do not necessarily accept or facilitate democratic procedures which give equal weight to each individual (Crook and Sverrison, 2001: 8). This suggests that consciously providing new local government structures may not result in altering the existing power relationship and institutions within the community but rather reinforce their power and position. That was why existing institutions continued to shape who became a DA representative and village interactions. Therefore understanding the resources, endowments and opportunities that facilitated the role of existing elites, in this case traditional leadership, in the community will broaden strategies that are required to bring marginalised individuals into development.

The material and livelihood concerns of the poor also need to be considered for them have an effective social life. In the study we noticed how the agency of certain individuals was focused outside the new spaces and even beyond the community in search of more ordinary livelihood concerns.

8.5.3 Understanding existing institutions

The literature on decentralised governance suggests the centrality of formal local government structures in promoting participation in community based initiatives. Institutional theory focuses on robust formal organisations to make good the deficiencies of old or weak institutions. Within such an approach people are seen as rational and their actions informed by conscious reasoning. Purposively crafting institutions to shape the behaviour of people and their

social organisation implies severing their ties to existing institutions. For several people the cost of mediating their interactions within such specific institutions may be high.

However, the study revealed that in everyday social life people consciously and unconsciously relied on diverse institutions arrangements to shape their interactions. Therefore, institutions arising as a result of interventions served to create additional channels of institutional membership and access to resources (Berry, 1993) and not to determine which particular institutions that individuals should use to shape particular interactions. People based on their subjective values had the agency to decide on which institutions to use to shape their everyday interactions.

The reality is that new institutions and existing ones interact in many ways within a particular locality to shape outcomes of local governance. These interactions that are either for instrumental or functional reasons or due to the unintended outcomes of policy may result in conflict between these institutions. Therefore, it is important for decentralisation policy to emphasise an understanding of the depth of existing institutions that shape interactions within a particular locality prior to the intervention. Building clear linkages between customary and modern governance institutions through effective nesting can contribute to creating synergy between the state and local populations, improving the effectiveness of local government structure and redressing inequities based on gender, ethnicity, and social status.

This is also important for policy makers since people really do not attach democratisation to the affairs of the village chief but rather saw their role in the community as role founded in culture and the right to lead. This argument

does not suggest the uncritical acceptance of the role of chiefs in decentralisation but rather assess the role of chiefs in local government structures and identify their existing roles that fit with various local government activities in their area while taking into consideration other various actors in the field of local government. It may also be desirable for the state to blend the formalise local government structures with the activities of local chiefs.

Related to this point is the idea that social actors do not subscribe solely to formal institutions or new interventions to mediate their mundane interactions. Hence, existing socially embedded institutions need to be adequately understood and considered in approaches to decentralisation. This reinforces Cleaver (2002) argument of the importance of 'understanding of the content, underlying principles and social effects of institutions, not merely their visible forms' (2002: 28). Thus, having an in-depth knowledge on the content and form of the varied institutions at play within the locality will give an idea of which blend of institutions, both bureaucratic and socially embedded will result in greater effectiveness. This supports the assertion that there is no one 'right' institutional fix, rather as Rhodes (1997: 47) puts it, 'it's the mix that matters' for effective governance. This requires designing new local governance structures in such a way that they are compatible with existing local organisations, organising practices and norms that are beneficial to the locality.

Therefore, incorporating individual subjective values and the social context into the process of institutionalising decentralisation will result in greater understanding of the complexity and heterogeneity of the local context. By considering in particular the history of existing social relationship, the ongoing struggles and contestations over power and resources within the locality and

among diverse individuals, the diverse institutional channels that shape agency for different people, then, the dynamics of the social context will become explicit. The consequence is that decentralisation through local governance arrangements will be able to adequately engage with the situations and relationships which shape local governance. Otherwise, institutional approaches to decentralisation will continue to benefit a few individuals while failing a large number of people in their quest to be involved in the governance of their locality.

Appendix I

The generous nature of rule interpretation

The district assembly bye-law allowed village leaders to fine individuals who do not pay *notkuatoo*, continuously absented themselves from communal labour or even send them to court but that was not done due to the time and cost involved in prosecuting cases at courts in the district capital. Application of rules was not instant but involved a process of negotiation to get the individuals conforming to rules.

For individuals who did not attend communal labour emphasis was placed on dialogue so that they change their behaviour. Such individuals were allowed to do their part of the communal work at a later period if they showed remorse. For others who continue to be difficult we report them to the chief. Some get go away free instead of being fined or sanctioned to do their bit of the communal labour. This practice is encouraging some people to stay away from communal work.

For those who do not pay fines we report them to the village chief. But you see the chief and elders have their own way of getting these individuals to pay the fines or do their bit of communal labour. If the chiefs invited individuals and they fail to honour the invitation they are not compelled to use force but leave the person alone. Instances occur in village life that the chiefs will get such individuals to live up to their responsibilities. This can even delay till death of the individual. For example, when you die, your family will never be issued with a permit to bury you if you have been in contravention of any rules or are in areas of *Ntokuatoo*. The chief owns the land so without him giving you a land at the cemetery your grave can never be dug for you to be buried. A funeral date cannot even be fixed without your family paying all outstanding levies and fines. So it's the responsibility of your family to make sure that you do the right thing by paying participating in communal labour and respecting village elders. Village elders intercede on your behalf when you are in trouble, so you have to make sure you are in their good books.

Appendix II

Contestation among the four village chiefs over claims to land

'When the idea of the creation of the lake was mooted by Osagyefo Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, the four Akan speaking villages were located in the midst of other Guan and Ewe tribes met and had consultation that manifested in their decision to relocate together. Before being resettled the towns were not too far away from each other and had intermarriages over the years. So the decision to resettle together was collective. When the lake was formed we lived peacefully with each other in Notnaboma, meaning *'we have met the plateau'*. The four villages had one Town Development Committee (TDC) which later became the town committees for each village. Initially we thought we are brothers for good but the generation of today is trying to make cracks in the bond of brotherhood. About 46 years ago, those who brought us here to re-settle, most of whom are dead now, loved themselves and worked together for the common good of all. The lust for money and lust for power among the current generation is destroying the good neighborliness that existed among us.

There were three different ethnic divisions each with its own land. Initially there was no friction concerning ownership of the land. But these days, those of us (the chiefs) who had our farming lands near the Digya area submerged by the lake have no land to farm. When we farm on Agyaade stool lands, the elders demand rent from us claiming that the land belongs to them. If you cut a timber here or in any part of the forest they will not allow you to cut it because they claim it belongs to them (Akroso or Agyaade stool). If you step on Agyaade land to cut timber they will not allow you to cut it away, even though you might have the permit from the Forestry Department to fell a tree for a domestic use. My subjects went to farm at Agyaase forest about 3 miles away from here, they were asked to pay ground rents even though the government has acquired the land for the state and paid compensation to them. Moreso, we are one people with different ancestral lineage.

I have petitioned the government over a year now and nothing has been heard about it. I am very sure that people of Akroso had collected their compensation. Because of these agitation majority of Supuom people left to settle at Bridgeano about 20 years ago. They were the second highest populated settlers but they were not prepared to tolerate such cheating and disregard for the needs of other members of the villages forming Ntonaboma. Until a government official comes to interpret the government acquisition to the chiefs for them to understand that A is A and B is B they will continue to suppress other people. One day it will escalate into serious violence. It is like *'cow dung the surface is hard but the under is soft and hot'*. I am sorry I have left my files at Accra else I would have given you a copy of the instrument'. This is the beginning of a potential conflict which needs to be settled before it escalates into violence (**unedited interview with the chief of Yamuso, Nana Adade Bekoe II on 12/05/2007 who gave me the permission to reproduce the transcript**).

Appendix III

The contested nature of the authority of appointed DA members

The attempt by the appointed members to manage amenities emanating from the district was challenged and this had to be done by the elected members or other community members in consultation with the chiefs. An example was the decision by the appointed assembly man living in Supom, Mr. E. Y. Mensah to take over the management of the only public toilet in Ntonaboma. The toilet was previously managed by a village member who was always accused of embezzling the money collected and not using it to buy detergents for cleaning the facility. Reason given was that the position of the appointed members was transient and that their authority could be revoked at any time by the appointing authority or if there was a change in government. Such a change in roles at the village level may come with its own accountability challenges. Also the role of the appointed members of the assembly was at the back stages and did not involve activities that brought them into mainstream communal activities.

For example during the renovation of the community clinic the appointed member of the DA, Mr. E. Y. Mensah who was also the chairman of the Area council was given the responsibility to oversee the project by the district assembly by virtue of his position. What the appointed assemblyman did was to bring in the elected member for Agyaade/Yamuoso, Mr Apreku Nkansah to act as his link between him and the communities due to the fragile nature of his authority within the community. So within the official spaces of the district assembly Mr E. Y. Mensah was in charge of the project but at the community level Mr Apreku Nkansah was responsible for the day-to-day management of the project.

During the project period his authority was continuously contested and he had to negotiate with other community actors and other authority systems in trying to re-assert his public authority and control over the project. He was also accused of not collaborating with the other elected DA member from Akroso, Nana Akuamoah Boateng who felt the AC chairman had monopolised the whole project and was not been transparent in the utilisation of the funds released for the project. Nana Akuamoah Boateng used his position as a traditional chief to get the other chiefs to request Mr. E. Y. Mensah to render accounts to them and keep them involved in the financial management of the project. This resulted in the artisans withdrawing their voluntary labour and requesting that they should be paid for the services they rendered. However, community members mentioned that in earlier community projects the services of these artisans were provided freely. Mr. E. Y. Mensah had to bring in other authority structures to negotiate and settle the issue.

Appendix IV

Sources (key informants)

Name	Date
Nana Asumadu, Gyasehene of Aygaade	10/02/2007, 26/03/2007
Nana Akuamoah Boateng, Mankrado of Akroso, DA member for Akroso).	03/02/2007 04/02/2007 12/04/2007
Interview with Foyoo ,27 years and a Village Influential Youth	24/02/2007
GD with the Akroso Traditional Council	26/03/2007
GD with the Yamuoso Traditional Council	29/03/2007
GD with the Agyaade Traditional Council	21/02/2007
GD for women in Yamuoso village	26/03/2007
GD for men in Yamuoso village	26/03/2007
GD – mixed members of the various bureaucratic committees in Akroso Village	20/03/2007
interview with the chief of Yamuoso, Nana Adade Bekoe II on	12/05/2007
GD with UC and Assembly members	29/03/2007
Interview with UC member	18/04/2007
Mary Addae Konadu,	15/04/2007
Interview with Appointed DA member	12/02/2007
Diary notes during the Ntonaboma Easter Harvest	08/04/2007
Interview with Adwoah Serwaa	21/05/2007)
Mr. Nketia, UC Chairman,	03/02/2007).
Interview with Opayin Addae	14/02/2007 20/05/2007
Interview separately for three village members in Akroso village after communal labour	26/04/2007
Interview with Mr. Nkansah, Agyaade/Yamuoso DA member	14/03/2007
Interview with a Ntow, a village youth on the tractor committee	12/03/2007
Interview with Mr. E. Y. Mensah	17/01/2007
Interview with Nana Akuamoah Boateng, DA member for Akroso).	04/02/2007
Interview with water Committee member	03/05/2007
Interview with Sammy; 35, Unsuccessful District Assembly Contestant for Agyaade/Yamuoso	22/03/2007 23/03/2007
Interview with Asare, ordinary village member,	23/05/2007
Field notes, village meeting).	13/02/07
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Table 2.1: Modes of participation in development theory and practice

Forms of participation	What participation means to the implemented agency	What 'participation' means for those on the receiving end	Approach	Participants viewed as	Why invite/involve?
Nominal	Legitimation – to show they are doing something	Inclusion – to retain some access to potential benefits	Community Development	Objects narrow form of citizenship	To enlist people in projects or processes, so as to secure compliance, minimize dissent, lend legitimacy
Instrumental	Efficiency – to limit funders' input, draw on community contributions and make projects more cost-effective	Cost – of time spent on project-related labour and other activities	Political participation	Instruments	To make projects or interventions run more efficiently, by enlisting contributions, delegating responsibilities
Representative	Sustainability – to avoid creating dependency	Leverage – to influence the shape the project takes and its management	Populist or participation in development	Actors	To get in tune with public views and values, to garner good ideas, to defuse opposition, to enhance responsiveness
Transformative	Empowerment – to enable people to make their own decisions, work out what to do and take action	Empowerment – to be able to decide and act for themselves	Alternative development, Social capital, Participatory governance	Agents	To build political capabilities, critical consciousness and confidence; to enable to demand rights; to enhance accountability

Adopted from White (1996 : 7–9) cited in Cornwall (2008: 273) and Hickey and Mohan (2004: 9).

Table 3.1 Summary of Data Collection Method and Respondents for the study

Who/domains	objectives	Data Generation Methods
Akroso, Supom, Yamuso and Agyaade	<p>To understand the participation or non-participation of various actors in village governance, their motivation for doing so and the factors enabling and constraining their participation Specifically;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to understand how new institutional spaces are accessed, by who and with what resources and the nature of the selection process • 2.to explore how village decisions and rules are negotiated and in which spaces, who makes the final decisions and interprets the rules with what resources • 3.How are leaders held to account and through what means, formal or informal 	<p>Informal interviews of key informants and unstructured observations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 13 members from Akroso (5 women) • 6 members from Supom (3 women) • 8 members from Yamuoso (4 woman) • 10 members from Agyaade (4 woman) • 5 formal UC and DA representatives • For other informants selection was purposively done based on age, (18- 30years), gender and ethnicity and well-being (poor, 27 (12, women) and non-poor, 8(3 women) • Group Discussion separately for men and women • Selected 2 youth members in informal discussions • Observed 2 village meetings one at Akroso and the other at Agyaade • Observed 3 town committee meetings in Akroso, Yamuoso and Agyadde • Observed 2 communal labour one in Akroso, and another in Agyaade • Observed tractor committee and School management committee meeting
Akroso, and Agyaade	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To understand the dynamics of village governance and the nature of interactions occurring between existing institutions and new ones and how this shapes village governance • To understand how social relationships, values and beliefs are brought to bear on participation in village activities • To understand the nature of interaction occurring among the four villages and how this affected co-operation and governance 	
Traditional leaders, Assembly and Unit, Committee Members and the town committee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To understand their role in village management and how their authority is enacted in practiced and legitimated? • To understand who has power and authority within the village and through what processes 	<p>Informal interviews - Selection was purposively done</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All 4 assembly members (2 appointed and 2 elected, • 8 UC members from Akroso (5 from Sukuumu and 3 from Ahenbono UC (3 appointed 5 elected) • 6 UC members from Ayaade/Yamuso (2 appointed 4 elected; 2 women) • 6 UC members from JSS UC ((3 appointed, 3 elected; • All four chiefs for were interviewed. • 3 sub chiefs from Akroso, 2 from Supom 1 each from Agyaade • Group discussions one each for the Akroso and Agyaade Traditional councils

Table 4.1 A summary of Ghana's history of decentralisation

Phase	Period	Characteristics
Phase One	1878 -1951	Colonial period provided a statutory basis for local government through chiefs referred to as the NA. The main strategy was to modify the traditional systems of organising to suit modern conditions through indirect rule. No provision for opportunities for the development of local democracy or democratic local government in the rural areas.
Phase Two	1951 – 1957	Attempts at decolonisation resulted in local government reforms aimed at effectively designing institutions that would be responsive to the needs of the local population opening a window for community participation in local governance.
Phase Three	1957-1988	Placed emphasis on administrative decentralisation rather than devolution of political authority. Rationales for decentralisation during this period were economic and centralisation of state power stifling participation. The outcome of the local government reforms during this period was a dual hierarchy structure in which the local government and the central government institutions operated in parallel.
Phase Four	1988 to present	Placed emphasis on political liberalisation and democratisation that were shaped by external conditionalities. Combination of administrative and democratic decentralisation. Introduction of local level institutions that was genuinely participatory and responsible to the local community.

Table 5.1 Dynamic structure/agency framework for understanding differential participation in local government structures

	Agency			
Structure		Local norms	Personal motivations	Resources
	Age	<p>Majority of the villagers expected village traditional leadership to solve village problems and take the leading role in village governance</p> <p>Forms of power inequality that shaped social relations in the family, kin and community permeated the local government structures privileging older men and returnee retired civil servants to run the affairs of the village</p> <p>The youth are to behave appropriately towards village elders and report any problems and uncertainties to them</p>	<p>Village elders think that they had the social obligation to ensure that village affairs are well managed as was done by their ancestors.</p> <p>Majority of the youth thought that the elders had the right to lead.</p> <p>The youth felt that society expects them to migrate to the cities to look for paid jobs and send remittances to cater for their family members</p> <p>Respect and Social status within the village</p>	<p>Links to traditional authorities/lineage provided the resource for the elderly to become representatives on local government structures</p> <p>Skill and knowledge/education</p> <p>Social positioning</p>
	Wealth	<p>The norm that the wealthy must be accorded privileged position in the community still prevails. This was evident in the daily life of Ntonaboma where wealthy individuals occupied front pews at church and other important village functions.</p>	<p>Poverty was a challenge to participation in local governance.</p> <p>Attending village meetings was time consuming.</p> <p>Majority of village members gave little priority to anything that does not impinge upon their livelihoods.</p>	<p>Party Politics provided the politically connected and powerful to be appointed DA and UC members if even they lacked the qualities to become a representative</p> <p>Skill and knowledge/education</p>
	Gender	<p>Cultural norms of women undertaking a passive role in the management of community affairs still prevail.</p> <p>Women have to always negotiate and seek consent from the male dominated village traditional leadership to undertake any activity in the village</p>	<p>Majority of women had low self esteem.</p> <p>Those who were married depended on their husbands for their livelihood survival. Other women depended on their family members for their livelihood</p> <p>Low education made some of the women think that they could manage the affairs of the village</p>	<p>Kin networks, religion, wealth, and education facilitated access for some women to the local government structures</p>