RESEARCH and EVALUATION

The 'silent pistol' in Ghana's local government system: presiding members vs. chief executives

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Abstract

Decentralisation and local governance aim at local economic development, but collaboration among key actors at the local level is essential in realising this objective. However, at district assembly level Ghana exhibits problematic conflicts between district chief executives (DCEs), who head the executive committee, and presiding members (PMs) who convene and preside over assembly deliberations, acting as speaker. This study aims to unpack the main causes of such unsavoury conflicts by using 13 case studies from the Ashanti Region. Both primary and secondary data were collected for the study. Primary data was gathered from a selection of 40 key informants drawn from three main groups including DCEs, PMs, and other stakeholders such as regional coordinating council members, assembly members and chiefs. The main research instrument was one-on-one in-depth interviews with participants. The study found deep-seated conflicts between DCEs and PMs, in some cases even transcending these two actors to involve a greater section of actors within the local government administration. The study noted that professional bureaucrats within the local government service are affected when allegations of affiliation are levelled against them. The study also found that the legal status of DCEs and PMs appears to be the main driver of potential conflict, although other context-specific issues were also prevalent.

Keywords: Conflicts, local government, decentralisation, district assemblies, presiding member, district chief executive, Ghana

Introduction

Decentralisation and local government administration in Ghana seek to facilitate local development and participation, which requires the active and cordial participation of all stakeholders in the governance process. The Local Government Act (Act 462) of 1993 as well as Chapter 20 of the 1992 Republican Constitution envisage a partnership relationship with checks and balances between key

actors in the local government structure they enshrine. The main actors include the district chief executive (DCE), the presiding member (PM), members of parliament (MPs), the district coordinating director (DCD), assembly members both elected and appointed, and technical/professional and supporting staff. Others include traditional authorities, opinion and religious leaders, economic associations and occupational groupings, social groups and membership or faith-based associations, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and community-based organisations (CBOs), labour organisations or unions, the formal private sector and local media. A cordial relationship between actors is a *sine qua non* to foster the socio-economic development required of metropolitan, municipal and district assemblies (MMDAs) in Ghana. Local government areas are designated as Metropolitan, Municipal or District Assemblies if they have minimum populations of 250,000, 95,000 or 75,000 people respectively.

Though local governance requires cooperation and harmony among key actors to foster local development, in Ghana the system has been rife with interpersonal and inter-agency conflict in many MMDAs, which tends to reduce the efficacy of the system (Kessey 2006). Both anecdotal and empirical evidence suggest power struggles and relational difficulties among key actors in most MMDAs in Ghana that militate against unity of purpose or *esprit de corps* and hinder development at local level.

Conflict, an outcome of behaviour, is an integral part of human life and an inevitable part of any organisation, and occurs because of differences in opinion and thoughts (Rahim et al. 2000), as well as differences in goals, values and aspirations among different stakeholders, whose goals may be incompatible (Baron 1989; Hotepo et al. 2010). Conflicts within organisations are not necessarily a bad phenomenon (Ongori 2009; Kapusuzoglu 2010) and therefore must not be completely suppressed or eliminated, but instead managed to enhance organisational learning and effectiveness (Rahim 2002). The prevailing view is that whilst some level of conflict, or ordinary disagreement on issues, is good to avoid 'groupthink' and collusion in corruption, conflict becomes destructive when it becomes more sustained, personal and counter-productive. This point has forcefully been brought home by Onyishi and Asogwa (2009), who show that conflict becomes destructive when it is allowed to tear individuals, groups or society apart as a result of poor management. In such a case conflict becomes dysfunctional and should be strenuously avoided. In this paper, the term '**conflict' is used to describe a protracted, sustained and unsavoury lack of consensus and cooperation between actors, which is different from ordinary and episodic disagreements on specific issues**.

Such sustained tensions have prevailed in Ghana's local government system for many years. For instance, Ayee (1999, 2012) traces such local-level conflicts back to the independence era:

- From 1957 to 1966, the main conflict was among the then-ruling Convention People's Party functionaries at the local levels. There was also a lack of clear definition of roles between

district commissioners (DCs) and other local government officers, which resulted in 'institutional dualism' (Amonoo 1981).

- From 1967 to 1978 there were two main types of conflict in local governments in Ghana: conflict over roles, responsibilities and relationships; and conflict over the establishment of district councils and the siting of their headquarters. The main actors in these conflicts were the regional officers, district officers and DCEs.

- From 1988 to 1992, before the Local Government Act 1993 was passed, conflicts over the location of district capitals (where acrimonious lobbying took place over where the district capital should be located) and over roles, mainly involved district secretaries, PMs, assembly members, cadres of the revolution (CDRs) and chiefs. In some instances, assembly members who felt their local chiefs were sabotaging them even bought parallel *gong gongs* (a noisy instrument) to mobilise people.

Since the 1992 Republican Constitution of Ghana ushered in a Fourth Republic, the country has witnessed various protracted tensions among key local government officials, especially between DCEs and MPs, between DCEs and DCDs, and between DCEs and PMs. The local government system as provided in Chapter 20 of the Constitution was intended to encourage grassroots participation, self-governance and accelerated development; however these goals have been hampered by relationship conflicts in many assemblies. Often, the relationship between the DCE and other key actors is characterised by deep-seated misunderstandings that lead to conflicts, tensions and suspicions.

Though conflicts that occur at the local level are hydra-headed, it appears that in Ghana greater attention has been paid to conflicts between DCEs and MPs (Tettey et al. 2003, p. 58) and less to those between DCEs and PMs. Yet the conflicts that occur between DCEs and their PMs are potentially important for discussion because under the 1992 Constitution the former is head of the executive committee whilst the latter chairs and controls proceedings of the assembly (Article 244(2a) of 1992 Constitution). Both also need to have adherents (at least a two-thirds majority) among assembly members before assuming their positions, and their roles possess some similarities. The DCE is appointed by central government (the president) with the **approval of not less than two-thirds of assembly members** (Article 243(1)). The PM, on the other hand, is elected – but again, by **not less than a two-thirds majority of all assembly members** (Section 17(1)(3) of the Local Government Act 1993). A partnership between these two office holders is required to facilitate and harmonise the executive and legislative roles of the assembly, and without *esprit de corps* between these two foremost actors, assembly projects and proceedings cannot take place smoothly.

However, a conflict between DCE and PM may not necessarily just be between the two individuals, but can be a team or group conflict in which a house (district assembly) may be divided among itself.

The phenomenon of conflict between DCEs and PMs has been widely reported in the Fourth Republic local government dispensation; however, there is a paucity of literature on the subject. The main object of this paper is to examine the causes and consequences of the tensions, conflicts and power struggles between DCEs and PMs in Ghana, by examining case studies from 13 different local government areas within the Ashanti Region. For brevity, the term 'DCE' in this paper includes not just district chief executives, but also municipal and metropolitan chief executives (often referred to by the acronym 'MMDCEs') (see Section 162 of the Local Government Act 1993).

The paper is organised into five main sections. The first section provides background and a definition of the problem. Section two provides a brief review of relevant literature, whilst section three covers the study's methodology. The fourth section presents the data collected and a detailed discussion of key research findings. The final section provides a summary, conclusions and policy suggestions.

Literature review

Ghana's current local government system

The thrust of Ghana's decentralisation policy over the last 27 years has been to promote popular participation by shifting the process of governance from 'top-down' to 'bottom-up', with a focus on the devolution of power, competencies and resources to the district level (Yeboah-Assiamah 2014). The main features of the policy as outlined in the government's policy framework (see Local Government Act 1993; Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development 1996) are devolution of power and authority, administrative decentralisation, decentralised development planning, fiscal decentralisation and public–private partnership (see also Mahama 2009).

This policy forms the basis of the current local government system, which is premised on three core assumptions:

- development is that which responds to people's problems and furthers their goals, objectives and priorities;

- development is a shared responsibility between central government, local governments, non-governmental organisations and the people – the ultimate beneficiaries of development – all of whom must be closely linked;

- local government institutions are necessary to provide focal points for local energies, enthusiasm, initiative and organisation to demonstrate new skills and leadership (Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development 1996).

District assemblies are the human institutions created to give effect to these assumptions. They aim to create a forum at the district level where a team of development agents, representatives of the people and other agencies agree on the development problems of the district and their underlying causative factors, and decide on the combined actions necessary to deal with them. District assemblies were

given legal form by the new local government system and legal backing by the Local Government Law 1988, Provisional National Defence Council Law (PNDCL) 207, now superseded by Chapter 20 of the 1992 Constitution and the Local Government Act 1993.[1]

Section 10(1) of the Local Government Act 1993 states that a district assembly shall exercise political and administrative authority in its district, and provide guidance, give direction to and supervise all other administrative authorities in the district. The Act also outlines the responsibilities of the assembly, which include:

- being responsible for the overall development of the district and ensuring the preparation and submission of a) district development plans through the regional coordinating council to the commissioner for approval; and b) the district budget related to the approved plans to the Minister for Finance for approval;

- formulating and executing plans, programmes and strategies for the effective mobilisation of the resources necessary for the overall development of the district;

- promoting and supporting productive activity and social development in the district and removing any obstacle to the initiation of development;

- in cooperation with the appropriate national and local security agencies, being responsible for the maintenance of security and public safety in the district.

The district assembly performs these functions through the collaborative effort of its administrative and political wings (executive and legislative). The DCE and PM head the executive and legislative bodies, respectively, of the political wing. The roles of the DCE and PM encompass the overall responsibilities of the district assembly.

The DCE's role includes the following:

- responsibility for the day-to-day performance of the executive and administrative functions of the assembly;
- supervision of decentralised departments of the assembly;
- chairing executive committee and assembly tender committee meetings; and
- representing the president in the district.

The PM meanwhile performs roles including:

- controlling deliberation and ensuring good conduct and good behaviour at assembly meetings;
- presiding over general assembly meetings; and
- chairing the public relations and complaints committee.

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[1] For the legal framework underpinning decentralisation, see Yeboah-Assiamah 2014, p. 6.

Conceptualising conflict and typologies

The concept of conflict in organisational settings has been defined in various ways in the literature (see Appelbaum et al. 1999; Wall and Callister 1995; Dwivedi 2001). For instance, Appelbaum et al. (1999) conceptualise conflict as a process of social interaction involving a struggle over claims to resources, power and status, and/or over beliefs and other preferences and desires. On their part, Wall and Callister (1995, p. 517) define it as "*a process in which one party perceives that its interests are being opposed or negatively affected by another party*" whilst in the view of Dwivedi (2001) conflict involves a process of hampering someone's efforts by blockage, frustrating his or her plans.

Various sources of administrative conflicts have been identified in the literature (Robbins 1974; Nelson and Quick 2012). For instance, Robbins (1974) cites three main driving forces or sources of conflict; communication, structure and personal variables. This suggests that it is not just personal attributes and personality traits, but also poor communication and poor organisational structure, with a lack of clarity on roles and functions, which can cause conflict in an organisation

Recently, scholars have grouped the causes of conflict into two main types: structural and personal (Nelson and Quick 2012). Structural causes involve procedures, legislative provisions on roles, status, and organisational processes, which are all a potential source of conflict where there is ambiguity or lack of clarity; whilst personal causes are propelled by individualistic tendencies. The latter have been characterised as involving individuals' styles, values, beliefs, principles and mottoes in life, which determine their choices and objectives (Baron 1989).

DCEs and PMs in context: a stage for potential conflict?

It is also important to relate the above theoretical conception of conflict to Ghana's local government case and the specific conflicts between DCEs and PMs.

DCEs are appointed by the president, so one could argue that their actions are most likely to reflect the wishes and preferences of the ruling party in government (Yeboah-Assiamah 2014). The DCE serves as a link between central government and the district (Ayee 1999). He/she also chairs the executive committee, the most powerful committee in the assembly. The DCE is also responsible to and removable by the president, so may be tempted to follow the central government line rather than prioritising local circumstances (Yeboah-Assiamah et al. 2014).

By contrast, in accordance with Section 17(1, 3) of the Local Government Act 1993, the PM of a district assembly is elected from amongst its members by at least a two-thirds majority (see also Article 244(2) of the 1992 Constitution). He/she is one of the most powerful actors in the assembly, as he/she convenes and presides over the day-to-day meetings of the assembly and performs other functions prescribed by law (Article 244(3a, b)). Assembly decisions are taken by majority vote and in situations where there is a tie the PM has a casting vote (see Section 18(3) of the Act). This

powerful officer holds office for two years, after which he/she is eligible for re-election (Section 17(4)). The PM is accountable mainly to the assembly, as he/she is directly elected by members. However, the current system makes the DCE appear to have a dual allegiance: first to the president who directly appoints him or her, and then perhaps to the assembly or to local people (see Yeboah-Assiamah et al. 2014). At times, assembly members may disagree with the DCE, who may want to serve his or her external (central government or presidential) party's interest – perhaps at the expense of local needs. Thus, DCEs and PMs may sometimes disagree on issues and courses of action to be taken. Since these are two powerful actors in the assembly with their own constituencies (ie adherents or power base within the assembly), any major disagreement between them has serious ramifications for the *modus operandi* and activities of their district assembly. This paper argues that it is the legal framework that is largely responsible for the observed conflict between DCEs and PMs in Ghana's MMDAs.

A political structure has been deliberately created which ensures a clear separation of powers between the DCE and the PM. The functions of the DCE and the PM serve as checks and balances to each other in the district assembly, as can be seen in the following areas:

- the PM receives his/her mandate from the district assembly (as he/she is elected by assembly members) and is supposed to act as a check on the DCE;

- the DCE chairs the executive committee, from which the PM is excluded;

- the PM can propose that assembly members pass a vote of no confidence in the DCE; and

- the PM chairs the assembly's public relations and complaints committee and therefore in principle has powers to investigate complaints, allegations or reports against the DCE.

Figure 1: Conceptual framework showing the relationship between DCEs and PMs
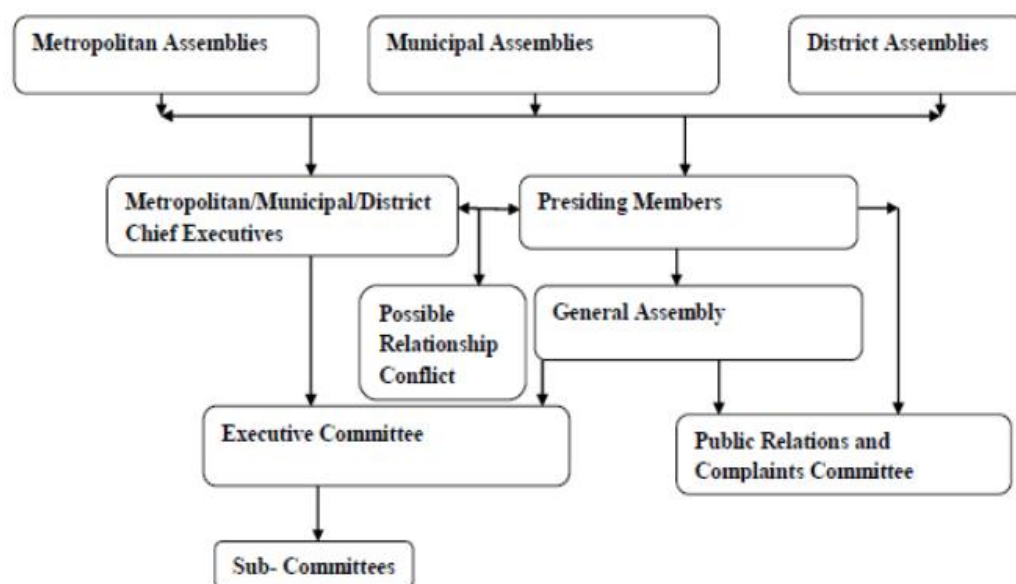
Source: Authors

MMDAs by law have both DCEs and PMs. The DCE is a representative of the president at the local level, so he/she has dual allegiance: both to the citizens, and to the president who appointed him or her. The DCE is nominated by the president, must be approved by two-thirds of the members of the district assembly present and voting at a meeting convened for that purpose, and is subsequently appointed by the president. The DCE has combined political, executive and administrative powers within the MMDA. The approval of the DCE by the assembly is presided over by the PM, who is the chair of the assembly. It is the duty of the assembly to either accept or reject the president's nominee for the position of DCE. Once accepted, the DCE becomes a voting member of the assembly, though not an elected member.

The position of the PM is established in Chapter 20(244) of the 1992 Constitution and in the Local Government Act 1993. He/she is elected from among the members of the assembly and must be approved by at least two-thirds of all members of the assembly present. The PM holds office for a term of two years and may be eligible for re-election after the end of his or her term of office. The PM presides over general assembly meetings, chairs discussions and ensures good conduct of and good behaviour at meetings. This puts the PM in a powerful position regarding the DCE's confirmation or otherwise in post and at assembly meetings.

The DCE and the PM chair the two statutory committees of the district assembly: the executive committee and the public relations and complaints committee respectively. These two committees perform different roles for the smooth functioning of the assembly. The DCE presides over the executive committee, of which the PM is not a member, as well as over the executive and coordinating functions of the district assembly. This committee implements the decisions of the district assembly. The PM is not a member of the executive committee partly because he/she leads the process of its dissolution if it is not performing efficiently according to its remit under the Local Government Act 1993. Under the Act, the assembly may by resolution of two-thirds of the members dissolve the executive committee and elect another.

As noted above, the PM is the chair of the public relations and complaints committee. This is an important committee of the assembly, as it receives, investigates and makes recommendations on public complaints to the district assembly about the conduct of assembly staff. This committee is meant to promote transparency, openness, effectiveness, efficiency and public accountability. It serves as a platform for citizens to express their views on the conduct of people in the assembly and to seek redress. The DCE is not a member of this committee, which means that complaints about the DCE can be investigated by the PM, putting the PM in a powerful position.

The executive and administrative functions of the district assembly are discharged through the executive committee, which is responsible for day-to-day performance of the executive and

coordinating functions and the implementation of the resolutions or decisions of the general assembly. The executive committee of the assembly creates sub-committees to deal with specific relevant issues and submit recommendations to the executive committee for consideration. The executive committee has the following statutory sub-committees: development planning, social services, works, justice and security, finance and administration – and any other sub-committee that the district assembly may decide.

The Local Government Act states that "*each sub-committee shall consist of such members of the District Assembly as shall be determined by the Assembly; except that each member of the District Assembly other than the Presiding Member shall serve on at least on sub-committee during that member's tenure of office*". The PM is deliberately left out in the composition of both the executive committee and the sub-committees. The aim is clearly the separation of powers and the creation of a system of checks and balances. The DCE presides over matters brought by the sub-committees to the executive committee for decision. The PM, not being a member, helps him/her address such issues during assembly meetings as neutrally as possible. The plans and programmes of the sub-committees are coordinated and submitted by the executive committee (chaired by the DCE) to the assembly as comprehensive plans of action – where their reception is presided over by the PM. Thus it can be seen that the PM and DCE plays dichotomous but complementary roles which have the potential to lead to conflict between the two.

Methodology

This research adopted a multiple case study design within a qualitative approach, drawing on both primary and secondary data. Thirteen multiple cases (namely, district assemblies) within the Ashanti Region were purposively selected for the study. The Ashanti Region was chosen because it is the stronghold of the opposition New Patriotic Party and therefore provided likely conditions for potential conflict. This is because all DCEs are appointed by the president and are thus mainly from the ruling National Democratc Congress party, whilst all PMs are chosen 'endogenously' from among assembly members, who in Ashanti Region tend to have a 'soft spot' for the opposition New Patriotic Party.

The target population for this study included DCEs and PMs, together with selected stakeholders such as chiefs, assembly members and some local government service staff in the selected areas. In all, 40 respondents were selected. In each of the 13 MMDAs, both the PM and the chief executive officers were selected, giving 26 respondents. Additionally, five district coordinating directors, four chiefs and five members of local legislative assemblies from some study areas contributed a convenience sample. The main instrument for primary data collection was in-depth interviews, each lasting an average of 45 to 60 minutes.

Discussion of results

Partnership between DCEs and PMs: the ideal for smooth governance

Chapter 20 of Ghana's 1992 Constitution and its Local Government Act 1993 create the positions of political and legislative head in every MMDA in Ghana. The PM performs the functions of the legislative head and the DCE performs those of the executive head. However, to carry out their duties effectively requires close interaction between them on both legislative and political matters. Cooperative partnership working is the ideal for smooth governance. Though a PM is voted in whilst a DCE is directly appointed by government and subsequently approved by assembly members, they are both supposed to be non-partisan, neutral and loyal, and to serve the interest of the people at all times. They consult each other on a myriad of governance issues. For example, whilst the DCE is responsible for initiating a policy, the PM and his/her assembly members perform a legislative role of scrutiny and approval. Despite the theoretical separation of their functions in practice the two actors find themselves often interacting. The framers of the 1992 Constitution and the Local Government Act deliberately envisaged such separation of powers and interaction as paving the way for first-hand information sharing, checks and balances and participatory governance. One local government official interviewed maintained:

> *These two roles were purposely delineated to typify what occurs within central governance structures where the speaker of parliament chairs the legislature [here, PM] to serve as check and balance on the president [here, DCE]. There too, the president needs to prudently lobby the speaker to get bills, policies, appointments and policies approved. This lobbying and partnership is an ideal situation for governance especially at the local level.*

Another respondent confirmed these 'interaction effects', stating that:

> *The functional roles of the PM and the DCE are technically separate, [but] ideally they are intertwined and symbiotic. This could create some grounds for conflict, especially when the rules of engagement are not explicitly stated.*

Respondents noted that when DCEs want approval for budgets and other development projects, they need (in an ideal governance situation) to enlist the support of the PM to help facilitate the process. However, in situations where there is a deep-seated conflictual relationship, a 'missing link' or vacuum develops between the two, which stalls the business of the assembly entirely.

Table 1 below summarises the various functions of these two actors, as indicated by respondents:

Table 1: Respondents' views on the functions of PM and DCEs

PM	DCEs
• Presides over general assembly meetings • Chairs the audit report implementation committee • Provides legal sign-off for all programmes of action before implementation • Summons the DCE to explain issues or to brief the assembly on important matters • Chairs the public relations and complaints committee	• Presides over the day-to-day functioning of the district • Serves as a link between government and local people • Ensures development of the local area • Presides over executive committee meetings • Heads local security services • Acts as chief authorising officer for expenditure

Source: Field data 2014

In an ideal situation, there will be partnership and symbiotic co-existence, allowing the DCE to lobby for his/her policies, budgets and projects and persuade the PM to approve them. But this ideal situation remains a pipe-dream in most MMDAs because of difficult relationships between the two, which tend to hold back even uncontroversial local development projects.

Evidence of DCE–PM relationship conflict, and its causes

According to Barron et al. (2004) conflict is inevitable in any society because of human nature. This study asked respondents if there were any conflicts between DCEs and PMs. Table 2 below shows that an overwhelming majority – 38 respondents or 95% of the sample – answered affirmatively. This data provides empirical evidence that conflict between DCEs and PMs is a real phenomenon in Ghana's local governments.

Table 2: Evidence of any conflict between DCEs and PMs

	Frequency
Yes	38
No	2
Total	40

Source: Field data 2014

Probing further, the researchers asked respondents for their views on the relationship between the PM and the DCE in their assembly. Whilst a few indicated that it was 'excellent', others indicated the relationship was poor. Similarly, some respondents indicated 'very good', 'good' and 'average'. Those who indicated the relationship was 'excellent', 'very good' or 'good' cited as evidence to support this, *inter alia*, that: there were regular consultations between the PM and the DCE before and after executive committee meetings; they work in harmony; they collaborate in their capacities; and they make decisions together. However, those who said the relationship was 'average' or 'poor' indicated that: (i) there is often high tension between the two, (ii) cooperation and consultation are rarely in evidence and (iii) the two office holders sought to undermine each other. One PM had this to say as a description of the relationship between PMs and DCEs:

> *Instead of ensuring a stronger partnership between legislation and execution at the assembly level, it is however observed that individual values, personal interest, and past events among actors have created [a] rather poor environment for such partnership in governance.*

From the interviews, nine major factors that cause tension in the working relationship of PMs and DCEs were recorded. These have been discussed thematically below.

Potential candidacy for similar political office in future

A major observed cause of relationship conflict between a PM and a DCE is their interest in vying for similar political positions in the future. It should be noted that both actors are politicians ('small' honourables) who typically aspire to higher political positions such as becoming MPs. If either has

reason to believe the other will be competing for a position in which he/she has an interest, the two slip into unhealthy competition and sabotage. One DCE stated that:

> *I had discussed with my PM some time ago that I would want to contest the upcoming primaries as candidate for member of parliament. We were working together and I made the PM my unofficial campaign coordinator. This presupposes that we had a common interest and agenda. Little did I know he wanted to contest too. After [a] few weeks, I realised that he has been using my resources I have offered him as my campaign coordinator to canvass for his personal support. This has created [a] serious problem between us.*

Perceived sabotage and 'witch hunting'

Section 7 of the Local Government Act 1993 states that the emoluments of a PM shall be determined by the district assembly and paid out of the assembly's own resources. It appears that payment of these emoluments (however meagre) is often delayed, especially when districts do not have funds. It can happen that inadequate communication and poor consultation between the DCE and PM make the latter believe that the former is sabotaging him/her by delaying the payment of his/her entitlement due to 'bad faith' rather than economic challenges within the district. There is some evidence for this; for example, in sharing his personal ordeal one PM remarked:

> *Do you know on several occasions the coordinating director and the accountant told me the district chief executive has intentionally refused to release the allowance due me? I was amazed when I was told, because I have complained on several occasions to the DCE and he said there is no money. Since that day, I never trusted him and would resist any attempt by him to impose any activity on the assembly.* [albeit, this is not the case in all situations or districts]

Respondents took the view that such sabotage aims to frustrate the work of assembly members and the PM in order that either constituents will see them as unproductive and vote them out of office, or that their future political aspirations will be frustrated. This point was well articulated by a key informant:

> *If the DCE perceives the PM to have interest in, for example, contesting for a member of parliament position (perhaps against him), then he will intentionally cut his financial resources or at best distort the flow, so that the PM's ambitions and plans get disorganised and frustrated.*

Political ideological differences and previous political encounters

As noted above, both the DCE and the PM are supposed to operate in a non-partisan fashion. However, this does not really happen. The political ideologies or perceived political alignment of both PM and DCE often create a poor working relationship. This challenge was very evident in the region under study, as it was a stronghold of the opposition party at the time of the study. Most PMs and assembly members tended to have differing views from DCEs on both policy and legislation. Almost all respondents confirmed that political differences between DCEs and PMs was a basic cause of relationship conflict at the district level. They acknowledged that when the political affiliation of these two actors is different, then from the first days of taking office there is inherent chronic hatred of each other.

One of the PMs indicated:

> *If I am an NPP [opposition party] and the DCE is not, [then] definitely as a rational actor I may sabotage him to render him ineffective. It is likely that the sum effect of my action can lead to a regime change and electoral victory for my party.*

From another angle, an opinion leader interviewed indicated that, in instances where the DCE attempts to manage certain government policies from a partisan perspective, such policies or programmes may be rejected by the PM. One PM had this to say:

> *Some of our DCEs have approached most programmes [through a] political [lens] without looking at [them] rationally, and at times we have fiercely rejected their activities. Such circumstances have created some mistrust between us. These circumstances are more prevalent in instances where we as PM fail to push through a controversial agenda which we have already [agreed] with DCEs to undertake.*

On the issue of previous political encounters, one DCE indicated that he had run for the post of PM but had lost to the current incumbent; however he then fortunately (appointed by the president) became DCE for the district. He further explained that the election was keenly contested between the two and involved a heated campaign (see Asamoah et al. 2014 on the acrimonious context of elections in Ghana). He explained that this has led to frequent intense tension between them due to the allegations made against each other during the campaign period. The importance of this factor – acrimonious previous political encounters – was also cited by other assembly members, chiefs and opinion leaders from another perspective. They indicated that political campaigns and accompanying personal insults and other forms of victimisation prior to PM elections and DCE appointments create a volatile environment that impedes subsequent harmonious coexistence.

Path dependency leading to loss of trust

Path dependency is a school of thought which argues that 'history matters' and that, if one wants to understand contemporary issues or situations, one should assess what has occurred in the past. This study observed that historical events within the district where the DCE and the PM were involved could spark overt hatred. For example, where a DCE is removed from office by the president due to campaigning involving the PM, the new DCE may fear that the PM can similarly ensure his or her removal. From the start the newcomer will have some misgivings and mistrusts about the PM based on such historical antecedents. This situation was reported by respondents as having happened on several occasions since the 1992 constitutional democracy. Such situations undermine trust between the two actors. Similarly, events leading up to the appointment of a DCE and their confirmation are often muddied with politicking. Such politicking may lead to later falling out between the DCE and the PM because of earlier comments, allegiances or disagreements.

One PM noted that:

> *My DCE does not want to see me; he barely involves me in decision-making. I feel very unwelcome whenever I attempt to engage him on matters of legislation. However, I feel strongly that the events that preceded his appointment and eventual confirmation, in*

> *which I had a deferring opinion might have occasioned his behaviour. I feel that the past is an event that should be forgotten and we must work together without much recourse to the bad past.*

Tenure insecurity and the quest for legitimacy

As DCEs are appointed by the president and can easily and abruptly be asked to leave office at the whims and caprices of the president, this office is very volatile and insecure. This has been observed by Ahwoi (2010) who points out that Article 243 (3) of the Constitution stating that "*the office of District Chief Executive shall become vacant if – (a) a vote of no confidence, supported by the votes of not less than two-thirds of all the members of the District Assembly is passed against him; or (b) he is removed from office by the President; or (c) he resigns or dies*" makes DCEs very insecure. Ahwoi further notes that this provision makes DCEs the most insecure of all political office holders under the 1992 Constitution:

> *At best, he can be DCE for a maximum of 8 years only – it does not matter how well he performs. In the process, he wakes up every morning wondering whether he still has a job. This is because the president can decide to sack him at any time. He does not have to give any reason. The district assembly can also decide to sack him at any time by passing a vote of no confidence in him. They do not have to give any reasons.*

In an attempt to prevent any sudden termination of appointment, DCEs are tempted to rush through a development agenda that provides them with a positive image (to obtain legitimacy and favour from their political party and the president) with a view to maintaining their position for a long while. By contrast, the PM as an assembly member has a relatively stable four-year term (the mandate can be revoked but the process is laborious and this rarely happens), and therefore enjoys some tenure security. These differences in job security were noted by various respondents as a factor that creates some insecurity for DCEs. As a result, if a PM may want more time to scrutinise a policy or project before approval (which might delay the DCE's efforts), the DCE may be tempted to perceive it as an act of sabotage. At times, the PM may want procedures and methods extensively scrutinised and extensive due diligence carried out before approval of projects – perhaps to ensure value for money – but the DCE may not believe these are his/her genuine motivations.

Disregard for procedures and desire to 'cut corners'

As noted above, DCEs may want to push through a certain agenda, policy, legislation or development project on which the PM seeks further due diligence and time. The differences in views on such matters can at times create conflict between the two actors. In Ghana, it is very evident that during election years or by-elections, the government may want to accelerate the implementation of ongoing projects as a vote-canvassing strategy. In some cases new projects are also introduced and these are mostly carried out through the DCE, as the president's representative in the district. When the PM and the DCE have different political affiliations this always leads to relationship troubles. The DCE may want to circumvent procedures and due process, but the PM will resist these attempts.

Some DCEs were very frank in admitting that they sometimes attempt to circumvent procedures and are tempted to ignore best practice to avoid delays. One DCE said:

> ... sometimes a DCE would want to circumvent existing regulations in order to push government's agenda through. In most cases where we have attempted to do so without prior unofficial approval of the PM and [a] majority of the assembly members we have been met with fierce resistance and disapproval. When such resistance happens, the DCEs are tempted to point accusing fingers to the PM [leader of the assembly members] who could [did] not use his power and influence to support the agenda.

Appointment of political amateurs

In areas where conflict was rife, respondents unanimously noted that either the DCE or PM, or both, were novices in the governance 'game' or hindered by administrative inexperience that made them unable to manage even avoidable conflicts. Whilst lobbying has always been part of the political system, experience and competence are essential to be able to utilise this tool effectively. Opinion leaders indicated that DCEs must have the skills to adopt strategies to lobby the PM to support agendas even when they conflict with the PM's ideologies. They were emphatic in saying that it has become very easy for 'idle youth' to shout for regime change, and then receive political appointment as a DCEs as a reward, without the necessary experience. They indicated that using this criterion to choose DCEs affects the stability and development of the assembly since political novices end up getting appointed. The study data indicated that in situations where the DCE and the PM both had enormous work experience either in the public sector or private sector, fewer issues of relationship conflict were registered. One respondent had this to say:

> It is even worse when both are new to the subject area. Normally, they do not undergo any induction or training before assuming office. This results initially in [a] confidence crisis in the management of the affairs of the assembly.

Politicisation and 'deep-seated' opposition

The local government system in Ghana theoretically should be non-partisan but, unfortunately, this has not been the case: most rifts between members are based on political orientation. Instead, local government mimics the nature, structure and process of governance at the central level, where it can be clearly seen that opposition MPs appear to oppose almost all activities of the government or president. This creates a contentious and conflict-ridden assembly. For example, respondents reported that when DCEs support a certain candidate to become PM, but that candidate fails to win, this can sour the relationship between the ensuing winner and the DCE. Such situations, according to respondents, create a volatile environment where the two actors struggle to coexist in harmony, since they have taken entrenched positions about each other from the outset. A statement was made by a PM that:

> The current DCE of my district was supporting my opponent during PM elections. He wished my opponent became the presiding member in the contest. This has created an insecure relationship between us since assumption of duty.

Similar concerns, albeit from a different angle, were expressed by some DCEs who claimed that their PM did not support their [DCEs] appointment; and hence since their confirmation into office, the PMs exhibits an entrenched dislike for them.

Divergent personal and social values

As noted by Felati (2006), entrenched social or group interests lead to violent conflicts. It is perhaps not surprising therefore that in this study, almost all respondents cited differences in individual values and personal interests as a driver of conflict. The authors noted that whenever a decision or a position (on even trivial social issues) by either actor does not align with the personal interests or values of the other, it opens up an opportunity for bickering. Respondents defined the 'personal' dimension affected very broadly, to include age, religion, tribe, marital status, past achievements, professional background, sharing of resources, respect for each other etc. One PM had this to say:

> At times it is funny to know what really causes the rift between the PM and the DCE. We cannot rule out issues such as [a] clash on a particular lady in the assembly, personality clash, support of a football team, age differences and the like. When such funny issues are poorly handled it has the tendency to create confusion among the two.

Effects of conflict between DCEs and PMs

Respondents did agree that disagreement between the DCE and the PM could occasionally be positive, for example by preventing collusion and abuse of power, preventing fraud, and improving participation, transparency and accountability. However, they were of the view that its negative impact was a serious problem for assemblies. Notably, they reported that conflicts **protract** decision-making and **delay** execution of development projects. Table 3 below lists what respondents cited as the negative impacts of conflict on assembly functioning.

Table 3: Respondents' views on effects of conflict on MMDA functioning

Effects of conflict on MMDAs	Percentage
Excessively long-drawn-out decision-making by the assembly	90%
Delays or halts in implementation of developmental projects	70%
Increase in corrupt practices	62.5%
Ineffective leadership at the assembly	60%
Refusal of government to release funds to the MMDA	50.8%
Low patronage of assembly's activities by stakeholders	50.3%
Political instability in the MMDA	50%

Source: Field data 2014

The conflict between PMs and DCEs is a major problem that must be thoroughly investigated. In one extreme case, a PM respondent claimed that due to an ongoing clash between him and his DCE, his assembly had had no meeting for a very long time. As a result, assembly deliberations on development issues have been slowed:

> The situation has gone further to involve professional bureaucrats whose actions and inactions are judged by individuals as representing allegiance to the PM or the chief executive, leading to poor human relationships in the entire assembly.

Other respondents confirmed that relational conflict between the two actors has implications for local development, with several negative effects listed: excessively protracted decision-making; non-implementation of assembly decisions; poor local-level governance; opportunities for the abuse of power, leading to corrupt practices; ineffective leadership; low support for assembly activities by stakeholders; and a poor political atmosphere in the MMDA.

Summary and conclusions

From the discussions above, the study draws the following useful conclusions. Firstly, protracted and sustained conflict in the form of both bickering and 'shows of might' between DCEs and PMs is more common, and its effects more devastating, than people imagine. It is like a 'silent pistol' thwarting the developmental efforts of MMDAs in Ghana. The main sources of conflict were found to be: competition for the same political office; perceived sabotage and 'witch-hunting'; ideological and political differences; insecurity of tenure and a quest for legitimacy; divergent personal and social values; politicisation and 'deep-seated' opposition; appointment of political amateurs; and a disregard for procedure and desire to 'cut corners' by DCEs.

Secondly, the study found that the conflict between DCEs and PMs has profound negative consequences for the development of local communities. In terms of general governance, such conflict can spread to affect the entire assembly, reducing the house to two factions which each take entrenched positions on any issue presented without necessarily assessing its merit. Professional local government staff also tend to be affected, and may be claimed to belong to either of the two factions, leading to ethical dilemmas and confusion. In terms of local economic development, five major negative consequences were found: excessively prolonged decision-making by the assembly; delays in or non-implementation of assembly decisions; opportunities for corruption due to a breakdown of proper checks and balances; low support for assembly activities among stakeholders; and local political instability, with its attendant effects.

The authors therefore conclude that protracted conflict between DCEs and PMs is – as indicated above – a 'silent pistol' that affects local governance and holds back community development. This is because conflict between the two powerful figures typically trickles down to the whole assembly since both command significant support among assembly members (as approval of the DCE and election of the PM both require at least a two-thirds majority).

We conclude that strategies to manage conflict better will be crucial in Ghana's district assemblies. MMDAs are already plagued by substantial challenges and cannot afford to worsen their plight with trivial personal conflicts. It has long been known (see eg Boachie-Danquah 2005) that district assemblies are not fully devolved in terms of resource- and capacity-building, technical expertise or equipment to ensure the achievement of their core objectives effectively. Therefore any other factor

(such as trivial conflicts) that exacerbates the existing statutory and fiscal challenges should be tackled vigorously. Whilst conflict occurrence has been observed to be inevitable and ubiquitous in human organisations, within the district assembly system of Ghana strategies for managing it better are essential and ought to be a matter of concern to individuals, groups and scholars.

Policy suggestions

This study provides five recommendations for managing conflicts in Ghana's MMDA system, using the DCE/PM relationship as a case study:

Firstly, internally this study recommends using a blended methodology for conflict resolution. For example, a dialogue strategy should be explored in many circumstances to avert potential conflicts, and improvements in communication between DCEs and PMs should also be sought.

Secondly, in attempting to prevent and resolve development-retarding conflicts between DCEs and PMs, we recommend using a framework by Thomas (1976). Drawing on the two main acknowledged conflict dimensions – namely how assertive or unassertive the parties are and how cooperative or uncooperative each appears – Thomas conceptualises five conflict resolution techniques. He posits that the ease with which conflictual situations are resolved greatly depends on whether the two parties involved want to cooperate, compromise or not yield at all. The first scenario, which he calls *competition*, occurs when both parties are assertive (in pushing for their interests) and uncooperative. Each wants to prove that 'might is right', making the process more cumbersome and difficult to resolve. A second form – *collaboration* – occurs when each party is assertive, but cooperative. Here the conflicting parties believe in 'let's work this out together' but they appear too rigid in their positions. A third form – *avoidance* – involves both parties exhibiting unassertive but also uncooperative tendencies. The fourth – *accommodation* – involves unassertive, but very cooperative, parties. A final form – *compromise* – arises from a middle position on both dimensions and leads to a win–win situation in conflict resolution that tries to 'split the difference'. However, appropriate techniques for achieving this outcome will need to be fashioned depending on the context and nature of the conflict, because there is no 'one-size-fits-all' best approach.

Thirdly, this study recommends establishing clear guidelines on how emoluments for the PM and assembly members are accessed, removing unilateral discretion from the DCE. Such guidelines should compel the DCE to justify in writing any decision not to remit on time approved stipends, allowances, or any other resources for PM and assembly members. One option, where there is a suspicion of bad faith, is that a committee could be instituted to investigate the reasons and adjudicate on approval or release of the assets, perhaps by a two-thirds to three-quarters majority vote.

Fourthly, regional coordinating councils should ensure they have in place monitoring mechanisms to constantly assess the relationship between DCEs and PMs (and other actors) within their

administrative regions, and any hint of conflict should be immediately addressed by bringing together relevant actors. Where there appear to be stalemate situations, the regional coordinating council together with the particular district should as early as possible make a strong recommendation for action that should pass through the appropriate channels to the appointing authority. Assembly members also have an important role to play, since their combined efforts can make or unmake these two foremost actors.

Finally, there should be specific and compulsory dates set for district assembly meetings – in addition to arrangements for emergency meetings if required – so that any personal rancour between actors cannot spill over into assembly business and impede development projects.

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