

# Participation and Accountability in Local Governance in Emerging Democracies: The Debate between Elections and Appointments to the District Assemblies in Ghana.

William Mark Adolwine

Land Economy Dept., Coll. of Architecture and Planning, Kwame Nkrumah Univ. of Science & Technology,  
Kumasi, Ghana

[adolwinwm@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:adolwinwm@yahoo.co.uk)

## Abstract

In many developing countries, ongoing decentralization reforms are promoting changes in governance structures that are reshaping the relationship between local governments and citizens. The success of these decentralization reforms will depend on active citizen participation, the ability to hold public officers accountable for their decisions, sound financial management and the provision of desired basic services. This paper focuses on popular elections as a critical tool in ensuring citizen participation and in holding local government political officeholders accountable for their actions. The research gathered empirical data through discussions and interviews from selected districts on stakeholders' participation and their perceptions of downward accountability of political officeholders in local governance. The study revealed that contrary to the mainstream view that lack of downward accountability of local government leadership was due to their non-elective nature and that adopting the 'elective principle' would ensure this, was not borne out of the facts on the ground as those of them who hold elective offices have not been shown to be accountable to the electorate who elected them. The paper adduced empirical evidence to demonstrate that the appointments of the District Chief Executives (DCEs) and 30% Assembly members (AMs) have been made a scapegoat for the lack of citizen participation and downward political accountability of leaders in the local governance process and concludes that selecting public officeholders wholly through the ballot box though necessary, could be a deficient policy in enhancing local development in an emerging economy like Ghana. Development and accountability strategies will be most effective when they are cumulative and combined. Thus, a mix of appointments and indirect and direct elections of officeholders can be the best approach to enhance effective service delivery, development and accountability in the district assemblies.

**Keywords:** Participation and Accountability, District Assemblies (DAs), Emerging Democracies, Assembly members, District Chief Executives.

## 1. Introduction

Across many developing countries, reforms are being undertaken to improve local governance by introducing new institutions and systems intended to increase the transparency and accountability of governance. Most evident are efforts to decentralize government functions to lower tiers through changes to governance structures. However, the success of these decentralization reforms will largely depend on the collaborative participation of citizens in the development process and effectively holding public officers accountable for decisions they make in public financial management.

The conventional claim is that electing public officeholders at the local level is the panacea to citizen participation in local governance and the accountability of the officeholders in decision-making. Political accountability thus becomes the hallmark and a *sine qua non* for good governance. Proponents of this school of thought argue electoral accountability enables scarce resources to be generated and expended with greater efficiency for socio-economic development (Schaeffer and Yilmaz, 2008; Crawford, 2009; Debrah, 2009). Some have however doubted this position. Hoffman and Metzroth (2010) caution that it is not always evident that far-reaching decentralization with popularly elected public officeholders per se, would make local government more democratic and effective. Blair (2000) also argues that elections alone cannot produce sustainable accountability. Thus, the Democracy and Governance's (DG) Office of USAID (2000) succinctly captures this position by positing that *political decentralization is about potential; it guarantees nothing, and whether or not decentralization actually promotes democratic local governance in any particular country context is an open question, as it reflects a country's political history and culture.*

Protagonists of the elective principle assert that citizens who elect their leaders can hold them increasingly

responsible and accountable for decisions they make (Crawford, 2004; Heywood, 2007; Debrah, 2009). They argue that when lower level governments are freely elected, the closer would be the relationship between the people in power and their electorate, and this will increase the accountability of the politicians to the electorate. This in turn is expected to *increase transparency of decision-making, improve the quantity and quality of services provided and increase the willingness of those who receive better and more reliable services to pay for them and possibly decrease the overall cost of governance* (USAID, 2000).

For this reason, developing countries over the past three decades have seen devolution of political and economic power to local governments as an important element of participatory democracy. Ghana for example has been religiously pursuing decentralisation policies since 1988 to promote development through popular and effective citizen participation by devolving power, competence, resources and means to the district level (MLGRD, 1996).

The current debate has been whether to directly elect all of the political officeholders of the Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies (MMDAs)<sup>5</sup> or to appoint them or have a mix approach. Critics of the 'appointment principle' have argued that accountability of officers of the MMDAs have remained only rhetorical more than two decades of devolving power to the local authorities because the practice of appointing DCEs and other political actors does not encourage grassroots participation and engagement with the political officeholders (See Crawford, 2004; Debrah, 2009). They therefore advocate for an 'all elective system' as the only route for full citizen engagement and participation in the governance process and for the leaders to be responsible, answerable and accountable for their deeds, commissions and omissions.

The preceding discourse sets the context of this paper. It critically examines the extent to which popular election of DCEs and AMs ensures citizen participation and the accountability of officers to the electorate in local governance. To put the paper in perspective, the selection of local officeholders in the UK; the former colonial power which is taunted for its democratic credentials, is examined in addition to the primary data collected from a survey of two selected Metropolitan Assemblies.

## 2. Local Governance in Ghana

### 2.1 *The Legal Framework and structure of the Local Government System*

Attempts at local governance are traced back to the colonial era when local or Native Authorities were created for specific geographical jurisdictions that became part of the indirect rule system of governance introduced by the British in 1878 (Aye, 2000). A post independence 1971 Local Administration Act, (Act 359) attempted significant decentralization reforms by introducing a single hierarchy model<sup>6</sup> which was hoped would cure the inherent problems associated with the dual hierarchy model of local administration but this was not implemented due to a military takeover of government (MLGRD, 1996).

Further local government reforms in 1988 created the MMDAs as basic units of local governance primarily responsible for the implementation of development policies and programmes. The guiding policy was to devolve authority to the district level to promote popular grassroots participation from the stand points of planning, implementation, monitoring and delivery of services (ibid). The reforms were given legal backing by the *Local Government Law, 1988 (PNDCL 207)*, now replaced by the current *Local Government Act, 1993 (Act 462)*. The 65 existing districts were re-organized into 110 DAs as non-partisan bodies. Further reorganization in 2008 and 2012 brought the total number of MMDAs to 216.

The structure begins with the Regional Co-ordinating Councils (RCCs) which are only co-ordinating bodies. Below them are the Metropolitan Assemblies (with populations of over 250,000), Municipalities (one-town Assemblies with population over 95,000) and the ordinary DAs (with population of over 75,000).<sup>7</sup> The RCCs regulate and harmonise the functions of the assemblies in their respective regions (MLGRD, 1996).

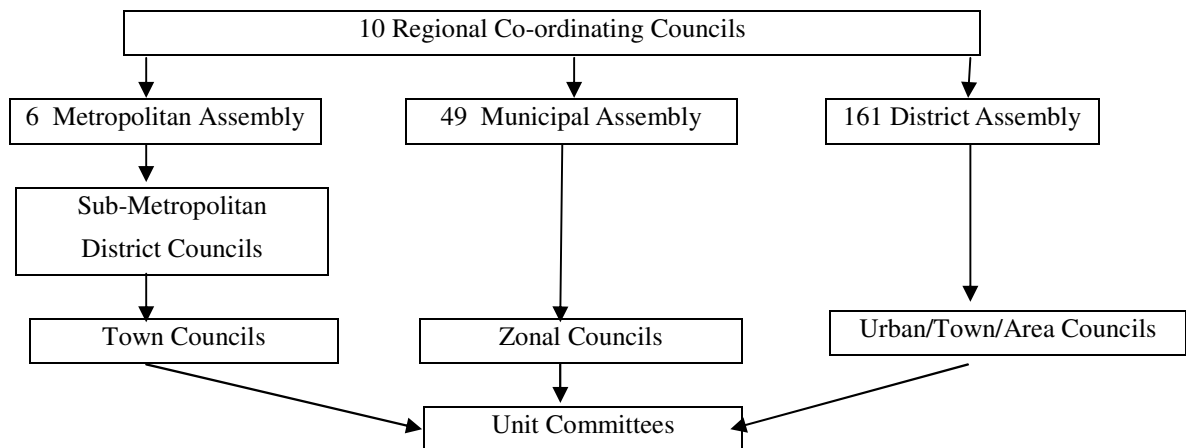
---

<sup>5</sup>District Assembly is the generic term for the political institutions set up to oversee local administration; they are styled variously as District, Municipal or Metropolitan Assemblies in reflection to population and development status.

<sup>6</sup>It was described as a monolithic structure designed to bring all central government agencies operating at the local level under the District Councils for purposes of local administration and service provision.

<sup>7</sup> Local Government Act, 1993 (Act 462) Section 1(4)

Fig.1 New Local Government Structure of Ghana



Source: Adapted from MLGRD: 1996

The MMDAs are the highest political and administrative authorities in the districts with deliberative, legislative and executive powers<sup>8</sup>. They are responsible for the totality of governance at that level. At the grassroots level are the Unit Committees which form the base structure of the local government system and are comprised of small settlements or groups of settlements (See Fig. 1).

### 2.2 Representation in the District Assemblies

The Constitution and Act 462 provide for the composition of a DA as follows:<sup>9</sup>

- The DCE (equivalent to mayor) of the district shall be appointed by the President.
- One person shall be elected from each local government electoral area within the district.
- Other members not exceeding thirty percent (30%) of all the members of the DA, shall be appointed by the President.
- Member/s of Parliament from the constituencies within the district are non-voting members.

The two categories of AMs (equivalent to councillors) are the 70% directly elected who represent electoral areas and the 30% appointed, which is designed to create access to skills and expertise and ensure representation of certain local interest groups (Thomi, 2000). AMs work part-time and are not paid any salaries. Elections are held every four years on non-partisan basis and candidates seeking election must present themselves to the electorate as individuals. They shall not use any political party symbol nor shall a political party endorse, sponsor, offer a platform to, or in anyway campaign for or against candidates seeking election to the DAs<sup>10</sup>. The appointment of the DCE must be approved by at least 2/3 majority of the AMs present and voting.<sup>11</sup>

### 3. Accountability in Local Governance

The concept of accountability is multifaceted and many interpretations are given. To most scholars, it is a policy of holding public officials or other employees accountable for their actions. The term "accountability" originates from Latin, *acomptare* (to account). The business dictionary defines accountability as the obligation of the individual or organization to account for his/its activities, accept responsibility for them and to disclose the results in a transparent manner. Stone, Dwivedi, and Jabra identified many types of accountability including administrative, political and managerial of which leadership accountability cross cuts many of the distinctions (Wikipedia.com, 2013a). This paper seeks to highlight those applicable under the Ghanaian context.

<sup>8</sup> Article 241 (3) of the 1992 Constitution

<sup>9</sup> Article 242 and Section 5(1) of the Constitution and Act 462 respectively

<sup>10</sup> Article 248 and Section 7(1),(2) of the Constitution and Act 462 respectively

<sup>11</sup> Article 243(1) and Section 20(1) of the Constitution and Act 462 respectively

A well functioning local government managerial structure should be subject to accountability not only to its citizens, but also to public agencies and to higher-level governments. Schaeffer and Yilmaz (2008) refer to these kinds of accountability as: bottom up—by the local government to local citizens, horizontal—by the local government to various public institutions of accountability, vertical—by the local government to higher-level governments. Thus, accountability can either be downward (bottom-up), horizontal or vertical (top-down).

Bottom-up accountability include citizens acting through the electoral process or indirectly through civic organizations (NGOs, civil society) or the news media, holding public officeholders to account. Bottom-up processes establish linkages with communities to identify people's needs and preferences. Horizontal accountability covers the range of public entities that check local government abuses and inefficiencies. These agencies may include local government councils (or legislature), the court system, anti-graft/corruption agencies, public complaints agencies and various auditing agencies. Local governments are also held accountable to higher-level governments (e.g., central, state) since they set the rules under which local governments operate and also provide some financial resources through fiscal transfers.

Moncrieffe further distinguished between *ex-ante* and *ex-post facto* forms of accountability (Debrah, 2009:280). The former works on the principle that in order to act effectively in the citizens' interest, public officeholders must know the interest of the people and act to satisfy that interest. This can be done by engaging the electorate to ascertain what programmes and decisions are important to citizens. On the other hand, *ex-post* accountability refers to holding elected officials to account through the law, other monitoring and sanctioning mechanisms and ultimately through elections. This occurs in representative democracies where citizens hold judgment over their representatives through recall elections or periodic elections where an unsatisfactory conduct or performance of an elected official is rejected and replaced with favourable alternatives (ibid).

#### 4. Research Methodology

Empirical data was collected between February and April 2011 from 570 randomly selected respondents residing within the Kumasi Metropolitan Assembly (KMA) and the Sekondi-Takoradi Metropolitan Assembly (STMA). The survey participants were in two categories. 510 voters or electorate and 60 AMs. Of these, 300 electorate and 37 AMs (28 elected and 9 appointees) were selected from the KMA which has a total of 97 AMs (60 elected, 27 appointed and 10 Members of Parliament (MP)).<sup>12</sup> From the STMA, 210 electorate and 23 AMs (17 elected and 6 appointees) were selected out of a total of 76 AMs (49 elected, 23 appointed and 4 MPs). A combination of closed and open-ended questionnaire was administered to the 510 voter-respondents who were given sometime to fill them for later collection. Those who could not fill them were assisted to do so. At the time of collection, some further probing questions based on the answers given were asked for clarification. Another set of questionnaire was administered to the 60 AMs.

Questionnaire administered to the AMs examined their functions and their accountability to the electorates, while areas covered by the questionnaire to the electorate included:

- Whether or not AMs consult them on local matters for their views and concerns to be presented to the assemblies as the law requires.
- Whether or not AMs brief them on the outcomes of assemblies deliberations on issues.
- Whether the work of their AMs is satisfactory.
- Their views on the appointment of DCEs and the 30% AMs
- Factors considered in electing or re-electing AMs
- The ability to discipline AMs as well as voters' participation in the political process.

#### 5. Selecting Councillors and Mayors in the UK

In linking accountability to elections, it is important to draw useful lessons from the advanced democracies of the west by examining the veracity of the claim that, councillors and mayors of local authorities must

---

<sup>12</sup> MPs are ex-officio members of the District Assembly under which their constituencies fall. They have no vote but are expected to attend meetings and take part in debate.

necessarily be directly elected for the necessary citizen participation and accountability of officeholders to arise. To this extent, the selection of councillors and mayors in the UK is thus examined.<sup>13</sup> The UK is a doyen of modern democratic governance and has been practising parliamentary democracy since 1721.<sup>14</sup> Its history of local governance however dates back to the Norman Conquest of 1066. The Normans introduced a feudal system and divided the country into counties and boroughs for purposes of local governance.

Modern local authorities are governed by elected county councils; a two-tier system of metropolitan and non-metropolitan counties and metropolitan and non-metropolitan districts (Stevens, 2013).<sup>15</sup> Members of the county and borough councils since 1835 were divided into two classes, distinguished from each other only as to numbers, method of election and tenure of office. Whereas three-quarters of the councillors remained directly elected for periods of three years, one-quarter, composed of aldermen held office for six years and were elected by the councillors from among themselves or from persons eligible for election as councillors (Beattie, 1946).

The Aldermanic Principle was introduced by the Municipal Corporation Act, 1835, as a concession to the Conservative's fears that a council, wholly composed of persons directly elected for such a short time as three years, would prove too unstable a body for the proper conduct of important work often demanding the prosecution through considerable periods of a consistent policy. The longer tenure of office ensured some stability and continuity and opened the door of the council to men and women of skill and ability whose services could not otherwise be obtained (ibid). The practice was a measure to fill gaps created by popular elections and after 139 years, it was stopped in 1974 to allow for all councillors to be directly elected.

Regarding mayors, the councillors and aldermen together elected them from among themselves or persons qualified to be elected as councillors. However, by the Labour reforms of 2000, mayors could be directly elected, albeit such decision to directly elect must first be approved at a referendum by any local authority wishing to do so. However, since 2001 many of the counties that held referendums on whether to elect mayors rejected the idea, and to date, only a few councils directly elect mayors (ibid).

Some other advanced democracies also either indirectly elect mayors as is done in Spain and Bulgaria or centrally appoint them as is done in Canada and The Netherlands. Even a recent proposed constitutional amendment to make the mayor an elective one in The Netherlands was rejected by the Senate in 2005 (Wikipedia.com, 2013b). Aldermen are also appointed by the Crown or elected by the councillors from amongst themselves.

## 6. Participation and Accountability in the District Assemblies

Free, fair, regularly held elections and universal suffrage are said to be the most direct mechanisms for ensuring accountability of officeholders to citizens (Blair, 2000; Debrah, 2009). The Constitution requires that people in particular local government areas be afforded the opportunity to participate effectively in their governance, and elected representatives should also avail themselves to the electorate through frequent interaction for consultation and mobilization of local opinions/demands.<sup>16</sup> But the question is, to what extent has there been citizen participation in the Ghanaian MMDAs activities? Second, has there been any ex-ante and ex-post accountability of elected AMs?

### 6.1 Citizen participation and ex-ante accountability of elected Assembly Members

The Local Government Act in respect of ex-ante accountability of AMs provides that a member of a MMDA shall-

- Maintain close contact with his electoral area, consult his people on issues to be discussed in the DA and collate their views, opinions and proposals.
- Present the views, opinions and proposals to the DA.
- Meet his electorate before each meeting of the Assembly.
- Report to his electorate the general decisions of the Assembly and its Executive Committee

<sup>13</sup> The UK was a former colonial power that operated local governance in Ghana within an indirect rule system.

<sup>14</sup> The UK had its first Parliament in 1295 and appointed its first Prime Minister in 1721.

<sup>15</sup> Today there are six metropolitan and 27 non-metropolitan county councils in England together with some single-tier unitary authorities, mainly serving urban areas, as well as the Greater London boroughs

<sup>16</sup> Article 240 (2) (e) of the Constitution



and the actions he has taken to solve problems raised by residents in his electoral area.<sup>17</sup>

The requirement for an AM to organize regular meetings, hold consultations with the electorate, collate opinions and report back is paramount for the survival of the local government system that is pivoted on participatory democracy. It also enables the electorate to demand accountability from the AM as to how well he represents their interests in the Assembly. However, evidence from this research shows that elected AMs have largely failed on their obligation of meeting and interacting with their electorates, thereby disabling them from participatory governance. Only 10% (30 out of 300) of the 'electorate respondents' from KMA had attended a meeting organised by their elected AM on local matters. 11% also claimed their views on certain matters had been sought but at individual and personal levels.<sup>18</sup> However, 79% (237 out of 300) had never met their AMs for any discussions on their views and concerns, let alone brief them on the outcomes. These assertions have largely been corroborated by the 28 elected AMs themselves. 75% confirmed they had not been able to organize a meeting but attributed this ineptitude or failure to lack of funds. They cited absence of logistics and resources to meet demands when such meetings are called. They also claimed expenses incurred in organizing such meetings are not refundable by the assembly. Juxtaposing this with the fact that they are not paid salaries,<sup>19</sup> they contend regular meetings and interactions is an unrealistic requirement. Consequently, only seven (25%) had organized consultative meetings but which were poorly attended. They claim people are simply not interested, and when they do attend, they make unnecessary demands.

Responses from STMA were not different. 76.2% of the 210 'electorate respondents' had never met with their AMs at a forum even though over 63% acknowledged knowing their AMs. Only 18.1% of the respondents have met with their AMs to discuss and present their views/concerns, while 5.7% cannot remember ever meeting their AMs. These assertions were also confirmed by the 17 elected respondents. Only 29.4% have held consultative meetings with their constituents, but 70.6% were yet to arrange for such meetings claiming lack of resources and logistics.

The law also requires an elected AM to report back to his electorate the general decisions of the Assembly and its Executive Committee and the actions he has personally taken to solve problems raised by residents in his electoral area. This seeks to enforce compliance of the duties of the AM to the electorate, but the survey revealed even worst results. An overwhelming 91% (273 out of 300) and 88.6% (186 out of 210) of the electorates interviewed in KMA and STMA respectively said the AMs had never held any such meeting to report back to them decisions of the Assemblies nor issues taken to the Assemblies. This was confirmed by 71% of the elected 45 AMs from the two Assemblies. Clearly then, there has been very minimal or no citizen consultation and participation in local governance, neither has there been any bottom-up accountability of stewardship as required by law. Important community decisions affecting citizens' well-being are being made without consulting them; effectively shutting the door of participation against them, as well as denying accountability to the very people who elected them into office.

### *6.2 Poor image of Assembly Members and voter fatigue*

The attitude of AMs has given them a poor image. On whether the electorates consider the work of the AMs satisfactory, 87% and 89% of the electorate respondents from KMA and STMA respectively responded in the negative. Respondents from Kumasi complained AMs do not care for their interests, citing what they termed 'unnecessary conversions' of every available urban public space into *trotro*<sup>20</sup> loading and parking terminals. Others said AMs go to sleep and only wake up at the next election.

The lack of citizen engagement and participation is also reflected in the dwindling interest of the voter in district level elections. Voting to elect one's AM constitutes the basic participatory level in local governance and this study sought to find out citizens' level of participation in the December 2010 district level elections. National statistics show a continuous decline of citizens' participation in local elections. With a nationwide voter turnout of 60% in 1989 following the introduction of the DAs, turnout dropped sharply to 29.3% in 1994 (Thomi, 2000). Turnout rose again to 41.5% in 1998 but by 2010, turnout had again declined to 35.3%, far lower than for

---

<sup>17</sup> Act 462, section 16(1)

<sup>18</sup> These respondents were found to be the elite ones, highly educated and very influential in the society.

<sup>19</sup> There are 6,135 elected AMs across the country, representing 6,135 electoral areas

<sup>20</sup> Commercial mini-buses commuting within the district

national elections, reflecting citizens' disinterest or dissatisfaction for local elections.

Figures from STMA for the December 2010 elections are particularly worrying. With a total registered voter population of 256,740, only 49,382 or 19.2% cast their votes. No electoral area recorded up to 40% turnout. Effiakumah West Electoral Area recorded the lowest voter turnout of 3.4%. At the sub-metro level, Effia-Kwesimintsim which had the highest number of registered voters (98,745) recorded only 13.6% voter turnout.<sup>21</sup> These figures sharply contradict assertions of greater citizen interest in local elections with voter turnouts higher than for national figures since the introduction of donor support for democratization at local level in the 1990s by international agencies such as USAID and UNDP (see Blair, 2000:23).

Various reasons were advanced for the dwindling interest in local level elections. When the electorates were asked to indicate and rank reasons for the low turnouts during local elections, 80.5% indicated that because AMs have not been involving them in local governance, their interests in elections have waned. 77% said there are no mass mobilizations as is done in national elections. 51% asserted that their elected AMs were not responsive to the needs of the community and therefore their expectations were not met, while 43% said there was no need to vote because years of local elections have brought no significant improvements in their communities adding that whatever changes have occurred were the efforts of central government and not the Assemblies.

### *6.3 Ex-post Accountability of Elected Assembly Members*

Political accountability is anchored on a system of elections that enable officials to hold offices at the pleasure of voters. Officeholders must at all times answer for their stewardship to the electorates and periodically renew their mandates (Debrah, 2009). Ex-post accountability is therefore the type of accountability leaders owe to their followers, public officials to taxpayers, and political officeholders to the electorates. Once in office, non-performing elected officials can be recalled through referenda before the end of their tenure. Act 462 provides two possible ways of holding incumbent AMs to account. First, the law provides for a complaint to be lodged at the Assembly against an AM for his mandate to be revoked on the following grounds. If:

- it is discovered that he is not a qualified candidate under the law.
- he has put himself in a conflict of interest situation by failing to disclose any financial interest he may have in a contract brought before the Assembly for consideration.
- he has absented himself from more than three consecutive ordinary meetings of the Assembly without a written permission of the Presiding Member (PM) of the Assembly.<sup>22</sup>

A complaint will have to be investigated by an ad-hoc committee of the assembly and any adverse findings shall then be subjected to debate and decided by a resolution of the assembly as to quilt or otherwise. Many of the electorate respondents (47%) interviewed from the two Assemblies had no knowledge/idea of this provision on bringing AMs to account and could not have taken advantage of it, if even they had concerns about the conduct of some AMs. Even those who have knowledge (53%) said that the final authority vested in the Assemblies makes it most unlikely that any such complaint would succeed.

A second mechanism for bringing elected AMs to account is by recall through referenda. Section 9 (1) of Act 462 provides that for purposes of revoking the mandate of an elected member of a MMDA, 25% or more of registered voters in the electoral area may petition the Electoral Commission (EC) for the member's recall from the Assembly. On receipt of the petition, the EC would proceed to organize a referendum to decide the issue whether or not such member must be recalled. The issue of the referendum is decided if at least forty percent of the registered voters in the electoral area vote, and sixty percent of the valid votes cast are in favour of the recall.

181(35.5%) out of the 510 electorates interviewed were not even aware of the provision and over 46% of the 64.5% who have knowledge of the right to recall, do not know of the procedure. The result is that the mechanism has never been used in the two study districts; no single electoral area has been able to commence proceedings for the revocation of the mandate of an AM. Those with knowledge of the procedure said the cumbersome legal processes together with the 40% voter turnout requirement and 60% "yes vote" are unrealistic/unattainable and renders the right to recall moot. Accordingly the electorates have shunned the use of signing of petitions to remove their local leaders, making recall an ineffective tool.

---

<sup>21</sup> These figures were obtained from the STMA's office of the Electoral Commission in March 2011

<sup>22</sup> Section 8 (c)- (f) of Act 462

The final ex-post accountability is located in seeking the renewal of a mandate through re-election at the end of one's tenure of office, but this is also ineffective because ethnocentrism is a key factor in Ghanaian politics. National elections have largely been fought along ethnic and political lines (Gyimah-Boadi and Debrah, 2008). This canker has affected local elections and consequently the ability to use the ballot box to discipline erring and non-performing AMs. In particular, the entrenched Ashanti, Northern and Ewe ethnic voting has reached such crescendo that non-performance alone of an AM can hardly be a reason to be voted out of office.

The research findings confirm that people select their preferred candidates based on ethnic and party affiliation. When asked to rank three basis for voting for a candidate, 78% of the 300 respondents from Kumasi said they would vote based on competence, 67% would vote for candidates who are humble and respectful, 38% on party affiliation and 20% would vote based on ethnic or family affiliation. From STMA, 89% of the 210 respondents would vote based on competence, 61.9% would vote for candidates who are humble and respectful, 21% would vote based on party affiliation and 17% on ethnic or family affiliation. However, when asked to choose only one basis they perceive other people vote for their candidates, the responses in both areas clearly exposed the insincerity and hypocrisy in their earlier responses. 291 (57.1%) out of the combined 510 respondents believe people vote on political party affiliations, 32.7% believe people vote on ethnic and family considerations, 7.1% thought people vote based on competence and 3.1% vote for humble and respectful candidates. Considerations for the ethnic and political factors thus constitute 89.8% and elections, which are suppose to be the most legitimate and practical means of holding AMs to account for their actions and inactions during the period are unable to do so.

The ethnic and political factors became more evident when the election of the incumbent AMs was examined. 25 of the 28 (89.3%) interviewed from Kumasi are natives and known members or supporters of the main opposition NPP, which has Kumasi as its support base. On the other hand 49% of those interviewed from STMA are known NDC members while 47% are NPP sympathizers. In discussions, most of them agreed that though elections are non-partisan, because of the politically polarized nature of national elections, the chances of being elected to the assemblies is higher if one is identified with one of the two dominant parties.

#### 6.4 Accountability of the Appointed AMs and DCEs.

The President by law has the sole prerogative of disciplining appointed AMs. The role of citizens in sanctioning or holding appointed members accountable is indirect. By section 9(6) of Act 462, the mandate of an appointed member of a District Assembly (DA) may be revoked by the President either, (i) *in the exercise of his discretion* or (ii) *upon the recommendation of  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the members of the District Assembly on grounds of neglect of duties or that he has committed acts incompatible with his office as member of the District Assembly* or (iii) *upon a complaint of wrong-doing or improper conduct proven by an investigation conducted by an ad-hoc committee of the District Assembly*.

Thus, though the electorate or the assembly can initiate the removal process, the buck stops with the president who is ultimately responsible for removing an appointed member. 83% of the 'electorate respondents' from KMA and 92.9% from STMA are aware of the president's prerogative in disciplining appointed members but cannot recall if it has ever been exercised. On their part, the elected AMs were unanimous that because appointed members are often members from the President's party, they're seldom disciplined even in cases where the local citizens have a *prime facie* case. They however conceded that the duties of appointed members are undefined by law, so they owe no obligation to the electorate. This therefore makes it difficult to accuse them of neglect of duty.

The DCE, unlike the 30% appointed members has double allegiance. He is accountable to both the President and to the Assembly and by extension to the electorate since he is nominated and appointed by the President with prior approval by 2/3 majority vote of AMs present and voting. Consequently, the law provides that the DCE can be removed from office by: (i) the President or (ii) a vote of no confidence supported by the votes of at least 2/3 of all AMs. On holding DCEs to account, both elected and appointed members interviewed in both districts believe political polarization of members of the assemblies has made it difficult for a vote of no confidence to be passed against erring and non-performing DCEs. According to them, the appointed members of the MMDAs demonstrate total loyalty to the President through the DCE and this makes it extremely difficult for a DCE to be removed by an Assembly. Those from Kumasi recounted the numerous occasions 'votes of no confidence motions' against sitting Metropolitan Chief Executives (MCEs)<sup>23</sup> of KMA at different times failed, all due to the

---

<sup>23</sup> DCEs manning Metropolitan Assemblies are referred to as Metropolitan Chief Executives (MCEs)



unalloyed support for the MCEs by the 30% appointed members.

Hence, despite the existence of mechanisms for disciplining local leaders, there are many challenges that face the application of the *ex-post facto* accountability in the MMDAs; the apparent unwieldy legal procedures for holding both elected and appointed leaders to account, the ethno-political factor and the lack of direct power to discipline appointed members. On the part of the DCEs, it is more of the polarization of the AMs rather than the lack of disciplinary power.

#### *6.5 Citizens' views on appointments of DCEs and the 30% Assembly Members.*

Views from interviewees as to whether DCEs and all AMs should be elected or appointed, produced overwhelming preference for elections. The electorates and the elected AMs prefer elections while the appointed AMs want the status quo maintained, albeit a reduction in the percentage. The DCE is the chief representative of the president at the district level and the appointed members fear that election could lead to the election of opposition DCEs in some MMDAs with dire consequences for the unity of the state and the implementation of the president's development agenda in those areas. The majority who are against continuous appointment, counter argue that there cannot be grassroots democracy and accountability without direct elections. Statistically, 83% of the 300 'electorate respondents' and 92.9% of the 28 elected AMs from KMA want the DCE elected in order to improve accountability. On the contrary 77.8% of the appointed AMs interviewed called for the status quo to remain while only 22% wish DCEs could be elected. Responses from STMA followed a similar trend. Of the 210 electorates interviewed, 76.2% called for the election of DCEs, 22% wish appointment continue while 2% want appointment to be blended with elections.

With respect to the 30% AMs, there was consensus not to scrap appointments entirely. They rather want the percentage reduced so as to minimize political patronage. From the electorate, only 18.4% of the combined 510 respondents from KMA and STMA want the system scrapped, 81.6% want it retained though 63% of this considers it too high and want the percentage reduced. All the 15 appointed members favour the appointment of some members though only 40% want it in its current form. For the elected AMs, 46.7% of the combined 45 interviewees want some appointments (of this, 42% want a reduction) and 53.3% want it scrapped. In principle therefore, appointing some of the AMs is seen as desirable by stakeholders in order to ensure the presence of critically needed skilled people in the DAs.

#### *6.6 Views from other stakeholders*

The above findings are in tandem with the general Ghanaian perspectives on election and appointments of political officeholders. The over 20 political parties, except the New Patriotic Party (NPP) and the National Democratic Congress (NDC) which have been in government before argue for DCEs and all AMs to be popularly elected.<sup>24</sup> The Progressive People's Party (PPP) is loudest and relentless in this call. The NPP had initially campaigned on the principle of elections, but later backtracked and made a U-turn when it came to power in 2001 and faced the realities (Crawford, 2004:13).

Civil society organizations, non-governmental 'think thanks,' anti-graft agencies and the media have all been vociferous in their campaigns for direct and popular elections. The minority who are opposed to elections have argued that appointments are needed to ensure that technocrats, professionals, skilled and experienced people who often do not avail themselves for elections especially at the local level are included in local governance. Appointments will also ensure smooth implementation of government policies and programmes. They point out that elections hold the dangers of electing mayors whose popularity may obscure their inadequacy in leading their communities, for demagogues, often make populist but problematic promises in order to win elections.

They further argue that unchecked democracy can lead to majoritarianism<sup>25</sup> which contains the threat that individual liberty and minority rights may be crushed in the name of the people, particularly in politically polarized and ethno-centric societies like Ghana. Protagonists of the appointment principle also worry as to what happens when the opposition controls some districts and their priority rankings differ from central government priorities under a development plan, citing the case of former Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher who in 1990 paid the ultimate price when her Community Charge (Poll Tax) policy became electorally unpopular.

<sup>24</sup> This was contained in a communiqué issued after a two-day consultative meeting organized by the Institute of Local Government from 14<sup>th</sup> – 16<sup>th</sup> November 2009 in Accra, sponsored by the Konrad Adenauer Foundation. Most of these Parties are moribund, but still exist on the Electoral Commission's register.

<sup>25</sup> Heywood (2007) considers this situation as the tyranny of the majority

Ethnocentrism and political polarization underpin Ghanaian elections. Gyimah-Boadi and Debrah (2008: 128) have traced this ethno-political factionalism back to the pre-independent era when some traditional areas insisted on the creation of a federal state using violence in settling tribal scores. To the authors, Ghanaian electorates have since been cleaved along tribal lines. Indeed, the recent Supreme Court contempt cases involving the general secretary of the NPP and another on account of their public accusation of alleged biases of the justices sitting on the November 2012 Presidential Election Petition, and threats of death if justice did not go the way of the NPP,<sup>26</sup> as well as the trial and imprisonment of four NPP activists for the gruesome murder of an NDC activist in 2009<sup>27</sup> only succinctly demonstrate their point.

### *6.7 Qualifications of Officeholders*

The research also examined the qualifications of both the incumbent elected and appointed AMs of KMA using information from the office of the Metropolitan Electoral Commission. The data revealed that the appointed members are by far more educated than the elected ones. Of the 60 elected members of the Assembly, as many as 28 (46.7%) have only basic education, 22 (36.7%) have secondary or college education and only 10 or 16.7% have tertiary education. On the other hand, the 27 appointed members are mainly teachers, lecturers, lawyers, doctors and other professionals. None holds only basic education. 14.8% have secondary/college education and 23 (85%) have tertiary education, reflecting the proposition that appointments normally ensure more skilled/experienced and better educated people in the assemblies than do elections.

### *6.8 Summary*

The conventional view of accountability has been that direct elections are the mechanism through which politicians can be called to account and forced to introduce policies that reflect public opinion (Blair, 2000; Crawford, 2009; Debrah, 2009). The clarion call has therefore been for local government officeholders to be elected. This will not only confer legitimacy but will also ensure accountability and efficient service delivery since citizens will actively participate in governance. This will then reflect in pro-poor development. But the question is, has there been any citizen participation and downward accountability of officeholders more than two decades of decentralization in Ghana? The above results show there is hardly any citizen participation and involvement in the MMDAs affairs. There is total lack of downward accountability of even the elected officials, and no ex-ante and ex-post accountability as well; AMs do not regularly interact with the electorate to solicit their views or concerns, neither do AMs report back to the electorate decisions of the assemblies and their own contributions as demanded by law.

As Blair (2000) argues, it takes more than elections to ensure citizens participation and accountability of officeholders, for these are dependent on a gamut of factors of which elections is only one of them. Besides, the effectiveness of elections is measured against an existing political culture. First, political parties must play fairly in educating the populace devoid of extreme ethnocentrism. In addition, vibrant civil society organizations, pluralistic media and easy complaints procedures are all part of the equation of keeping a government on a path of rectitude (ibid).

Regrettably, as poignantly argued by Gyimah-Boadi and Debrah (2008: 129), ethno-political factionalism and voter mobilization based on ethnic loyalty and prejudices which emerged since the 1950s continue to be the bane of Ghanaian politics. Dissatisfied voters can neither discipline AMs through the complaints system nor through recall referenda, nor vote them out at the end of their term because of cumbersome procedures and the ethno-political factors. Thus, elections alone do not automatically lead to citizen participation, downward accountability and pro-poor development in local governance.

## **7. Achieving development and decentralized Accountability: The Way Forward for Emerging Democracies**

According to Schaef, and Yilmaz (2008), decentralization is fundamentally an argument about improving the process of governance in terms of tax spending, service provision and local preferences. The main issues at the local level therefore relate more to development than to ideological orientations. Communities measure success by the local government's ability to improve the quality of their lives by addressing their social needs and

<sup>26</sup> See the 15<sup>th</sup> August (No 19229) and 29<sup>th</sup> (No 19241) editions of the Daily Graphic newspaper

<sup>27</sup> See the 22<sup>nd</sup> August (No 19235) edition of the Daily Graphic newspaper

improving basic public services such as dealing with sanitation, primary health care, education, public security, public utilities, environmental protection and ensuring judicious and efficient non-corrupt use of local resources. The debate therefore ought to centre on what should be done to improve efficiency, development and accountability in local governance than on whether to elect or appoint political officeholders.

#### *7.1 Assembly members should work full time rather than part time*

The continuous part-time nature of the work of the assembly members is the bane of their inability to function properly as desired since they work on *pro bono* basis. Doubtless, it is expensive to engage full time the over 6,135 elected AMs nationwide and pay salaries, but that must be part of the cost of democratization and the Assemblies should find the resources. This paper believes the survival of the MMDAs as pillars of grassroots governance and popular democracy is threatened unless and until AMs work full time rather than part time. Until we deal decisively with this overarching issue which has been overlooked, introducing ‘an all elective system’ based on partisan politics would only succeed in recruiting mediocre councillors who will not be able to rise to the challenges of local governance.

#### *7.2 Elections to the Assemblies should continue on non-partisan basis*

Notwithstanding its difficulties, non-partisan local elections have sustained the community-spirit of co-existence and ought to continue. Besides, partisan politics in ethnically diverse and politically polarized societies at the local level could create local “empires” and spark off secessionist groups through demands for separate districts by groups who may feel marginalized.

#### *7.3 Appointment of critically required skills in local governance should continue*

As a young democracy grappling with high levels of illiteracy, poverty, and problems of ethnic divide, there is the need for some appointments to ensure the injection of critical skills in the Assemblies, since technocrats and skilled professionals are more likely to be appointed than elected. Accountability requires mechanisms that combine politics with competence to ensure democracy and development.

#### *7.4 DCEs should go through indirect election*

To ensure equilibrium or balance of power between the center and the Assemblies, it is important that the President remains the nominating authority of DCEs for indirect election either by the District Assemblies themselves or by the public. This should satisfy the quest for elections while at the same time ensuring the implementation of government’s economic and social policies for a holistic national development. Full blown western-styled democracy has real and potential challenges to national unity, policy implementation and economic development in emerging economies.

#### *7.5 Amend Act 462 to make accountability of officeholders real*

The relevant laws need some amendments to effectualise accountability of public officers. The complaints procedures are very ineffective in their current form and cannot be used to discipline erring and non-performing members, so too are the recall referenda requirement of voters as well as the “no confidence vote” requirement against DCEs. In addition amendments should provide for Town Hall Meetings as a way of engaging the people in discussions and approval of budgets and major projects and programmes undertaken by the Assemblies. Such public meetings and hearings educate people on major developments, tax responsibilities and how monies are expended and should be made compulsory.

## **8. Conclusion**

The developing world for the past 30 years has been pursuing decentralization reforms with greater dispersal of central powers to lower levels, and increasingly relying on elections as a solution to their governance and developmental problems in response to the belief that citizens’ full participation and accountability in local governance are linked to popular elections of officeholders. However, this paper has shown that in Ghana, direct local elections do not necessarily guarantee citizen participation and downward accountability of officeholders. Therefore elections, direct and indirect, combined with some appointments should be a better option. If

developed democracies have rejected popular election of mayors, it should be more compelling in developing countries that a blend of direct and indirect elections and appointments in local governance are key to maintaining national unity and development.

There is no doubting the importance of promoting elections, but to argue that elections of public officeholders is the panacea to good governance, local development and service provision, on the basis that it guarantees accountability of such officeholders for their actions, is tantamount to prescribing a simple solution to a complex problem. Accountability to be effective must be comprehensive and must include mechanisms (formal and informal), that combine politics with competence to ensure democracy and development. Far-reaching political reforms at the local level including making assembly membership a paid job just like membership of parliament is, making accountability processes flexible and more especially eliminating ethnocentrism and reducing poverty are all necessary before the introduction of full scale popular democracy at the local level. As long as this is not the case, its introduction will exacerbate problems rather than solve them. It will be retrogressive rather than progressive. The developing world must heed the advice of Hoffman and Metzroth (2010) that incremental rather than transformational decentralization is what is required for democracy and development in emerging democracies.

## References

- Ayee, J. R. A. (2000). The Global Context of Decentralization. In: Thomi, Yankson, Zanu (ed) *A Decade of Decentralization in Ghana: Retrospect and Prospects*, EPAD Research Project/MLGRD, Accra. 3-14.
- Beattie, D. J. (1946). *Hart's Introduction to the Law of Local Government and Administration*. (3rd ed.). Bell Yard London: Butterworths and Co. Ltd.
- Blair, H. (2000). Participation and Accountability at the Periphery: Democratic Local Governance in Six Countries. *World Development*, 28 No 1. 21-39.
- Crawford, G. (2004). Democratic decentralization in Ghana: Issues and Prospects. POLIS Working Paper No. 9. School of Politics and International Studies, University of Leeds, UK
- Crawford, G. (2009). Making Democracy a Reality? The Politics of Democracy and the Limits to Local Democracy in Ghana, *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*; 27 No 1 57-83. (Online) Available: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02589000802576699>. (January 6, 2013)
- Debrah, E. (2009). Assessing the quality of accountability in Ghana's District Assemblies, 1993-2008. *African Journal of Political Science and Int. Relations*, 3(6), 278-287. (Online) Available: <http://www.academicjournals.org/AJPSR>. (October, 10 2012)
- Gyimah-Boadi, E., & Debrah, E. (2008). Political Parties and Politics. Agyeman-Duah B. (ed.). *GHANA: Governance in the Fourth Republic*. The Ghana Centre for Democratic Development, Tema: Digibooks Ghana Ltd.
- Heywood, A. (2007). *Politics*. (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Basingstoke, Hampshire: RG21 Palgrave MacMillan, Houndmills
- Hoffman, B. D., & Metzroth, K. M. (2010). The Political Economy of Decentralization in Ghana. Center for Democracy and Civil Society, Georgetown. Paper Prepared for the World Bank.
- MLGRD. (1996). *Ghana: The New Local Government System*. Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development. Box 50 Accra, Ghana
- Schaeffer, M., and Yilmaz, S. (2008). Strengthening Local Government Budgeting and Accountability. Policy Research Working Paper 4767. The World Bank: Sustainable Development Network, Social Development Dept. (Online) Available: <http://elibrary.worldbank.org/content/workingpaper/10.1596/1813-9450-4767>. (July 11, 2013)
- Stevens, A. (2013). History of local Government in England. (Online) Available: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:England\\_administrative\\_division\\_since\\_2009.svg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:England_administrative_division_since_2009.svg) (June 11, 2013).
- Thomi W. (2000). The Local Impact of the District Assembly. Thomi, Yankson and Zanu (ed.) (2000) *A Decade of Decentralisation in Ghana: Retrospect and Prospects*. Ghana: EPAD/MLRD.
- USAID. (2000). *Decentralization and Democratic Local Governance Programming Handbook*. Technical Publication Series, Office of Democratic and Governance, USAID, Washington, DC 20523-3100.
- Wikipedia.com. (2013a). Accountability. (Online) <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Accountability>. (July 10, 2013).
- Wikipedia.com. (2013b). The History of Local Government. (Online) Available: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/localgovernment>. (August 29, 2013).

The IISTE is a pioneer in the Open-Access hosting service and academic event management. The aim of the firm is Accelerating Global Knowledge Sharing.

More information about the firm can be found on the homepage:  
<http://www.iiste.org>

## CALL FOR JOURNAL PAPERS

There are more than 30 peer-reviewed academic journals hosted under the hosting platform.

**Prospective authors of journals can find the submission instruction on the following page:** <http://www.iiste.org/journals/> All the journals articles are available online to the readers all over the world without financial, legal, or technical barriers other than those inseparable from gaining access to the internet itself. Paper version of the journals is also available upon request of readers and authors.

## MORE RESOURCES

Book publication information: <http://www.iiste.org/book/>

## IISTE Knowledge Sharing Partners

EBSCO, Index Copernicus, Ulrich's Periodicals Directory, JournalTOCS, PKP Open Archives Harvester, Bielefeld Academic Search Engine, Elektronische Zeitschriftenbibliothek EZB, Open J-Gate, OCLC WorldCat, Universe Digital Library, NewJour, Google Scholar

