

**ENHANCING DECENTRALIZATION THROUGH FUNCTIONAL
SUB-DISTRICT STRUCTURES:
The Case of Jirapa/Lambussie District.**

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ABSTRACT

This study seeks to explore how functional sub-district structures can strengthen the decentralization process in Ghana. Specifically, this paper entails examination of the Jirapa/Lambussie sub-district structures (such as town councils, area councils and unit committees), the level of participation of these structures and how they contribute towards deepening decentralization of local government. The performance of the constitutional duties of the sub-district structures are being marred by the conflict between the Jirapa/Lambussie District Assembly and its sub-structures over roles, functions, motivation resource constraints (such as cede funds, human resources and logistics). Simple random and purposive sampling techniques were used for the investigation of the above problems. The findings revealed that sub-district structures are relevant for the enhancement of decentralization but, there was public apathy towards the operations of the sub-district structures, poor motivation, inadequate co-ordination between the District Assembly and its sub-structures and the challenges of political interference. The study concludes that the consolidation of decentralization will depend on the institutionalization and proper integration of the sub-district structures into the operations of the District Assemblies. The paper therefore recommends capacity training programmes for the staff of the sub-district structures, provision of material, financial and psychological incentives for the Councilors and Unit Committee members and redefinition of roles and functions of the District Assembly and the sub-district structures to enhance cooperation and participation.

KEY WORDS: Decentralization, Institutional support, Sub-District Structures, Functional Analysis, Decentralized Participation,

INTRODUCTION

The concept of decentralization has shaped the contours of development thinking, administration and governance both in the developed and developing countries. Indeed, the demand for decentralization is strong throughout the world because of its link to the concept of subsidiarity, which holds that decisions should be taken at most appropriate level of government and establishes a presumption that this level will be the lowest available (community based institutions). In the case of Ghana, the provision in LI, 1589 suggests that Sub-district structures, which are the lowest of the local governance structure, have been established to promote participation of local people in their own affairs. The full participation of individuals within the local governance system contributes to the creation of community solidarity because everyone feels involved in what is going on relative to his or her welfare (Van Kersbergen and Verbeek, 1994). However, moving government to the people, as the decentralization has done, throws up enormous challenges for development in terms of the capacity of the District Assemblies and its sub-structures to deliver and the extent to which people are willing to and able to participate to achieve development goals. Again, full participation of individuals in making societal choices and decisions is also seen as a natural outcome of the endowment of individual dignity, as it contributes to individual self-development. In practice, however, full participation within the local governance system has not been achieved by the Sub-district structures for a number of reasons.

First of all, there has been conflict between District Assemblies and the Sub-district structures over roles, functions and resources (e.g., ceded funds, human resource, and logistics among others) Ayee (1994). This has led to a call by some District Assemblies to the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development (now, Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Environment) to redefine the role and functions of the Sub-district structures.

Secondly, the failure or ineffectiveness of the local or Sub-district structures in aiding development at the grass root level stems from the fact that there is generally apathy toward the operations of the Sub-district structures. This is because councilors and committee members who are serving on these structures are not paid either a sitting or transport allowance. Most Unit Committee members have become disenchanted and frustrated because; contrary to their expectations, being a member of the Unit Committee is sacrificial and voluntary. More importantly, citizens in the communities feel that the work of the Sub-district structures is a duplication of that of the District Assemblies. In some instances, Unit Committee members have complained about the general public apathy and despondency (Korbie, 1998). Furthermore, the Sub-district structures are unable to play their roles effectively because no rational principle had evolved to govern the delimitation of their areas, their constitution, functions, and relationship with the District Assembly (Ayee, 1994). This is due to the fact that the Sub-district structures lack the necessary logistics (such as infrastruc-

ture, personnel, funds) to enhance their operation in conformity with popular participation and for that matter community development. The Sub-district structures have failed to impress the communities that will goad them to arouse their support. Their fore-bearers, the District Assemblies are still grappling with the high expectation which the communities have placed on them and which cannot be fulfilled.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework used, and subsequently, informing the analysis in this paper is the theory of decentralization. There are two schools of thought on the role of participation in development and governance: the populist and the elitist perspectives. The populists believe that participation is desirable because it had positive impact on participants; it results in increased responsiveness to the needs and desires of the participants and improves participants' self image, confidence and sense of power (Gow and Vansant, 1983). Participation increases the information available to administrators and results in more effective programmes. The principal roles of participation are to ensure the efficient implementation of projects and the empowerment of communities to sustain projects as well as to be able to design other projects to improve the quality of life (Krefetz and Goodman, 1973). On the other hand, the elitists believe that participation is not desirable because it makes programme formulation and implementation less efficient (Lowenstein, 1971). Participation increases the number of people involved giving rise to the possibility of disagreement, which delays decision-making (Barnfield, 1970:253). It increases the total cost of the project because animation is quite expensive and requires expertise, which may not be easily available. While participation has been recognized as essential to the development process in Ghana, this is not likely to happen without the following conditions (Kendie, 1997: pp. 12):

- Participation requires that there should be real commitment of politicians and administrators to allow communities to control critical decision-making issues such as needs-assessment.
- The emergence of strong civil society organizations able to mobilize the people to demand both participation and the rendering of quality services by state institutions is essential for effective participation.
- The political context in which participation occurs must be opened at all levels. Participation at local levels may produce results, and there are many examples. But the benefits of such local level efforts are not likely to be widespread and sustainable. Sustainability will depend on how permissive macro-arenas of decision-making are to participation. Where participation takes place at all spatial levels, the efficiency and empowerment objectives may be fulfilled.
- Participation ought not to be only instrumental; it has to be an end in itself.

The theory is based on the principle that local administrative units become more beneficial to the beneficiaries where there is an increased capacity of the local communities to identify their own needs and priorities and explore options to meet these needs, as far as possible for themselves through the mobilization of resources that they command. This involves the transfer of power or authority from the central government to the periphery (Ayee, 1994).

Institutionally, the set-up of Sub-district structures of District Assemblies is the galvanizing agent for local development. Under the new Local Government Act 1993 (Act 462) and the National Planning System Act, 1994 (Act 480), the National Development Planning Commission (NDPC) and the District Assemblies are responsible for the preparation of development plans, formulation of programmes and strategies and the mobilization and utilization of resources of their respective levels. This approach represents a fundamental shift in planning with regards to both the actors and the activities associated with socio-economic development. It involves the differentiation analysis of each district's potentials and constraints as a pivot for plan formulation and hence integrating the districts into the overall development process of nation building. The new approach also provides administrative mechanism for expanding operational capacity at the local level while at the same time contributing to reduction in regional inequality. This approach however seeks to focus on the District Assembly, Development Institutions, Decentralized Departments, and Non-Governmental Organizations all working in collaboration with the district as a pivot of development leading to an overall development process of the entire nation. Currently, the local administrative units for bringing governance closer to the people have been increased from 110 to 138. Essentially, the difference between the District and the Metropolitan/Municipal is one of degree rather than kind, thus political and administrative structures of the Assemblies are the same (Kessey, 1995). The four-tier structure that is being practiced, consist of Regional Coordinating Councils, District Assemblies, Town/Area Councils and Unit Committees within each of the ten (10) regions with the promulgation of PNDC Law 207 in 1988.

Decentralized participation is imbued with virtues of greater involvement by grass-roots communities and people in local development; better mobilization of local resources, encouragement of micro market like responsiveness to use of service, greater efficiency of public management arising from improved coordination and shorten decision-making hierarchy. These therefore anchor improved stability politically through legitimization of the different local needs and perspectives (Mawhood, 1983). In situations where administrative capacity is low, decentralized participation is sometimes seen as a means of creating larger numbers of skilled administrators and managers. Such skills, as it is argued, are only strengthened when administrators have meaningful managerial responsibilities (USAID 1979a). One of the possible ways of effective identification of felt needs and planning is reduction in the power of the centre or centralized planning. Dr. Paa Kwasi Nduom supported this principle when he acknowledged the values inherent in decentralized participation and said,

“The successful establishment of self-sustaining development oriented on decentralized local government system countrywide will promote the ability of the nation to achieve active grass root democracy” (Nduom, 1999).

The Legislative Instrument (LI, 1589) of Act 462 (1993) that created the Sub-district structures as consultative bodies to the District Assemblies (DAs), carry out their functions as delegated by the District Assemblies. This, undoubtedly point out that the District Assemblies are linked to their various communities through the sub-structures, represented by Assemblypersons, Urban/Town/Area Councilors, Unit Committee members and the staff of the Secretariat. The Unit Committees and Councils are needed to help the District Assemblies (DAs) identify the development needs and also act as agents for the implementation of projects at the community level. The roles and functions of Sub-District Structures (SDS) as stipulated by law include the following;

- To enumerate and keep records of all ratable persons and properties in the zonal, Town and Area councils.
- To provide, operate and maintain community services in the Urban, Area or Towns.
- Subject to the approval of the Assembly, SDS implement schemes for economic development and social justice as may be entrusted to them.
- Mobilize members of the Unit for the implementation of self-help and development projects.
- Be responsible, under the guidance of the Registrar of Births and Deaths, for the registration of births and deaths in the unit.
- Provide a focal point for the discussion of local problems and take remedial action where necessary or make recommendations to the Assembly where appropriate through the relevant Urban, Zonal or Town councils.
- Organize voluntary work, especially with respect to sanitation.

Most of the functions of the sub-district structures are meant to promote popular participation because they are the “rallying point of enthusiasm and participation in support of the development objectives of the District Assemblies” (Ayee, 1999).

METHODOLOGY

Data Source and Collection

The study makes use of both primary and secondary data. Data from the primary source were gathered from the respondents using questionnaires, focus group discussions and observation (Thomas et al., 1998; Morgan, 1997; Wilkinson, 1999). Ques-

tions were both structured and semi-structured relating to social, demographic, economic and political issues of the respondents (Mckay, 2002: pp. 187-199). Also, questions asked were based on the respondents' knowledge of the Sub-district structures, their roles, AND level of participation in decentralized governance, perception about the Sub-district structures and how these structures have enhanced decentralization. Focus group discussions were held in the four (4) Area councils and twelve (12) Unit committees selected from Tizza, Gbare, Lambussie and Jirapa. This involved individual household heads and members as well as personnel of the Jirapa/Lambussie District Assembly. Issues discussed were based on the need for the importance of the sub-district structures, the relation between the Assembly and the sub-structures and measures to increase dialogue between and among stakeholders. This method helped to put straight, information gathered by using the structured and semi-structured questions. Secondary sources of data used included the review of the 1992 Republican Constitution of Ghana, Textbooks, Journals, Articles as well as archival records of the Jirapa/Lambussie District Assembly.

Sampling Technique

A multi- stage sampling technique was employed (Vandana and Potter, 2006: pp. 169-170). Stratified sampling was used in the selection of the Area councils and Unit Committees (Twumasi, 1986; Kumar, 1996). The Area councils and unit committees were clustered into four (4) groups. Out of twelve (12) Area Councils and one hundred and four (104) Unit Committees, a simple random was used to select four (4) Area Councils and twelve (12) Unit Committees. Randomly, a total of ninety-eight (98) households were then selected on the basis of population size from the administration of the household questionnaires. Purposive sampling was also used to select the key informants (Area council chairpersons, opinion leaders and personnel of the Jirapa/Lambussie District Assembly) for detailed discussions and information on the activities of the sub-district structures in promoting decentralization.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Table 1 shows that thirty-nine percent (39%) of the respondents had no formal education. The highest of fifty-one percent (51%) were those who had primary education and those with secondary education were ten percent (10%). The results are not encouraging because, out of the sixty-one percent (61%) who have attained formal education only ten percent (10%) had secondary education. This situation has a direct relation with the activities of the sub-district structures as the level of education affects efficiency level of Councilors/Committee members in the performance of their roles and functions of the sub-district structures. For the people to have an in-depth knowledge about the operations of the Area councils and Unit committees and the benefits thereof, there is the need to organize more workshops and public education to re-orient them.

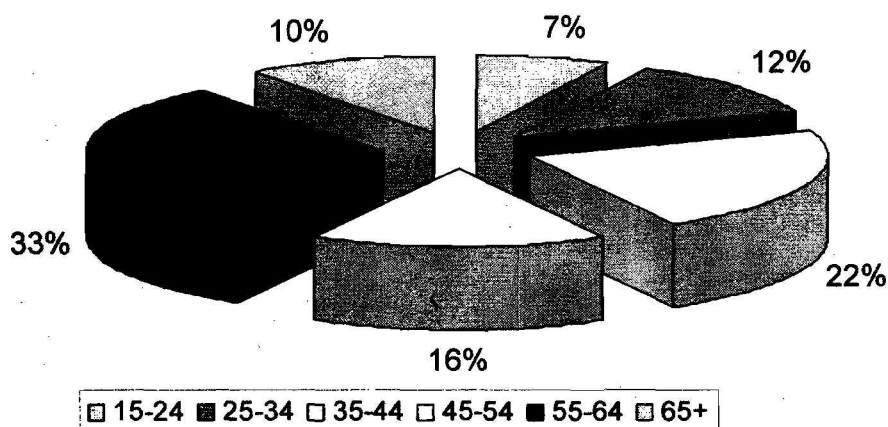
Table 1: Education Status of Respondents

Level of Formal Education	No. of Persons	Percentage %
No Education	38	39
Primary	50	51
Secondary	10	10
Total	98	100

Source: Field Survey, 2007

The study revealed that, majority of the respondents were within 35-44 (22%) and 55-64 (33%) age groups. The third highest age category of 65+ had 16% whilst 25-34 obtained 12%. The group with the least (7%) was the ages between fifteen (15) and twenty-four (24). The age composition of the respondents indicates that, majority of them are eligible voters whose decisions are politically significant, particularly at the grass root level (refer to figure 1).

Figure 1: Age Distribution of Respondents.



Source: Field Survey, 2007

Data from field survey indicates that forty-two percent (42%) of the respondents have knowledge about the existence and operations of the sub-district structures as compared to fifty-eight percent (58%) who have no knowledge about the Area councils and Unit committees for enhancing decentralization. Those with some knowledge saw the sub-district structures as the local representatives of the central government (see table 2). Further discussions with the 58% of the respondents with little or no knowledge about the sub-district structures expressed that, though the structures of government are closer, the practice of local governance is still far off.

Table 2: Knowledge about the Sub-District Structures

Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	41	42
No	57	58
Total	98	100

Source: Field Survey, 2007

Fourteen of the Councilors and Unit Committee members, representing 58% supported resource mobilization as their key role. This category of the respondents was mainly from communities with markets where some of the members of the sub-district structures were engaged in revenue collection. This indicates that the other equally important functions are not being performed. The study further shows that 16% of the interviewees view the administrative function as the prime role; planning and advocacy had 13% each. The implication is that, Councilors and Unit members are not fully aware of their key roles in promoting decentralization at the grassroots. This may affect the proper functioning of the sub-district structures since the issue of role conflict is likely to emerge. Lack of well-defined roles is what Amonoo (1981) calls "institutional dualism", whereby largely political and purely administrative organs operated side by side in an uncoordinated manner.

Table 3: Key Functions of the sub-District Structures

Functions	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Resource Mobilization	14	58
Planning	3	13
Educating the People	3	13
Administrative Role	4	16
Total	24	100

Source: Field Survey, 2007

Table 4 reveals that majority; comprising 79.2% of Councilors and Unit Committee members were not satisfied with the working relationship existing between the Jirapa/Lambussie District Assembly and the sub-district structures. This was based on the fact that they were mostly neglected in decision-making, the provision of logistics, funding and generally lacked incentives. This, in the views of Gow and Vansant (1983), does not increase the responsiveness of local communities. Local opinion indicated some level of satisfaction with the performance of the District Assembly structures on revenue generation. One Unit Committee Member said the inter-institutional relationship was very satisfactory as this led to the provision of office accommodation for the Lambussie Council.

Table 4: Relationship between the Assembly and the Sub-District Structures

Level of Satisfaction	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Very Satisfied	1	4.2
Satisfied	4	16.6
Not Satisfied	19	79.2
Total	24	100

Source: Field Survey, 2007

To actualize participation through the Area Councils and the Unit Committees, the

Table 5: The Relevance of Decentralization

Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Promotes Participation	55	56
Mobilizes Support	25	26
Improves Stability	18	18
Total	98	100

Source: Field Survey, 2007

District Assembly should be concerned with both equity and efficiency in the delivery of services. This will not only motivate the Councilors and Unit members, but also facilitate effective fiscal and administrative decentralization.

The figures in table 5 show that respondents who agreed that decentralization through the sub-district structures is a necessary condition for promoting participation comprise fifty-six percent (56%). The results provide evidence to support the argument of Ayee (1997) that most functions of the sub-district structures are meant to promote popular participation because they are to be the “rallying point of enthusiasm and participation in support of the development objectives of the District Assemblies”. Whereas twenty-six percent (26%) said that proper institutionalization of decentralization mobilizes support for the central government, only eighteen percent (18%) linked it to improved stability. This implies that, the consolidation of the gains of decentralization will depend on the institutionalization and proper integration of the sub-district structures into the operations of the District Assemblies.

The picture that was indicated by assessing the image that was being held by the respondents of the four (4) communities is presented in Table 6. On the ordinal scale, the respondents agreed on a common image of the sub-district structures. That is, apart from the issues of “lack of orientation on roles and responsibilities” and decision-making being decentralized” which respondents from Jirapa differ, there was a consensus on the need for qualified personnel, performing less than expected and non-partisan in practice (see table 6).

Table 6: Image of the Sub-District Structures Held by Respondents

Aspect of Performance	Communities				
	Jirap a	Tizza	Gbare	Lambussie	Average
Assist in Resource Mobilization	-0.35	-0.29	-0.80	-0.28	-0.43
Performing less than expected	+0.43	+1.19	+0.39	+0.86	+0.72
Non-Partisan in practice	-0.45	-0.30	-0.65	-0.93	-0.58
Lack of Orientation on Roles & Responsibilities	-0.33	+0.27	+0.45	+0.79	+0.30
Needs Qualified Personnel	+0.21	+0.76	+1.96	+0.87	+0.95
Decision-making is decentralized	+0.69	-1.30	-0.55	-0.72	-0.47

Source: Field Survey, 2007

Scale: Strongly agree (+2) Agree (+1) Indifferent/don't know (0) Disagree (-1) Strongly disagree (-2)

Notwithstanding the fact that the Sub-district structures have a constitutional mandate to assist and promote the mobilization of resources at the local level, the respondents' perceptions about the performance of these roles were negative. This problem can be linked with the issue of decentralized participation in decision-making, which respondents of three (3) out of the four (4) communities disagreed to be taking place. Therefore, the empirical support that could emanate from effective involvement of the masses in the mobilization of financial, material and human resources will be missing. These findings do not support populist perspective of participation.

The most outstanding challenge, as expressed by the respondents was lack of incentives (33%). This has made the Area Councilors and Unit Committee members not to operate as required and was perceived to be ineffective. Public apathy towards the existence of the sub-district structures was 29% that culminated from the perceived ineffectiveness. Seventeen percent (17%) indicated that the problem of political interference was working against the functioning of decentralized participation. The 30% government's appointees of the Committees and Councils gain their appointments on partisan basis than the consideration of technical expertise and proven community work. Other challenges are lack of logistics (13%) and low calibre of staff (8%) of the Sub-district structures.

Table 7: Challenges of the Sub-District Structures

Challenges	No. of Persons	Percentage (%)
Political Interference	4	17
Lack of Logistics	3	13
Public Apathy	7	29
Low Calibre of Staff	2	8
Lack of Incentives	8	33
Total	24	100

Source: Field Survey, 2007

The people also perceived the District Assembly as not being transparent in terms of internal revenue generated at the sub-district level as much of this revenue went to the Assembly's secretariat to the detriment of the Area council/Unit Committees concerned.

The composition of Area Council secretariat/management was found to be inadequate. This is mainly due to inadequate qualified personnel available to manage area councils. For instance the positions of treasurer, messenger and a convener were all absent. Also, most assemblypersons, councilors and committee representatives interviewed saw their task as a lowly motivated one, since support in terms of funding from the top management of the District Assembly was regarded as being skewed and woefully inadequate. This was obvious in the sense that allowances payable to Area Council Secretariats were not forthcoming. Personnel recruited at the council level do not receive any form of motivation in the performance of their duties. It thus poses a serious threat to development of the areas in which they operate, as they are not able to undertake their activities appropriately to foster any meaningful development in the Jirapa/Lambussie District Assembly as a whole.

Efficiency of Sub-District Structures

The major role of Sub-district structures as revealed by the research in the study area-Jirapa/Lambussie District Assembly is for Area Councils and Unit Committees capability to be built to prepare development plans, formulate programmes and strategies as well as mobilize resources at the local level for development. It also plays a role in promoting participatory democracy whereby the opinion of those at the grassroots' levels about governance in the country is incorporated into the national development agenda.

However, the performance of these functions by the sub-structures of Jirapa/Lambussie district is being thwarted by the existence of apathy (both on the part of the Unit committee members/councilors and the public), inadequate training and staffing and woefully inadequate financial resources. This undoubtedly does not support the theoretical framework of participation.

CONCLUSION

The framers and drafters of the various Acts of Local Government and constitutions perceived the involvement of the masses (who reside at grassroots levels) in local governance as a way of ensuring social justice, equity and decentralized planning and management of resources for the overall development of the nation. In line with this, the Sub-district structures at the study district have brought governance closer to the people by allowing them participation in choosing their local representatives. It was also identified that the Sub-district structures play significant roles in promoting participation, mobilizing support for national development and improves on stability through legitimization of the different local needs and perspectives. However, the

Sub-district structures are faced with some challenges including inadequate knowledge about the activities of the Sub-district structures, poor working relationship between the District Assembly and its sub-structures, lack of orientation on roles and responsibilities, low calibre of personnel and low incentives. Subsequently, the people exhibit apathy towards the management of the Area Councils and Unit Committees. It was further revealed that the Sub-district structures of Jirapa/Lambussie district and roles/functions assigned them per se are not faulty but the necessary conditions to effectively utilize the available resources is being hampered due to financial resource constraints and lack of capacity training of personnel, culminating into inadequate implementation of fiscal and administrative decentralization.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To adequately achieve the democratic process of involving communities in the Jirapa/Lambussie District through the structures of Area Councils and Unit Committees, there is the need to intensify efforts in capacity improvement, interaction and motivation by all stakeholders in the decentralization process.

Drawing from the above, it is being recommended that:

There should be an elaborate and accelerated capacity training programme for the enhancement of the knowledge and skills of the Area Councilors and Unit Committee members. This will re-orient the staff, increase their efficiency and solve the problem of apathy.

The peasant communities in the hinterland of the district capital (Jirapa) should be integrated through regular interaction between and among the assembly members, members of the sub-structures, chiefs and opinion leaders by organizing meetings and community fora. In this respect, a mechanism must be found to facilitate these interactions for all segments of the communities to know and understand the operations and roles of the Area Councils and Unit Committees.

The Councilors and Unit Committee members should be appropriately motivated by the provision of material, financial and psychological incentives to make them more proactive in carrying out their responsibilities as enshrined in LI 1589. This will not only enhance their performance but also strengthen and promote decentralization and good governance.

The roles and functions of the District Assembly and the Sub-district structures should be redefined to make them work in partnership and be seen as partners in development; and their operations should not be based on 'master-servant relationship'. This has to be built by obtaining the commitment and cooperation of all stakeholders and actors for the decentralization process.

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