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# Grass-Roots Perception of Decentralisation in Relation to Community Development in Ghana

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## Author's contribution

*The sole author designed, analyzed and interprets and prepared the manuscript.*

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## ABSTRACT

Decentralisation is presumed to have a number of democratic as well as developmental benefits. It is assumed that democracy will be deepened by facilitating democratic participation at the grassroots thereby empowering grassroots and channelling their input constructively into community development. However, some authors argue that the purported benefits of decentralisation leading to community development are not as obvious as proponents of decentralisation suggest. This paper explores the relationship between decentralisation and community development in six regions in Ghana using questionnaire surveys at the district level. In all the relationship between decentralisation and community development for the six regions was 57.8 per cent. This implies that 57.8 per cent of the respondent's agree that there was a relationship between decentralisation and community development. The regression analysis between decentralisation and community development showed a significant relationship of 0.000 between decentralisation and community development.

*Keywords: Decentralisation; participation; community development; district assembly.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

There is an increasing trend toward decentralisation across the world in both federal and unitary countries. Both industrialised and developing countries are moving towards

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decentralisation. Designers and implementers of decentralisation policy believe that when designed and implemented properly, it would reduce bureaucracy and workload at the centre. Decentralisation is presumed to have a number of democratic as well as developmental benefits. It is assumed that democracy will be deepened by facilitating genuine democratic participation at the grassroots thereby empowering grassroots and channelling their input constructively into the national effort, create political and administrative accountability. It is believed that popular participation makes development plans more responsive to local conditions, and in the long run develop organisational structures tailored to local circumstances in which community felt needs would be identified and the provision of services will lead to development, growth and ultimately lead to community development and increased access to social services. It is also argued that locally elected decision-makers are likely to be more responsive to local needs than central government bureaucrats. Decentralisation enhances both effectiveness and efficiency in the use of public resources.

Decentralisation has been the major administrative reform in the 1980s. In the early and late 1980s, many countries across the globe passed major legislation introducing decentralisation in many different contexts. Examples of these countries include; Indonesia, Bolivia, Mexico, Ghana, Uganda, India, Nigeria, Mexico, Brazil, Philippines etc. In these countries major changes have been introduced and there have been a paradigm shift from the “top down” to “bottom-up” approach to planning, decision making and implementation. The degree of decentralisation varies significantly from country to country. The degree of decentralisation is not always encouraged by a federal structure or restrained by a unitary institutional structure [1]. In their study found that some unitary countries (Denmark and Sweden) were more decentralised than countries identify as federal (Germany, Mexico and United States). They conclude in their study that, the degree of decentralisation does not correspond directly with the fact – whether a country is classified as federal or not. Mexico has decentralised only health services and brought in a new budget line for those funds devolved to states. India’s constitution was amended through the 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> to bring in ‘local self governments’ in 1992-93 [2,3,4,5,6].

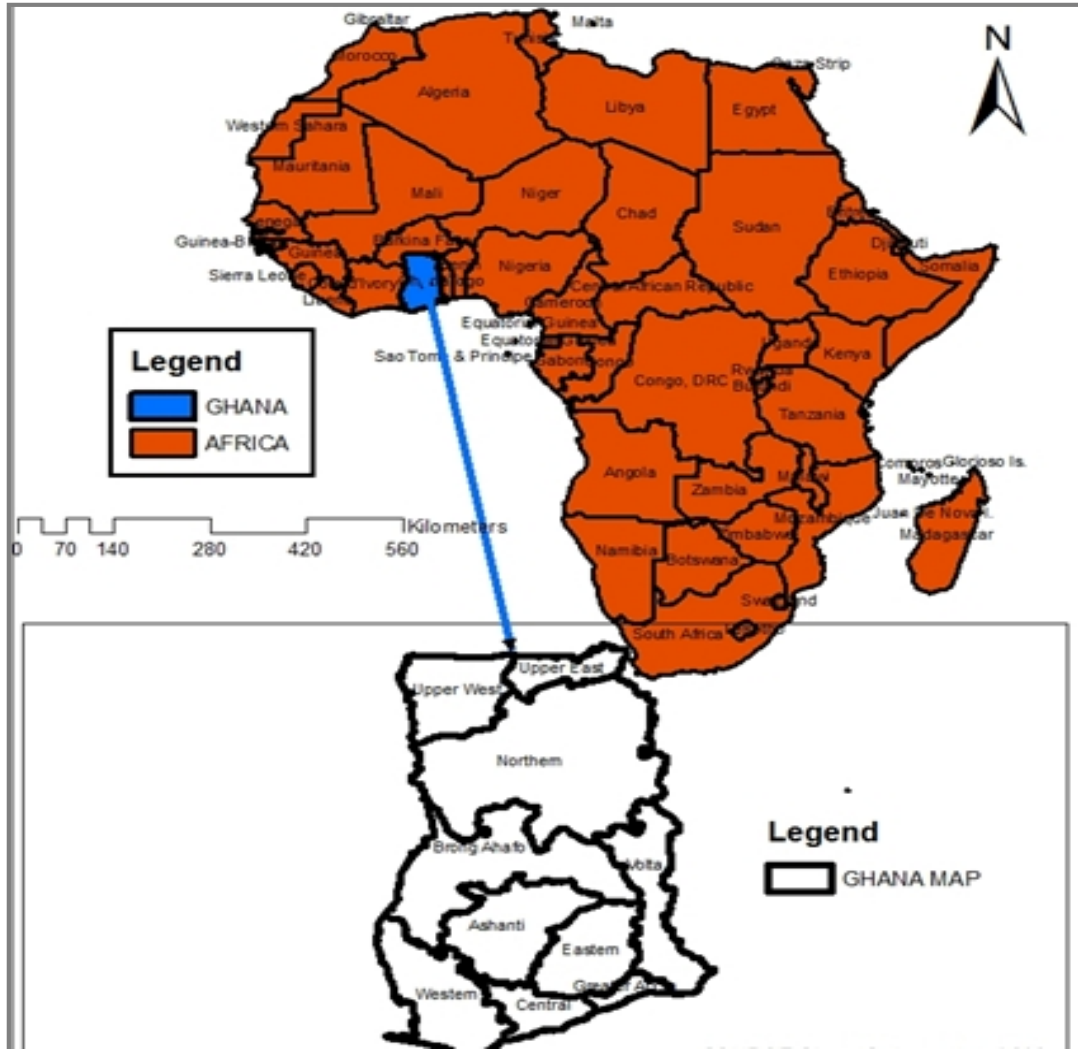
This paper examines decentralisation in Ghana and presents the perspectives of people on the implementation of decentralisation in Ghana over the years. It begins with background information on Ghana. It then presents the methodology adopted for the study. A discussion on the conceptualisation of decentralisation is then presented. This is followed by background information on decentralisation in Ghana. Results and discussions are then presented and conclusions drawn.

## **2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON THE REPUBLIC OF GHANA**

The Republic of Ghana is a unitary state and the first sub-Saharan country in colonial Africa to gain its independence on 6th March 1957. It was formerly called the Gold Coast. See Fig. 1 below for the location of Ghana in Africa context. From Fig. 1 below, it can be seen that, Ghana is in West Africa; its neighbours are the Republic of Togo to the East, Ivory Coast to the West, Burkina Faso to the North and the Atlantic Ocean to the South.

There are ten Regions in Ghana, these are; The Greater Accra Region where the capital Accra is located, the Ashanti Region, the Brong Ahafo Region, the Central Region, the Western Region, the Eastern Region, Volta Region, the Northern Region, the Upper East Region and the Upper West Region. The 2010 Population and Housing Census report puts the total population of Ghana at 25.4 million, which is thirty per cent increase from the 2000

population census figure of eighteen million, one hundred and ninety two thousand, seventy nine (18,192,079) [7].



**Fig. 1. Map of Africa showing Ghana**  
 Source: Adopted from Ghana maps

### 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research is mainly quantitative and the focus was on random sampling of respondents (household heads). The minimum sample size for this study was obtained using the Yamane formula.

$$\text{Yamane formula, } n = \frac{N}{1+N(e)^2}$$

Where n= Sample size  
 N= Population size  
 e= level of precision, 10% or 0.1

The following regions were randomly selected from the ten regions in Ghana; Northern Region, Brong Ahafo Region, Upper West Region, Ashanti Region, Central Region and Volta Region. This was followed by the random selection of two districts from each of the Regions from a listing of all districts in the selected region. Table 1 presents the selected districts and corresponding sample size.

**Table 1. Selected regions, districts and sample size**

Region	Selected districts	Total sample size
Northern	Central Gonja and Bole	197
Brong Ahafo	Banda and Jaman North	198
Upper West Region	Jirapa and Lawra	122
Ashanti Region	Offinso North and Asante Akim South District	306
Central Region	Agona East and Gomoa West	234
Volta Region	Akatsi North and South Tongu	145
Total		1202

The Total household size for each district was obtained and the Yamane formula was used to obtain the required sample size for each of the selected districts. The Central Gonja District is used as an illustration below.

$$\text{Yamane formula, } n = \frac{N}{1+N(e)^2}$$

Where n= Sample size

N= Population size = Total households = **16,250**

e= level of precision, 10% or 0.1

$$\text{Therefore, } n = \frac{16,250}{1+16,250(0.1)^2} = 99$$

#### 4. CONCEPTUALISATION OF DECENTRALISATION

The term decentralisation has no universally accepted definition. It is multi faceted and it is used differently by different professions and disciplines to suit their own circumstances.

[8] defined it as the transfer of planning, decision making or administrative authority from the Central Government to field organisations, local administrative units, semi – autonomous and parastatal organisations, local governments or non – governmental organisations. They emphasise that the different forms of decentralisation can be distinguished by the extent to which authority to plan, decide and manage is transferred from the Central Government to local organisations and the amount of autonomy the decentralised organisations achieve in carrying out their tasks.

[9] defined decentralisation in similar words as the transfer of authority to plan, make decisions or manage functions from the national level to any organisation or agency at the sub-national level. It is therefore a gradual process that evolves within an appropriate legal framework. He categorised decentralisation as political, administrative and fiscal decentralisation. Accordingly, he relates political decentralisation to the transfer of authority or function from the central levels of government to local institutions that are governed by local political representatives. Similarly, [10] defined decentralisation as the transfer of administrative powers to deliver services at sub-national level, and capacities to decide the institutional structures to support those services, and the second; fiscal decentralisation, which is the possibility to count on sub-national resources, raised sub-national revenue and transfers from the Central government to manage a budget.

Decentralisation is defined as a tool of public administration reform that involves the transfer of functions and powers, skills and competences and means and resources to lower levels of governance, normally structures of local government, though in some jurisdiction, the transfer is to other spheres of governance [11].

On the basis of the above definitions of decentralisation it can be argued that in practice decentralisation would be a matter of degree and, therefore, countries or organisations cannot be all placed equally into the various organisational forms of decentralisation

In Ghana's decentralisation programme, local authorities are the destinations of decentralised functions. The programme seeks to transfer functions and powers in a programme of political decentralisation; to transfer skills and competences in a programme of administrative decentralisation and decentralised planning; and to transfer means and resources through a programme of fiscal decentralisation [11].

A comprehensive decentralisation process may include the direct transfer of responsibilities and executive capacities to democratically elected sub-national governments, in addition to corresponding resources for public services and social programmes.

## **5. OVERVIEW OF DECENTRALISATION IN GHANA**

In Ghana, the decentralisation programme rest on four pillars, namely; legal framework, political, fiscal and administrative. The current local government reforms have the following major features as a matter of policy:

Ghana's decentralisation is by devolution of administration, development planning, implementation and budgeting decision-making in which local level authorities will be actively involved. The establishment of a National Development Planning Agency responsible for the integration of the overall planning process, the coordination of development planning activities of sectoral agencies at the national level, as well as sub-national agencies at the local level with the District Assemblies as the pivot. Specifically, the decentralisation programme has been designed to;

Devolve political and state power in order to promote participatory democracy through local-level institutions.

De-concentrate and devolve administration, development planning, and implementation to the District Assemblies (Local Government Units).

Introduce an effective system of fiscal decentralisation that gives the District Assemblies control over substantial portion of their revenues.

Establish a national development planning system to integrate and coordinate development planning at all levels and in all sectors.

Incorporate economic, social, spatial, and environmental issues into the Development Planning process on an integrated and comprehensive basis [12,13,14].

## **5.1 The Legal Framework for Decentralisation in Ghana**

The existence of a strong legal framework for decentralisation facilitates the definition of roles and responsibilities and provides guidance on implementation of the policy. A major advance in connection with the establishment of a decentralised framework for political administrative and development decision-making was the enactment of laws and acts which were designed to serve as a framework for district political authority. Thus Ghana's institutional structure for decentralisation was until recently based on the Local Government Law of 1988 (PNDC Law 207). This law made significant provisions for effective attainment of the goals of decentralisation. In January 1993, PNDC Law 207 was revised to reflect constitutional demands in the form of the Local Government Act 1993 (Act 462).

Many of the provisions contained in the Fourth Republic Constitution of Ghana as well as the Local Government Act were attempts to place more power at the Districts. The overall processes of decentralisation were aimed at restructuring the political and administrative machinery of government for development decision-making at both the national and local levels. It was also designed to be an integral part of various reform activities, including reforms of the public administrative system, with essential principles of building appropriate institutions for enhancing participation in national development and ensuring effective resource mobilisation and utilisation for development, especially at the local level. Thus, the laws established a local government system with District Assemblies as the development entity and political focus. The most important features of the laws establishing the districts included the following [12,13,14]:

- Separate legal entity
- Local planning and financial authority
- Local political representation, and
- Some level of political control

The Constitutional Framework for Decentralisation; Chapter 20, Article 240 of the 1992 Constitution provides the broad framework for decentralisation in Ghana by providing that local government and administration should, as far as practicable, be decentralised.

The constitutional framework identifies the components of decentralisation to comprise political, administrative, planning and fiscal.

## **5.2 Political Decentralisation**

Political decentralisation features the District Assemblies and identifies the key officers of the Assembly to be the District Chief Executive who is appointed by the President of the

Republic with the prior approval of two-thirds of the members of the Assembly present and voting.

A Presiding Member who chairs the Assembly is elected by two-thirds of all members of the Assembly. He must be a member of the Assembly.

The Assembly is constituted of 70 per cent elected by universal adult suffrage and 30 per cent appointed by the president in consultation with chiefs and other identifiable interest groups in the District.

The Assembly is supposed to be non-partisan and elections to the Assembly and its sub-structures are state-sponsored.

Decentralised planning involves a change from the previous 'top-down' approach to development planning to a 'bottom-up approach'.

A Regional Coordinating Council is established to coordinate and harmonise plans of the various district Assembly under their jurisdiction [12,13,14].

Political decentralisation aims to give citizens and their elected representatives more power in public decision-making. Advocates of political decentralisation assume that decisions made with greater participation will be better informed and more relevant to diverse interests in society than those made only by national political authorities. The concept implies that the selection of representatives from local electoral jurisdictions allows citizens to know better their political representatives and allows elected officials to know better the needs and desires of their constituents. Political decentralisation often requires constitutional or statutory reforms, the development of pluralistic political parties, the strengthening of legislatures, creation of local political units, and the encouragement of effective public interest groups.

Political decentralisation entails the devolution of powers from the centre to the Local Governments units at the grassroots, whose objective is to enable citizens at the grassroots to exercise their constitutional democratic rights to elect leaders who represent them in decision-making bodies, which are legally charged with the responsibility of planning, implementation, and monitoring of development plans and budget in their defined areas of jurisdiction with the ultimate aim of ensuring effective and efficient service delivery which aims at improving on the living conditions of the people.

Political decentralisation in Ghana literally means the devolution of powers to the District Assemblies and lower local levels at the District and below to the unit committees. As an integral part of political decentralisation, electoral democracy is carried out after every four years as required by the 1992 Constitution.

The political decentralisation components of Ghana's decentralisation programme involve creation of districts categorized into Metropolitan, Municipal and Districts. The total number of districts created when the PNDCL 207 was passed in 1988 was 110. This number was retained under the 1992 constitution and Act 462, but was increased to 138 in 2003 following the 2000 Housing and Population Census. The number was further increased to 170 in 2007. In 2012 additional 46 District Assemblies were created bringing the total number to 216 as at 28 June 2012.

### 5.3 Administrative Decentralisation

Administrative decentralisation translates into the creation of competence at the district level to enable the transferred functions to be effectively and efficiently performed. Administrative decentralisation deals with the transfer of responsibility for the planning, financing and management of certain public functions from the central government and its agencies to field units of government agencies, subordinate units or levels of government. In practice in Ghana, this was carried out by decentralising government agencies to the district level and the district staffs of the sector departments to take up the functions previously performed by central government agencies. This component was strengthened when the government re-assigned about three thousand civil servants to the local Government Service where their services were needed most. This was in accordance with the decentralisation system that put some departments of decentralised ministries at the District, Municipal and Metropolitan levels. With this new arrangement, every district would have 11 departments while a municipality would get 13 and metropolitan assemblies got 15 departments. Those departments would no longer depend on their headquarters offices in Accra, as the Districts and Regions would be strengthened to handle all the responsibilities.

### 5.4 Fiscal Decentralisation

Fiscal decentralisation is the situation in which decisions about expenditures of revenues raised locally or transferred from the Central Government are done by the Local Authority. In many developing countries local governments or administrative units possess the legal authority to impose taxes.

In Ghana, fiscal decentralisation translates into District Assemblies identification of sources for internally generated funds for the Assemblies as well as central transfer from Government referred to as "Common Fund". The District Assemblies Common Fund uses a needs-based equalisation formula to redistribute 5% of national revenues to the District Assemblies referred to as Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assembly.

## 6. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the study emanates from 1,201 questionnaires administered to household heads from the six sampled regions. This section is organised as follows. Section 6.1 presents the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents and section 6.2 presents the correlation analysis between decentralization and community development.

### 6.1 Socio-demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Out of the Total 1,201 respondents, 65% were males and 25% were females. Table 2 presents the educational attainment of respondents by regions.

**Table 2. Educational attainment of respondents**

Region	Non	Primary	Secondary	Tertiary
Brong Ahafo	19.68	57.33	38.94	3.05
Northern	4.35	59.70	30.88	5.07
Upper West	25.35	40.29	30.30	4.06
Ashanti	14.84	38.71	43.26	2.94
Central	14.32	34.53	45.21	6.04
Volta	16.79	33.42	44.41	5.38



From Table 2 it is evident Central Region has the highest percentage of respondents that had attained tertiary education. Upper West Region had the highest percent of non-educated respondents of 25.35% whilst Northern Region had the highest percentage of respondents who had attained primary education. Again, Central Region had the highest percent of respondents who had attained secondary education. Table 3 presents the occupation of respondents.

**Table 3. Occupation of respondents**

Region	Unemployed	Farming	Trading	Civil servants
Brong Ahafo	11.05	67.8	11.15	10.0
Northern	16.13	53.03	15.84	15.0
Upper West	22.85	51.25	13.24	12.66
Ashanti	3.57	44.29	46.64	5.50
Central	10.13	30.84	40.03	19.0
Volta	9.41	45.88	32.94	11.76

The Region with the highest unemployed respondents is Upper West Region (22.85%), Brong Ahafo region had majority farmers (67.8%), Ashanti Region had majority traders (46.64%) and Central Region had majority of civil servants (19.0%). Table 4 presents the correlation analysis between decentralization and community development.

**Table 4. Regional correlational results on decentralisation and community development**

Regions	$r^2$	% $r^2$	F	Sig. level
Brong Ahafo	0.939	93.9	16592.388	0.000
Northern	0.650	65.0	1916.701	0.000
Upper West	0.705	70.5	1930.818	0.000
Ashanti	0.837	83.7	5726.312	0.000
Central	0.741	74.1	1516.500	0.000
Volta Region	0.829	82.9	4241.389	0.000
All regions	0.578	57.8	9763.981	0.000

The analysis in Table 4 shows that there is a relationship between decentralisation and community development. Northern Region showed the lowest level of relationship (65.0%) whilst Brong Ahafo showed the highest level of relationship (93.9%). This implies that the perception of people about decentralisation leading to community development is high in Brong Ahafo Region compared to all other regions.

In all the relationship between decentralisation and community development for the country was 57.8%. This implies that 57.8 per cent of the respondent's agree that there was a relationship between decentralisation and community development. Table 5 presents the Anova analysis between decentralisation and community development.

Regression analysis of all the regions indicated that, the calculated value F is 9763.981 at 5% alpha level of significant (0.000). It shows that there is significant relationship between decentralisation and community development. Further analysis using coefficient of relationship between decentralisation and community development is shown in Table 6.

**Table 5. ANOVAs analysis**

Model		Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	6742.394	1	6742.394	9763.981	.000 <sup>a</sup>
	Residual	4929.747	7139	.691		
	Total	11672.141	7140			

**Table 6. Coefficients analysis**

Model		Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.638	.026		24.465	.000
	Decentralisation and community development	.709	.007	.760	98.813	.000

The coefficient analysis between decentralisation and community development was also significant which corroborate the ANOVA analysis in Table 5. The t test at 0.05 alpha level was 98.813 and the standard error was 0.007 which implies that there is a significant relationship between decentralisation and community development; that is the higher the degree of decentralisation the higher the level of community development.

## 7. CONCLUSION

In general, the results presented provide support for a link between decentralisation and community development in all six regions. The Region with the highest unemployed respondents is the Upper West Region (22.85%). The government and district assemblies in the Upper West Region must step up employment creation opportunities for the people in the Region. The regression analysis of all the regions indicated that, the calculated value F is 9763.981 at 5% alpha level of significant (0.000). It shows that there is significant relationship between decentralisation and community development.

The concept of decentralisation has shaped development thinking in contemporary times in both developed and developing countries. Indeed, the demand for decentralisation is strong throughout the world because of its link to community development and improving the quality of life of mass of the people in the rural areas. Individual's full participation in making societal choices and decisions is seen as a natural outcome of the endowment of individual's dignity, as it contributes to individual's self-development.

In Ghana, democratic decentralisation is associated with a programme of radical participatory reforms, which over a period of more than 22 years has produced significant benefits for the poor in terms of participation, increased access to social services such as health, education, potable water and community development. Although agreeable, the pace of development has been slow in certain areas and districts; those areas would have been worst of without democratic decentralisation. Some of the newly created districts virtually had nothing; no infrastructure to house the District Assembly Offices, but today most of these districts have moved from the status of 'nothing' to 'something'.

Ghana's District Assemblies, introduced in 1989 have been successful in enhancing electoral participation and giving access and representation to normally excluded groups, such as the uneducated, poor and marginalised rural poor. Local participation in 'self-help' community development projects an activity which people elect Assembly members has become an integral part of community development at the grass root level.

## COMPETING INTERESTS

Author has declared that no competing interests exist.

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