

# **An Advocacy for a Blended Representation Principle of Governance in Ghana**

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1. This policy proposal advocates for Ghana to adopt and utilize a “**Blended Representation Principle**” (**BRP**) of **Governance** as a cure for the “winner-takes-all”, divisive and alienating politics in vogue nationwide. A Blended Representation Principle is a fusion of traditional and modern leadership representation system which could lead to superior capability to communicate, mobilize and organize for the provision and delivery of services to people in their homes and communities.

## **Representation and Participation in Governance at the National and Local levels**

2. By now, there seems to be no ambiguity that universal adult suffrage via competitive partisan elections regardless of inherent flaws is the acceptable means of representation and participation of Ghanaians in governance at the national level. Ghana has chalked relative successes by electing Presidents and Members of Parliament through peaceful elections leading to successive alternate changes in party-based ruling governments.

3. What seems contentious is the governance and leadership designs at the local level. With the 1992 Constitution, the local governance and leadership design has been based on the appointment of the District Chief Executives, and the non-partisan elections of corresponding District Assemblies and Unit Committee members as the major actors.

4. Over the years, associated with this mode of representation and participation in governance at the local level are the undermining characteristics:

- national executive overreach, influence and control through appointments, inequitable allocation and distribution of development resources,
- abysmal level of interests and participation by ordinary people in the governance arrangement
- lack of transparency in decision making and resource allocation, and inability of the ordinary majority to hold the local officials accountable for stewardship
- arrested development aspirations of the communities as the overall gamut of governance arrangement through appointed DCEs, District Assemblies and Unit Committees is unable to provide and deliver services to the satisfaction of the people.

## **Clarion call for Local Institutional Reforms**

5. As the development dividends of the prevailing local governance and leadership designs become increasingly elusive, there have been numerous calls for some reformative actions to redress the situation. What seems to gain groundswell consensus is a desist from appointment of the District Chief Executives by the national executive and their direct elections by the people.

However, an aspect of this call for institutional reforms which has emerged contestable is the elections of the DCEs, Assemblies and Unit Committees on competitive partisan basis. To be precise, the call for institutional reforms at the local level is well-placed. However, whether to continue with the non-partisan method or introduce competitive partisan elections seems to be missing the point that the inability of prevailing local governance arrangement to meet the aspirations of the ordinary populace is a systemic leadership design anomaly than either non-partisan or partisan elections of the major actors. **Arguably, the backseat role assigned the Institution of Chieftaincy in the local government design and operations is the root of abysmal interest and participation by people in the local structures; and the inability of these local structures to evolve into a bulwark for ensuring transparency and accountability in national governance operations.** As Ghana is branded the “beacon of democracy” in Africa, it could further strengthen its democratic credentials by contributing uniquely to designs of local governance systems for the region founded on the core principles and values of its civilizations.

6. The persistence of poverty and the vicissitude of the poor majority continue to be an indelible mark on the capability of national leadership to stem the tide and lead the country out of the abyss of poverty in the midst of relatively endowed human, natural and material resources. A critical factor underpinning this scenario is the inability of the emergent national leadership (since independence and regardless of professed party politics leanings) to craft and institutionalize local governance and leadership arrangements capable of energizing the vast majority to participate vigorously in development efforts beyond recent periodic involvement in competitive partisan electioneering campaigns and voting. This state of affairs at the local levels affects the overall quality of governance in the country in terms of participation in decision making, transparency, openness and accountability for stewardship in the use (or abuse) of development resources.

7. On the way forward, guidance is needed from the country’s experiential practice of competitive partisan politics particularly at the national level vis-à-vis the institution of chieftaincy and the corresponding indigenous knowledge systems which people continue to utilize for sustaining coexistence as well as the psycho-social compositions of the communities with primordial ties to leadership and participation structures.

8. Certain critical hard facts are noteworthy in this context:

- Competitive partisan politics per se is not the cure-all for lack of interest and participation of people in local governance; and the weak and ineffective capacity associated with these structures. More importantly, it has also not led significantly to transparency in decision making and accountability of stewardship at the national level.
- Incessant individualism engendered by the winner takes all character of partisan politics is tearing apart the social fabric of communalism which undergirds how people make living in their homes and communities

- Divisive and acrimonious tendencies associated with the forms of partisan politics practiced in the country have strangled families and communities to become wary and suspicious of each other on the basis of party affiliations.
- Competitive partisan politics is mainly one form of organizing principles of life in a polity and should not be construed as the only tool for governance arrangement designs which merit the label of democratic accolade and behavior.
- The Institution of Chieftaincy regardless of its inherent flaws remains the more cohesive governance and leadership structure at the local level with symbiotic capability to communicate, mobilize and organize community members for collective development actions.
- There is demonstrable high-level interest and participation of people in the functional operations of the Institution of Chieftaincy, and thus can be empowered and utilized innovatively to ensure transparency in local governance decision making and hold officials accountable for stewardship of development resources at the national level.
- The Institution of Chieftaincy at the local level (when reformed, adapted and weaned of its anachronistic tendencies) can hold fort at the local level, and progressively complement competitive partisan politics at the national level to build a nation-state capable of meeting the development aspirations of all Ghanaians regardless of party affiliations.

**Pretensions in utilizing the Chieftaincy Institution as the integral foundation leadership structures in national development discourse and efforts.**

9. Development as a transformational process is predominantly political requiring energetic participation, transparency and accountability to meet targeted goals. Majority of the people have to grapple with vacillations between two dominant and competing leadership structures at the local level at times to the point of paralysis: One structure is the Chieftaincy institution which they have meticulously created, nurtured, guarded and sustained. The other structure is the panoply of the DCEs, District Assemblies, and Unit Committees which have been constructed and superimposed (through prevailing non-partisan arrangements, and which likely would metamorphose via competitive partisan elections with the December 17, 2019 referendum agitations) as the channel for participation in local conversations, representation and decision making. Through constitutional and legal provisions, the structure which is more popular among ordinary people has been anomalously designated unofficial for the purposes of public policy decision making, resource allocations and management, and stewardship at the local levels.

10. There would not have been any concern if this arrangement has worked to fulfill the aspirations of the people. No questions would be asked if the people are able to participate effectively within such operational apparatus and utilize the prescribed principles and rules of engagement to ensure transparency and accountability for the use and misuse of public

resources. All would have been well if the successive leadership structures command the trust, respect and confidence of the people voluntarily and without coercion, and are utilized to manage the basic resources upon which their existence and subsistence depend. If politics as practiced in Ghana is the means by which development resources are translated into beneficial dividends to meet aspirations of ordinary people, then the constitutional provision barring Chiefs from participating in politics has outlived its usefulness.

11. Paradoxically, the vast majority continue to rely more on the so-called unofficial and informal leadership arrangements and principles to make living within their family structures. And national leaders perceive such close ties and continuous relevance and influence as mainly veritable sources of access to votes and exploit them for self-serving purposes during competitive party election campaigns to boost vote grabbing efforts and voter turn outs. Even the relative peace the country enjoys in the midst of a sub-region riddled with turmoil is arguably attributable to the ways and means the vast majority keep intact their unofficial leadership structures. Many people are therefore left in a quagmire as the imposed leadership structures could not unleash collective energies and know-how to seek and find solutions to mind-boggling problems of poverty confronting them in their daily lives of existence.

### **Innovations to re-engineer Governance and Leadership with Blended Representation Principle**

12. Institutional reforms are about rules, norms, designs and practices. Beyond retaining non-partisan local governance structures or introducing competitive partisan elections in their design and formations, the call for institutional reforms should consider innovations with Blended Representative Principle which seems apt for the construct of democratic rules and behavior nationwide.

13. At the local level, a Blended Representation Principle would entail the following:

- Traditional Chiefs (males and females) will represent their villages at the currently designated District Assembly in a Local Representation Area (2 Representatives from each village constituting membership of a designated District Assembly).
- The Representatives will elect from among them Presiding Chairpersons and Deputies respectively to become the Chief Executives of the District Administration. Very important, where a male representative is elected as the Chairperson, a female representative will be elected as the deputy chairperson and vice-versa.
- A Ten-Member Administration Committee comprising the Chief Executive, the Deputy Chief Executive and Heads of critical sector including, Security/Police, Energy, Water, Health Education, Agriculture, Labor, Transport, Housing, Communication etc. will constitute the District Administration Authority.

14. The **Condition Precedent** (stemming from compelling reforms of the Institution of Chieftaincy) for the proposed local governance arrangements are:

- A Ten-year-term limitations on traditional leadership tenure

- Codification of the Traditional Leadership Selection and Removal Methods
- Institutionalizing Citizens Consultation Forums as Advisory and Accountability channels in the Local Representation Areas

15. At the national level, a Blended Representation Principle would mean:

- Competitive Partisan Politics remains the norm and the conduit for the Ghanaian Electorate to elect the President and Parliamentary Representatives through the prevailing political party system.
- Any change in ruling government at the end of the constitutionally stipulated four-year term will not affect the structural design and composition of the local governance arrangement.
- Participation and representation in politics and governance at the national level will be shaped by the modern electoral practices.

16. In a nutshell, adopting a Blended Principle of Representation in Ghana would likely induce the following;

- The ruling regime would be much closer to the people regardless of party affiliations as the foundation of operations is a unified community.
- The Administrative bureaucracy for policy implementation and delivery of services would be more professional and less partisan in outlook and performance as the technical officials would have proper seats at the decision-making table.
- Operational procedures for resource allocation and management at the national and local levels will be more trusted, respected and accorded revered loyalty by ordinary people regardless of party affiliations – veritable conditions for participation, transparency and accountability for stewardship.
- Overall, there will be less dejections and more expressed sense of belonging towards the governance arrangements.

15. This proposal is based on empirical findings and observations by the authors to substantiate the local governance and leadership malaise. These include field studies undertakings: (i) Research in ten communities in the Volta Region for a PhD dissertation in 1997; (ii) Capacity Enhancement Needs Assessment (CENA) exercise undertaken in the Eastern and Volta Regions by the World Bank in 2005; (iii) a Development Dialogue on strengthening the adjudication capacity of Traditional Leaders held in Kumasi under the auspices of the National House of Chiefs and the World Bank in 2006; Studies on Home Town Associations (HTAs) and Community Transformation under the World Bank Diaspora program 2007-2012; and Annual visitations and Participant observations of the research communities from 2010 to date.

16. For consideration and adoption nationwide, it is proposed to implement the Blended Representation Principle as a pilot initiative in the Volta Region of Ghana (given the bulk of the

empirical studies and observations were undertaken in the region) for superior comparable performance evidence supportive of scientific research and findings on this governance direction.

**This proposal is a Public Advocacy, Advisory and Accountability initiative as part of the Innovations for Better Governance (IBG) in Ghana / Africa program by:**

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