

# **Consolidation of Democracy in Ghana with sub-National Administration Reforms**

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Consolidation of democracy in a nation is partly a function and results of two interrelated measures: robust electoral process, and grounded state level structures and relationships – all of which contribute immensely to institutionalize the principles of participation, transparency and accountability for good stewardship in the use and management of public resources. Ghana has just completed its sixth elections under the fourth republic constitution, and the investiture of JDM / NDC administration (regardless of the Supreme Court petition filed by the opposition NPP).

By and large elections are periodic events for holding elected leaders accountable for public resources held in trust and managed on behalf of the populace. However, accountability for stewardship of the public purse is not a periodic event or act but a continuous process of participatory relations with the electorate embedded in the operations of state governance structures responsible for the management of public resources. The efficacy and effectiveness of these state structures at various levels in terms of involving the people in managing public resources would largely influence and determine the development prospects and transformation of lives in the nation.

The high voter turn-out recorded in the just completed elections (almost 80 per cent) does not mean or translate to high level of participation by the majority in the development governance of the nation. In other words, high level participation of the people is more or less restricted to elections and not in the aftermath of development governance. This is a serious anomaly which tends to retard efforts and progress towards transformational development. And there is a fundamental reason for this state of affairs. Democracy does not only mean participation in elections but also partaking in the dividends of the aftermath development benefits which elections of leaders should engender in a nation.

### **State-level structures of governance and restrictive participation in development are two sides of the same coin**

State structures of governance in Ghana are not configured to exert influence on each other and this undermines the prospects of effective participation, transparency and accountability of stewardship in the use of public resources. The lower level structures are the weakest links between the central-regional-local structure nexus, and this severely affects the participation of citizens in development governance decision making with serious implications for deploying both vertical and horizontal accountability mechanisms to consolidate the dividends of democracy in the nation. This prevailing scenario translates into disconnect and distance (or at best tenuous / artificial relations) between the citizens and the state structures – a phenomenon which undermines the effectiveness of applying the principles of participation, transparency and accountability to ensure that public resources are utilized efficiently by elected officials for the delivery of services and improvement of development outcomes.

Participation of the vast majority in development decision making is a key ingredient in the success of any targeted effort to reduce poverty. Participation for desired results and outcomes require trustworthy and respectable leadership structures capable of being utilized for communicating, mobilizing and organizing; and as well as the principles and rules of engaging people. For effective

participation, the people must be pivotal in creating the leadership structures, be familiar and comfortable with the principles and rules of engagement, and understand the corresponding uses for intended purposes. And such structures must be rooted in their belief systems and ways of life. Ownership, understanding, familiarity and ease of usage of the participation structures are thus the linchpins of responsive governance which strive to ensure that leaders are transparent and held accountable for the stewardship of public resources in a society.

If the participation apparatus are neither understood by ordinary people nor are they familiar and comfortable with their effective usages, alienation, marginalization and aloofness towards the behaviors and actions of leaders in terms of accountability for public stewardship ensue. The effective participation of the poor in efforts to find collective solutions to problems of poverty would therefore be predicated on the leadership structures, principles and rules of engagement established and operated by the poor themselves. It is by such arrangements and organizational frameworks within which the poor and the silent majority would be enabled to unleash their creative energies towards concerted and sustained involvement in improving governance and stewardship of public resources.

### **Utilize existing traditional institutions to craft blended local governance arrangements for consolidating democracy**

The weak local governance structures based on the prevailing District Assembly constructs are retarding Ghana's development efforts and a move to the next stage of the nation's transformation process requires serious rethinking and fundamental sub-national administration reform. Ghana needs to craft a system of local governance based on a blend of the existing traditional institutions and prevailing official lower level structures for managing public resources and delivery of services to the people. It is largely by this means that Ghana could consolidate its democracy in terms of ensuring high level participation at both fronts – elections and the aftermath more important development process.

Ghana needs to make better use of its traditional leadership institutions for development purposes beyond what currently pertains. There is no country in Africa that still has its traditional institutions intact and involved in how several people make a living in their homes and communities. The relative peace the country enjoys in the midst of a sub-region riddled with turmoil is arguably attributable to ways and means the country has kept intact and utilize these institutions albeit at times for parochial purposes. Unfortunately, these institutions sometimes are perceived in the current democratic process mainly as veritable sources of access to votes and exploited for self-serving purposes during election campaigns to boost vote grabbing efforts and voter turn outs.

The usual popular refrain on reforming current local government systems (LGS) is about electing the District Chief Executives (DCEs). The critical issue of local government in Ghana is beyond the elections of DCEs. The existing local governance structures, unlike democratic governance arrangements elsewhere, are not designed to function as checks on national state structures, or influence and shape behavior and actions of national state office holders. This phenomenon deprives the national structures of the foundations upon which cohesive institutions would thrive to inspire and rally citizens around a common sense of purpose, vision of development and transformation of lives.

Ghana should lead the way in Africa in redesigning LGS to incorporate as sources of fundamental operational strength the principles of leadership, organization and participation the vast majority of citizens utilize to subsist and manage common resources upon which their existence and livelihoods depend. The country should consider having a first tier of administrative leadership in the districts as

local leadership councils (LLCs) comprising of male and female traditional leaders the people themselves have nominated, selected and elected in their localities. This would be an accessible leadership structure influenced by ordinary people in terms of participation in decision making, organization and mobilization to rally around a common cause and purpose. Members of the local leadership council would select among themselves on rotational basis for a determined period, a presiding member as head of the council. The local leadership council would be supported by the existing technical and clerical staff in the administration and management of the district affairs. This arrangement would be based on creative adaptation of the positive elements of the existing traditional governance arrangements which hold the communities intact in most cases and blended with modern principles and systems of administration. Efficiency and effectiveness in the management of public resources for development purposes within the district could be ensured with participatory methods of planning, prioritization, budgeting, program implementation, monitoring and evaluation, and performance impact assessments. In a sense, this would be a local governance arrangement grounded in Ghanaian cultural values and belief systems which would be capable of (a) bringing government closer to ordinary people, (ii) having in place efficient, value for money administrative structures for resource management, (iii) institutionalizing operational procedures and transactions which command the respect, trust and loyalty of the people, and (iv) inculcating in the people a sense of belonging to the overall governance process of the nation.

Of course the views expressed here is not to glorify the traditional leadership institutions, or be oblivious of the fact that such institutions exhibit certain negative traits and features which do not conform to the representation nuances of present-day modern society. What this means is to undertake strategic critical reviews and assessments to identify the positive traits and features which would constitute the cornerstone of a viable and unique democratic arrangement for robust development governance at the local grassroots levels. In practice, the call for sub-national administration reforms would mean some of the intractable issues pivotal to these institutions such as tenure, succession, and land management arrangements etc. are subjected to critical and realistic reviews in order to codify and adapt the positive aspects to strengthen and consolidate democracy in the country. The time for such a reform is now as it has the potential to move the country to a higher level in its development transformation trajectory.