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**POPULAR PARTICIPATION IN GHANA'S POLITICAL
DECENTRALIZATION PROGRAM: REAL OF SYMBOLIC?**

**A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in
International Development Studies
at
Saint Mary's University**

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION.....	v
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	vi
ABBREVIATIONS.....	vii
LIST OF FIGURES.....	viii
MAP.....	ix
ABSTRACT.....	x

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

1. Background.....	1
1 Research Question.....	4
2 Literature Review.....	5
2.1 Participation.....	5
2.2 Decentralization.....	24
2.2.3 The Decentralization Debate of the 1980s.....	33
3 The Research Problem.....	42
4 Thesis Statement.....	42
5 Research Methodology.....	43
6 Plan of Presentation.....	45
7 Endnotes.....	48

CHAPTER 2. DECENTRALIZATION IN GHANA: FROM THE PRE-COLONIAL ERA TO 31 DECEMBER, 1981

2 Introduction.....	56
1 Pre-Colonial Era.....	56
2 Colonial Era: Indirect Rule and Decentralization.....	58
3 Reports of the Watson and Coussey Commissions.....	63
4 Convention Peoples' Party and Decentralization 1951-1966..	67
5 National Liberation Council and Decentralization 1966-1969..	74
6 Progress Party and Decentralization 1969-1972.....	77
7 National Redemption Council-Peoples National Party and Decentralization, 1972-1981.....	81
8 Conclusion.....	88
9 Endnotes.....	90

CHAPTER 3. THE DEFENCE COMMITTEES AND DECENTRALIZATION, 1982-1983

3.Introduction.....	95
1.The Economic and Political Crises.....	95
2.Rationale for the Defence Committees.....	98
3 Structure of the Defence Committees.....	101

4 Popular Participation.....	105
5 De-politicization of the Defence Committees.....	112
6 Conclusion.....	118
7 Endnotes.....	120
 CHAPTER 4. THE DISTRICT ASSEMBLY SYSTEM AND DECENTRALIZATION: THE CASE OF POPULAR PARTICIPATION IN THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS IN THE SOUTH TONGU DISTRICT ASSEMBLY 1988-1994	
4 Introduction.....	124
1 Background.....	124
2 Structure under PNDC Law 207.....	128
3 1992 Constitution and Decentralization.....	137
4 Popular Participation.....	141
4.1 Example 1.....	149
4.2 Example 2.....	155
4.3 Implications.....	157
5 Conclusion.....	160
6 Endnotes.....	162
 CHAPTER 5. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION	
1 Conclusion.....	166
2 Endnotes.....	181

BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	182
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DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to the everlasting memory of my brother, “Oginga Odinga” and my father, who left home for the “village” while I was away in pursuance of higher academic goals

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I wish to express my most profound sense of appreciation and gratitude to Dr. David Black of the Political Science Department, Dalhousie University, who is my Supervisor, for his critical and incisive comments, patience, and time in ensuring the timely completion of this study. His comments gave me a deeper insight into the subject area.

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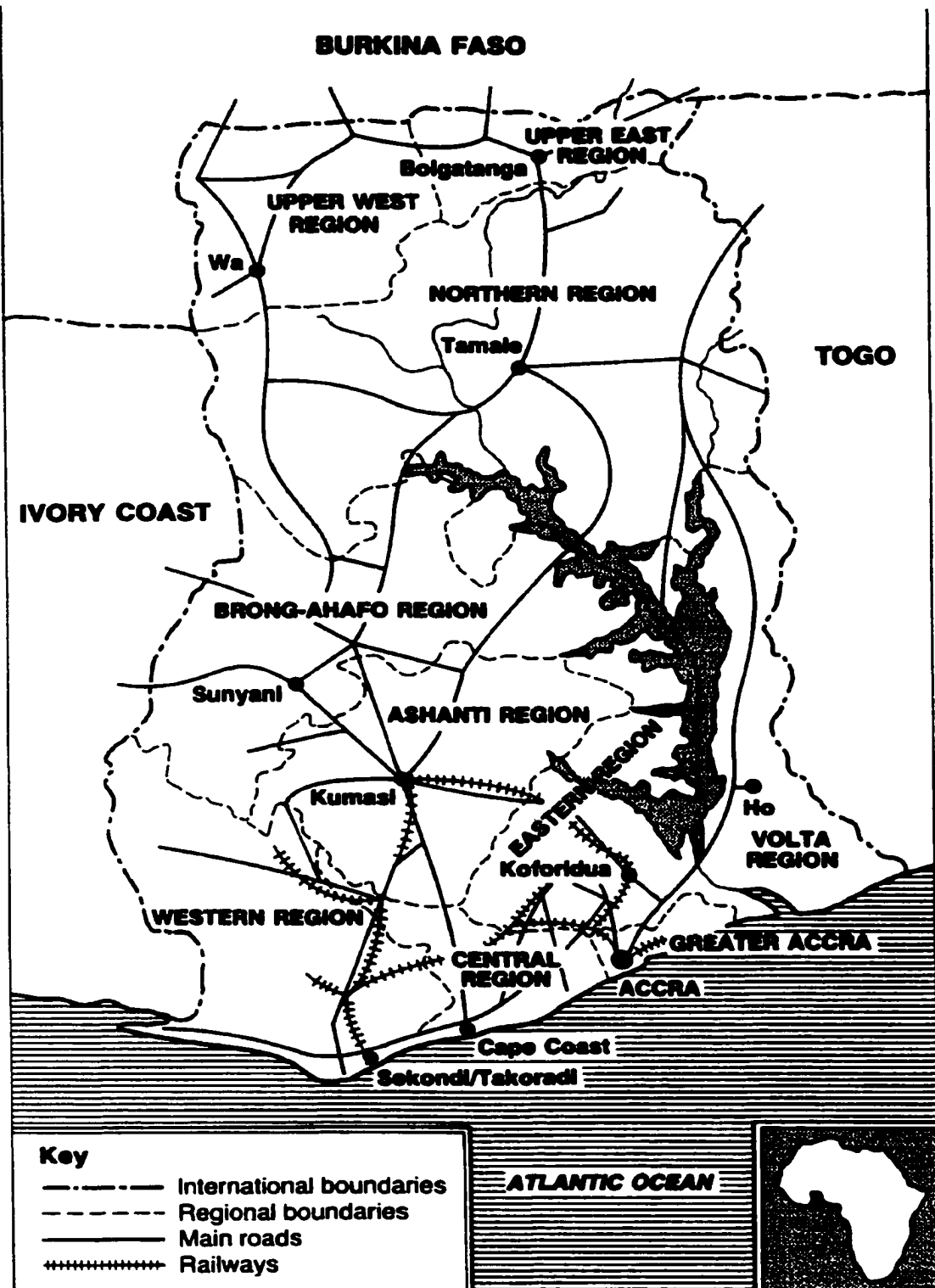
If, in spite of all efforts, there are any shortcomings in this study, members of my Thesis Committee are exonerated from blame, which is entirely mine.

ABBREVIATIONS

AFRC	Armed Forces Revolutionary Council.
CDRs	Committees for the Defence of the Revolution.
CPP	Convention Peoples' Party.
ERP	Economic Recovery Program.
IMF	International Monetary Fund.
INCC	Interim National Coordinating Committee.
NLC	National Liberation Council.
NRC	National Redemption Council.
P'WDC's	Peoples' Workers' Defence Committees.
PP	Progress Party.
PNDC	Provisional National Defence Council.
SAP	Structural Adjustment Program
SMC	Supreme Military Council.

LIST OF FIGURES

- Figure 1 Structure of Indirect Rule in the Gold Coast.
- Figure 2 Structure of Local Government under the 1951 Ordinance.
- Figure 3 Structure of the Defence Committees. 1982.
- Figure 4 Structure of Local Government under PNDC Law 207.1988.



Map of Ghana. **Source:** Ray, 1986. Reproduced with the permission of the author.

ABSTRACT

POPULAR PARTICIPATION IN GHANA'S POLITICAL DECENTRALIZATION PROGRAM: REAL OR SYMBOLIC?

The idea that centralized planning and administration adopted by the post-colonial states in the so-called Third World, especially in Africa has hampered their development found remedy in the 1980s, in decentralization. The Another Development Approach, which championed this view, argued that it is only by decentralizing government and allowing for the popular participation of people, who were hitherto ignored in the decision-making process could development occur. This is because, by their participation they would be able to determine their own priorities. It was expected that this participation would lead to their empowerment. There were other advocates, like the World Bank, which since the late 1980s championed the decentralization argument.

This study attempts to investigate these “virtues” in decentralization by examining the decentralization policy in Ghana between 1982 and 1994 under the PNDC/NDC. However, in order to provide a background to the study we have traced decentralization in Ghana from the pre-colonial era, when the institution of chieftaincy provided its basis. We have argued that contrary to the rhetoric that Ghana’s decentralization policy in the period under study facilitated popular participation in an effective decision-making process, the opposite is the case. That is, by illustrating the contest for power that accompanied the earlier period and the two examples of decision-making in the South Tongu District Assembly, we have shown that this decentralization policy, like those in the past, led to a re-centralization of authority.

On the basis of our findings, we concluded that for decentralization to promote participation in an effective decision-making process, the location of power must be addressed. The failure to recognize the centrality of power in decentralization has been identified as a limitation of the Another Development Approach and those of the other advocates of decentralization.

**Morgan Nyendu,
August 2000.**

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

1 Background

At the time of independence, the “new” nations of what became known as the Third World inherited centralized forms of government from the former colonial powers. Under colonialism, centralization of authority was found necessary in order to ensure the uniformity and success of colonial policies. On occasions when the colonial powers relied on local institutions to facilitate their policies, as in the case of the British experience with the policy of Indirect Rule which was promoted through the institution of chieftaincy, this was done only in so far as it helped promote the colonial interest.

However, by the 1970s, the need to shift development planning away from centralized control due to the perceived failure of centralized planning and administration came to the fore. This new thinking, referred to as “Another Development Approach”¹ holds that the interests and needs of the majority of the people of the Third World could best be determined by themselves. The approach, therefore, saw popular participation of the people in the decision-making process that determines their needs as a solution to underdevelopment² and identified decentralization of government as the most viable channel that could help “promote and sustain popular participation” in decision-making around their basic needs.³ It should be noted that since independence, all governments in Ghana had,

in one way or another, flirted with programs of decentralization. The main reasons for these programs varied from the need for efficiency, through accountability, to the desire to ensure the popular participation of the majority of the people who had been previously left out of the decision-making process, thereby empowering them.⁴

It is important to note that, since 31 December 1981 when the military coup led by Flt. Lt. Jerry John Rawlings resulted in the formation of the Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC), the idea of popular participation in the decision-making process has become a national dogma in Ghana. This was because of the government's belief that the overwhelming majority of the people who live in the rural areas were not allowed any meaningful participation in decision-making over issues that directly affected them. Thus in order to facilitate their participation, the PNDC in 1982 called for the nationwide establishment of Peoples' Workers' Defence Committees (P/WDCs) as decentralized structures through which the majority of the people could participate in an effective decision-making process over issues that directly affected their lives and interests. However, with time the focus on these committees as vehicles for facilitating popular participation in effective decision-making was shifted to new structures known as the District Assembly system. It is these two structures (P/WDCs and the District Assembly system) that are of concern to this study.

There are several reasons why the PNDC's decentralization program should be worth academic attention. To start with, as the first country in sub-Saharan Africa

to gain independence on 6 March 1957. Ghana had for a long time provided political leadership in Africa especially as a result of the radical Pan-African orientation of its first President, Dr. Kwame Nkrumah. Since then, most African watchers have always followed political developments in Ghana with keen interest and hence Ghana's experiment with participation through revolutionary committees would obviously have drawn the attention of observers of the African political landscape and therefore be worth study.

Moreover, it will be argued that the involvement of the Bretton Woods duo of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank was the principal, although not the only, reason that accounted for the shift from the initial radical orientation of the decentralization program. Thus it will be of interest to examine the nature of the influence that the World Bank's decentralization policy, as part of its "good governance" agenda had on Ghana's decentralization program. Further, the personal involvement of this researcher as a Government Appointee to the South Tongu District Assembly from 1990-1997 makes it imperative for the documentation of an insider's experience of the decentralization program. Finally, Ghana's case will be used to establish the fact that decentralization "per se" is not the "sine qua non" for popular participation in the decision-making process, and that other factors must be present if decentralization is to ensure participation in an effective decision-making process.

This Chapter provides a background to the study. It will touch on the debates in the mid-1970s that served as the basis for the "Another Development Approach"

which provides the framework for this study. Further, it will deal with the research question and reviews the literature on popular participation and decentralization in the wider perspective, and in so far as it reflects on Africa and Ghana, the last of which is the concern of this study. Finally, there will be a statement of the research problem, the thesis statement, the methodology, and an outline of the chapters.

1 The Research Question

The central concern of this study is to determine the effectiveness of Ghana's District Assembly system as a vehicle for the popular participation of the majority of the people in an effective decision-making process. Further, by attempting to determine this effectiveness, the study will also make a determination of whether there has been a decentralization of power, which constitutes the pre-requisite for any effective decision-making process. However, besides the central question, efforts will also be made to address the following subsidiary questions: first, if Ghana's decentralization program has not facilitated popular participation in the decision-making process, then what purposes does it serve: is it the interest of the World Bank or that of the central state by leading to the consolidation of government or both?; and second, does the initiative for participation come from above or from below, and are the inducements for participation voluntary or coercive?

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 PARTICIPATION

According to Cohen and Uphoff, the concept of participation as conceived in the 1950s and 1960s had to do with electoral and other issues related to decision-making processes.⁵ However, there was a wide variety of definitions associated with the concept, which was (and still is) interchangeably referred to in the literature as "citizen participation," "popular participation," or "peoples' participation." For the purpose of this study, we will adopt the definition of Huntington and Nelson that participation is an "activity by private citizens designed to influence governmental decision-making,"⁶ but will also add that it involves the hitherto marginalized people in the decision-making processes over issues that have direct bearing on their lives.

Forms Of Participation

There are two forms of participation that have been identified in the literature, namely participation in liberal representative democracy and direct or popular participation.

Liberal Representative Democracy

According to Stiefel and Wolfe, the conception of participation with the longest history and widest acceptance has focused on participation as the ideal functioning of liberal representative democracy.⁷ This conception has supposed free competition of ideas and criticisms; protection of the rights of minorities; and

regular interactions between constituents and their elected representatives. Moreover, it also assumes that there is a general consensus among all major groups represented in a given polity in spite of the varying degrees at which they are able to articulate their respective interests.

Jane Junn has argued that liberal political thought sees participation as ensuring that more individual opinions and preferences are taken into account.⁸ And because there are more individual voices, this results in better representation with the resultant effect of producing collective outcomes that represent the common good and ensure equality and justice. It should be noted that liberal democratic thought assumes that most people tend to be apathetic and disinterested in politics, hence the need for a relatively limited number of individuals to make decisions on their behalf. "As a result of this assumed passiveness on the part of the citizenry, people only participate at periodic elections which serve as the primary means through which they could exercise control over their representatives. Hence Pateman has argued that so far as participation is concerned in the liberal representative system, it is mainly "the choice of decision-makers."¹⁰ Bentham has argued that the chief role of participation in a liberal representative system is therefore to protect individuals and their property from the arbitrary decisions of the elected leaders.¹¹ Thus in liberal political thought, the role of a good government is to facilitate an enabling environment in which citizens can freely express their interests, desires, and preferences.¹²

The arguments advanced in liberal representative democracy have been variously criticized. To start with, liberal representative system is criticized for its stance on ethical or moral relativism. MacIntyre argues that this ethical relativism is a result of the fact that liberalism places so much emphasis on the individual.¹³ That is, liberalism concerns itself first and foremost with the individualism of the human being rather than as a component of society. As a result, some will argue that any conceptions of the "good" that citizens form are thought to have been arrived at individually without societal influence. And because participation in liberal thought is seen as an end in itself, it could be described as narrow in outlook.

The liberal representative system has also been criticized for its characterization of values as subjective preferences. Beiner, for instance, argues that this characterization is untenable, taking cognizance of the practical commonsense experience of the world.¹⁴ In other words, Beiner points out that since human beings constitute a necessary component of society, it is difficult to comprehend a situation in which people could form values independent of society.

Popular Participation

Opposed to participation in a liberal representative system is popular or direct participation, in which participation is seen as a purposive activity.¹⁵ This second concept is of the view that the value of participation could only be determined by its impact on the political system and participants therein. In this sense,

participation is seen as a means to an end, the end being the inclusion of people who were previously sidelined in decision-making into a new decision-making process, thereby empowering them. In this sense, popular participation should be seen as actions through which ordinary people attempt to introduce changes from below.

According to Steifel and Wolfe, the call for popular participation is a rejection of the traditional institutions of the liberal representative system for grassroots participation, through the creation of new institutions at the local levels to facilitate the active participation of the majority of the people in an effective decision-making process.¹⁶

The advocates of popular participation argue that it has some benefits for both individuals and society at large. One benefit is that it gives the individuals the opportunity for a meaningful role in the decision-making process and therefore provides them with a handle to control their environment and local officials. Again it provides the individual participants with a form of education, thereby enabling them to acquire new skills necessary for continued participation.¹⁷ It is also argued that since popular participation is advocated in the name of the masses of individual citizens, it is believed to have the psychological effect of providing them with a sense of freedom, thus enabling them to "own" themselves. Kweit and Kweit have argued that popular participation leads to the restructuring of society.¹⁸ For Kweit and Kweit therefore, this restructuring function is the most encompassing of the goals of citizen participation. Hence it has been argued that

because popular participation enables individuals to become dependent on one another, it performs an integrative role by increasing the sense of "community" among participants.¹⁹ Finally, popular participation is believed to lead to improvements in the performance of government. That is, through participation citizens communicate their desires to governments. In this sense, it will lead to the improvement of the effectiveness and efficiency of the delivery of government services.

The arguments advanced in favor of popular participation have been criticized. It should be noted that any increase in popular participation in effective decision-making implies that individuals would have to willingly commit more of their time to the community's interests.²⁰ Hence an increase in popular participation in decision-making implies that individuals will have to limit their involvement in other activities. This is because active participation requires time and commitment and these therefore call for sacrifices from participants. However, although there may be an initial enthusiasm for participation, this may wane with time since most people, especially in the rural areas of the Third World, are more concerned with their daily sustenance, in the face of economic hardships rather than being keen on participating in decision-making, which is sometimes regarded as "time-wasting."

Further, this approach takes the commitment of people to decisions that have been collectively arrived at as given. In fact, popular participation implies the acceptance of responsibility to take and abide by collective decisions. However, this is sometimes difficult to attain, especially in areas where ethnic differences

forestall efforts at building consensus and could even lead to the undermining of decisions that have been collectively taken.

Finally, although participation and empowerment are laudable goals that should be pursued, it is difficult to conceive of how the latter could automatically derive from the former.²¹ The argument here is that it has been erroneously assumed that once a previously marginalized people are drawn into public decision-making, this will naturally lead to their empowerment. The literature however, is silent on how to contain the hostility of groups, which had benefited from the previous system and would naturally resist any efforts at changing the status quo. Again, the likelihood that the new ruling class could manipulate popular participation in pursuance of its own agenda has often been underestimated.

PARTICIPATION AND DEVELOPMENT

The idea of the need for participation in development has originally been associated with the works of Ivan D. Illich, who called for the involvement of non-professionals in all aspects of society's life.²² However, Paulo Freire has been credited for being the strongest advocate of the participation of people in decision-making, which he regarded as being superior to the decisions exclusively made by the elite. According to Freire, the crucial issue in development is the need for the people who were previously ignored to assume the center stage in decision-making, enabling them to determine their own lives and thereby leading to an "authentic" development.²³

As already indicated, in the 1970s a new concept of development was emerging within the corridors of governments, international development agencies and academia. One of the central features of this concept was the need for popular participation by way of the active involvement of the majority of the people in all aspects of development, from planning to implementation, through to monitoring. The new orientation on the part of governments, NGOs, international donor agencies (especially the World Bank and other UN agencies) about development was largely due to the belief that the centralized planning that had become the norm in the countries of the Third World since their independence had failed and that popular participation could serve as a channel for facilitating their development. This was at the time when global attention was being focused on the need to provide for the basic needs of shelter, health, food and education for the poor of the Third world to ensure their productive participation in the process of development.

Even back in 1966, Title IX of the United States' Foreign Assistance Act advocated popular participation, without which it was felt development could not be meaningful. The Act recognized the close relationship between popular participation and the effectiveness of the development process and argued that the failure to engage all human resources in development issues "...acts as a brake on economic growth" and that "...the great potential for planning and implementation of development activities, contained in the mass of the people of the developing countries is still largely untapped...."²⁴ The Act saw popular participation in

development as covering decision-making processes in the selection and designing of priorities, and the sharing of benefits.

In 1975, the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) of the UN recommended that all governments should adopt popular participation as the cornerstone of national development strategy and should "...encourage the widest possible active participation of all individuals and national non-governmental organizations, such as trade unions, youth and women's organizations in the development process in setting goals, formulating policies and implementing plans." ²⁵

The World Bank literature, on the other hand, refers to what is called the "stakeholder" approach. The World Bank sees participation as a "...process through which stakeholders influence and share control over development initiatives and the decisions and resources which affect them."²⁶ In the thinking of the World Bank, those who are affected either negatively or positively, directly or indirectly, or whose influences could affect the outcomes of development programs are its stakeholders. And in this direction, the World Bank has identified governments (as chief stakeholders), the poor and marginalized (who in most cases are directly affected either positively or negatively), and NGOs and private sector business (both of which could be indirectly affected by projects). It therefore calls for a collaborative participation of all these stakeholders if development is to be meaningful. For the Bank, this stakeholder approach will "...strengthen the organizational capacities of the poor so that they can act for themselves" which

would occur when they receive the benefits of the projects and ultimately become their "owners."²⁷ It must be noted that the World Bank's idea of participatory development is part of its "good governance" agenda, which would ensure the reduction of the role of the central state in public issues by giving space to the private sector. The World Bank sees the link between participatory development and "good governance" as one that would facilitate the strengthening of social justice and equity in the developing countries.²⁸

It is clear from the World Bank literature, that its view of participation is largely a consultative one. This is because the poor, who stand to benefit or lose from the projects, are not involved in designing them, the Bank having already identified governments as the chief stakeholders. In sum, since participation in the Bank's projects is more of a consultative nature, it cannot lead to the empowerment of the participants, which it sees as one of the key goals of participation. With regard to NGOs, their involvement in several instances limit the participation of the people to implementation and benefits of projects, resulting in a situation in which the people have little or no control over the design or evaluation of projects and are only seen as beneficiaries. That is, because the participation of the people does not cover the vital aspects of design and evaluation, projects more often than not tend to largely fall under the control of external actors, which could be states, political parties, or NGOs.

PARTICIPATION AND POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT

It should be noted that the literature sees a broader political role for participation in national development. And in this direction, it has come to be seen both as a remedy and a drag on development. According to the first view, which was held by the modernization school, there are two sides to society, namely, "traditional" versus "modern." According to the modernization school, traditional societies are backward, irrational, and therefore unstable, as contrasted with the rationality, stability and social and economic development that has characterized the modern societies of the West. Thus for any development to occur in the Third World where the "traditional" societies are located, there must be transformation into a modern society.²⁹

Weiner and Rokkan, like other modernization scholars, had assumed that the roots of social and economic inequality and lack of political participation in the Third World lay in its social and economic backwardness.³⁰ And because the modernization scholars had been influenced by ideas of evolution, Rostow, for instance, outlined various stages through which traditional societies must pass if they should attain the degree of modernization that is seen in liberal Western societies.³¹ Thus for countries of the Third World to develop there was the need for social and economic modernization and development, which would increase the economic well-being of the people and spread wealth across the board, thereby resulting in political stability. In the view of the modernization school therefore, the creation of these enabling conditions would provide the occasion for the

establishment of liberal democratic institutions, which would facilitate the participation of the majority of the people in national development. In a sense, modernization was then expected to become the instrument for the transformation of traditional and backward societies into “progressive” ones, willing and able to pursue the Western path of development. These institutions would ensure consensus building and also serve not only as effective tools for national development but also forestall arbitrary rule by way of ensuring accountability and good governance on the part of the rulers. In sum, the modernization school saw political development as synonymous with modernization.

However, the modernization school was criticized on various grounds. The critics argued that the idea of modernization was an attempt to impose Eurocentric views on the rest of the world. This criticism came largely from the dependency school which emerged in the 1970s to question the fundamental assumptions of modernization to the effect that there could be only one path that all countries must follow in order to “modernize.” That is, for the dependency scholars, there cannot be a universal path to development that all countries pursue. The dependency scholars therefore argued that whatever was implied in modernization could not ignore country-specific circumstances. That is, any steps at modernization or development should take cognizance of the social, cultural, economic, and the political environment within which it occurs.

The modernization school was also criticized for using participation as a distinguishing factor between “modern” politics and “traditional” politics.³²

Lerner, one of the modernization scholars had argued, for instance, that "Traditional society is non-participant" whereas modern society is a "participant society."³³ This view of the non-participatory nature of traditional society was criticized for being a sweeping overgeneralization, since participation was found in even the earliest organized societies, for example in Greek city-states which could be regarded as "traditional" by the standards of the modernization school.

Further, the modernization school was criticized on the ground that in its attempt to impose its format on the non-Western world, it adopted concepts of political development, which made no room for reversibility. This was because they had only described how traditional societies should attain political development through modernization, but ignored the fact that because throughout history, nations and empires had risen and fallen, there could be a reversal of modernization into what Huntington chose to call "political decay."

Furthermore, the modernization school was also criticized for having been influenced by structural-functionalist ideas. It had erroneously thought that the creation of liberal representative institutions in the Third World would logically facilitate the participation of the people, without explaining its logic as to how effective that participation could be and how it could be sustained.

The counterthesis to the modernization school, which sees participation as a drag on development, is typified in the writings of Samuel Huntington.³⁴ One other scholar, among others, who is wedded to this view is Myron Weiner. According to this view, the primary concern of developing countries should be the

development of institutional capacities: any attempts to promote an uncontrolled participation would threaten the fragile institutions of these countries and therefore lead to "political decay." Huntington argued that because development requires strong institutional arrangements to propel it, there is a need for the centralization of powers to destroy the "traditional structures" instead of allowing for uncontrolled participation, more so when the people in these developing countries are politically inexperienced and need time to study the workings of the participatory system. The counterthesis therefore concludes that because participation raises expectations, which the developing countries lack the capacity to meet, it creates disorder, political instability, and consequently, political decay.

This counterthesis, as put forward by Huntington, has been criticized on various grounds. Hayward has raised two such criticisms.³⁵ First, he states that Huntington's argument that participation could lead to rising expectations, which could destabilize society is misdirected in the sense that it wrongly assumed that governments and political organizations could have adequate control over the expectations of the public. According to Hayward, because such key factors as education, news media, and radio, which could influence the expectations of people may be beyond the control of governments, any efforts by them in controlling participation would fail. Second, Huntington's effort at making a strong case for institutions is seen as an overemphasis of their instrumentality. Moreover, although these institutions have values of their own, which should not

be underestimated. Huntington simply sees none for them other than to ensure order and stability at the behest of those in authority.

Finally, Huntington is criticized for attributing inexperience and ignorance in participation to the majority of the people of the Third World. This is because, he assumed that the political leadership of these countries is knowledgeable enough to determine what is in the best interests of its people. But the critics state that since these leaders are also part of the general population, one wonders when and where they could have got the political experience that Huntington so much pins his hopes on.

The literature on participation in Africa has identified three phases of it, namely, the pre-colonial era, the period of colonialism, and the post-independence period. According to Hayward, the pre-colonial era saw participation occurring at the levels of the clans, tribes, kingdoms and empires by elders on behalf of the people.³⁰ Hayward argues that the nature of participation was dependent on the character of the structures within which it was being carried out and these varied from highly centralized institutions to ones which permitted high levels of participation. Paul Osei-Kwame has also argued that participation was confined to the chiefly class because of the belief that as the links between the ancestors and the living, they could be relied on to take good decisions in the collective interest.³¹ Hayward's argument that in the pre-colonial society there were some structures which allowed for high levels of participation lacks evidence since the institution of chieftaincy around which pre-colonial society was organized limited

participation to elders who were connected to chiefly duties. The level of participation that was seen in this period could best be described as restricted.

According to Goulbourne, although the greater part of the colonial era did not facilitate mass participation which could have undermined the centralized nature of colonial rule, the post-World War II era witnessed mass participation in Africa.³⁸ The importance of mass participation at this time, as Goulbourne has argued, was that it was central to the struggle for political independence. As a result, the nationalist movements channeled the energies of all groups and associations – hometown associations, ethnic groups, and cultural associations – into the struggle for independence. The boycotts and mass demonstrations, together with the turnouts in the elections that ushered these countries into independence constituted the participation of the post-War period. The goal of mass participation was therefore to rid the respective countries of colonial rule. However, the shortcoming in this form of participation was that it had a limited vision of only ending colonial rule. Hence one could argue that what occurred was not active participation but rather the mobilization of local sentiments against the colonial presence. Hence the argument in the literature that the period of the nationalist struggle was one of active participation should be treated with circumspection.

However, unlike mass participation that became attendant with the closing years of the colonial period, the first post-independence governments placed restrictions on the participation of the people in public decision-making. There are

various reasons that have been adduced for this phenomenon. According to one view held by such exponents of African socialism as Nyerere and Nkrumah, the restriction placed on participation was to ensure the continuity of the communitarian character of African society.³⁹ Nyerere had argued that since socialism places emphasis on the community's welfare, it represents the natural extension of African traditional tribal system, which regards the community as the basis of existence. Arguing along the same line, Leopold Sedar Senghor had stated that because Africa's traditional background stressed the importance of tribal community life, socialism was natural to Africa.⁴⁰ Senghor, however, argued that unlike socialism tribal African community did not have any room for the theory of class struggle. In view of this perceived relationship between traditional African society and socialism, the first post-independence governments adopted what became known as African socialism in order to avoid the class struggles that were perceived to be part of liberal representative system. In sum, African socialism allowed participation only in so far as it was carried out within the parameters established by the state.

However, there is much criticism against the argument as advanced in the name of African socialism. It is true to argue that tribal pre-colonial African societies were built around the idea that the collective interests of the communities should take precedence over those of individuals. However, unlike in tribal society, the post-independence leaders who championed the argument for African socialism, by and large, utilized that platform to maintain themselves in power and for that

matter keep out of government those who held dissenting opinions on public issues. If on the one hand, those leaders saw the wisdom in mobilizing the people in the fight against colonialism, why on the other, could they now have instituted “de-participation” as national policies in the name of African socialism?

A second body of literature on the lack of participation in the immediate post-independence period attributed it to the centralized character of the post-colonial state, a trait inherited from colonialism.⁴¹ Hence Naomi Chazan could argue that within a few years of decolonization, “...there was a decline of popular participation in politics in Africa” since there was no form of voluntary participation in national decision-making coupled with an absence of channels for exercising popular influence on governmental policies.⁴² The proponents of this view have argued that by its nature, colonialism was essentially elitist, centralist, and absolutist. There was the belief on the part of the metropolis (center) that it was carrying enlightenment (a civilizing mission) to the periphery (colonies). They therefore set up structures to facilitate these policies. Wunsch has, in fact, argued that as a result of these colonial policies, the post-independence leaders conducted state policies through those same colonial structures and relied on many of the personnel of the colonial period, with no serious efforts being made to change their orientation. Goulbourne has stated that the post-colonial state in Africa is still highly centralized and seeks to concentrate power in a few state institutions to the benefit of the leaders and their hangers-on.⁴³ According to Goulbourne therefore, as a result of this and other reasons, post-colonial

governments allowed for only limited levels of participation in public issues, thereby leading to the demobilization of the participatory zeal that accompanied the nationalist struggle.

There is criticism of the view that departicipation in the post-colonial era was the result of the centralized nature of the post-colonial state. It is true as pointed out in the literature, that the post-colonial state had carried with it the centralist character of colonialism. However, one cannot deny the fact that the departicipation that characterized the post-colonial period was the result of the fact that the first crop of political leaders saw themselves as fulfilling messianic missions and therefore treated any form of dissent as treason. Thus the departicipation was largely the result of the desire of these leaders to entrench themselves in power, since any leader who was genuinely interested in sustaining the momentum of participation that accompanied the nationalist struggle could have taken steps to provide a new orientation to the post-colonial state apparatus. Hence Hayward is right when he blames the political leadership for its failure to maintain this momentum.⁴⁴ Moreover, to overemphasize the centralized character of the post-colonial state is to deny any rationality and agency to the first crop of post-independence political leaders.

Much of the literature on participation in Ghana has shown the same trend as noticed all over Africa. Ayee, Osei-Kwame and others have discussed participation in the pre-colonial era under the institution of chieftaincy.⁴⁵ All these

writers agree that whatever participation there was at the time was largely restricted to functionaries of the institution of chieftaincy.

According to Ayee and Crowder, until the post-World War II nationalist agitation the colonial government ran local government administration through the chiefs by way of the policy of Indirect Rule. However, there was no popular input into national policies, and instead the chiefs seized on the colonial policy to loosen their subservience to local control.⁴⁶ Dennis Austin has argued that the nationalist era was one of active participation.⁴⁷ He attributed this to the efforts by the nationalist movement, especially the Convention Peoples' Party (CPP) of Dr. Kwame Nkrumah to mobilize grassroots support in the fight for independence.

The literature on the post-independence period has shown that the popular participation in public affairs that culminated in independence was short-lived. This was, among other things due to the desire of the first post-independence government to centralize all power in itself.⁴⁸ However, in spite of this, attempts have been made since independence to facilitate the participation of the people in local government administration. Ayee, Zaya Yeebo, and Adotey Bing have argued that the most ambitious of such efforts to encourage the popular participation of the majority of the people in the decision-making process in local government was initiated by the Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC) in 1982 with the formation of the Peoples' Workers' Defence Committees.⁴⁹ This participation was expected to lead to the empowerment of the participants.

However, the local literature on this period is criticized for its biases, due to the political orientations of the authors.

2.2 DECENTRALIZATION

The concept of decentralization has occupied the attention of and been widely debated by scholars, international agencies, and policy-makers, especially in the Third World for some time now. However, there is much ambiguity as to the actual meaning of the concept. Hence Olowu could argue that the term “evokes different images among policy makers, administrators, political scientists and the public.”⁵⁰

The concept has been variously defined in the literature. For Rondinelli, it could mean the “transfer of authority to plan, make decisions and manage public functions from a higher level of government to any individual, organization or agency at a lower level.”⁵¹ Ayee argues that Rondinelli’s definition limits itself to public functions and suggests that as a process, decentralization could only occur with the conscious involvement of government.⁵²

The United Nations, on the other hand, provides a definition that has its eyes firmly fixed on grassroots mobilization and citizen participation. This definition views decentralization as a process that unites the efforts of the people with those of government, in order to “improve the economic, social, and cultural conditions of communities, to integrate these communities into the life of the nation, and to enable them to contribute fully to national progress.”⁵³ The definition goes on to

identify two main elements that are contained in decentralization. First, decentralization encourages participation of local people in efforts to find solutions to their problems through their own initiatives and second, it portrays a willingness on the part of government to provide the necessary logistical support for a people willing, through self-help, to improve upon their lot.

Dianna Conyers defines the concept as "any change in the organization of government which involves the transfer of powers or functions from the national level to any sub-national level(s), or from one sub-national level to another, lower one."⁵⁴ Smith also states that the concept means "both reversing the concentration of administration at a single center and conferring powers of local government."⁵⁵ By these last two definitions, decentralization is seen as a political phenomenon involving both administration and government. It is these last two definitions that this study will adopt.

The advocates of decentralization identified certain key roles that it could play in society. Mutizwa-Mangiza and Diana Conyers have delineated such roles under administrative and political.⁵⁶ With regard to the former, they have argued that decentralization promotes effective coordination among institutions and agencies involved in development planning and administration at the local levels. This enables local agencies and central government field units to make certain key decisions in concert with other local institutions without undue interference from the government. Further, it will ensure flexibility in finding local solutions to problems that may arise in the course of the implementation of programs. On the

political rationale, they have argued that decentralization does not only ensure popular participation as a basic human right but it also reduces regional inequalities by way of facilitating equal levels of development.

Rondinelli has outlined certain roles that decentralization could play in the Third World.⁵⁷ First, decentralization could provide a remedy to the "red-tapeism" that characterizes the bureaucracy by shifting power, authority and resources away from the center to the local level to facilitate efficient administration of services. Second, it could result in the development of greater administrative capability in local government administration, thereby allowing sub-national structures to assume extra functions that were hitherto performed at the national level. Third, decentralization could promote political stability by ensuring adequate representation of all identifiable groups within a polity. Bachrach has also argued that because decentralization calls for the restructuring of the decision-making apparatus of government, this would involve the overwhelming majority of people who were previously not involved in the decision-making process in the determination of issues that directly affect them.⁵⁸

Forms Of Decentralization

Although decentralization can take several forms, three have been identified for the purposes of our study: administrative (deconcentration); what Schonwalder and Samoff respectively call the "pragmatic approach" and the "liberal interventionist school"⁵⁹; and political (devolution).

Administrative Approach (Deconcentration)

The literature on administrative decentralization examines the subject from the standpoint of the state. The focus is on decentralization as an administrative arrangement. Thus, the emphasis here is on the centrality of institutional reform as a means of improving the implementation of governmental policies.

According to Mills, the term “deconcentration” or administrative decentralization describes a form of decentralization in which administrative responsibilities are transferred to locally based offices of central government ministries.⁶⁰ That is, administrative decentralization involves the redistribution of administrative duties within the central government and it largely serves as a means for the efficient reorganization of local services. It follows therefore, that the central issue in administrative decentralization is the shifting of workload from central government ministries to their offices located outside the national capital to help promote the efficient delivery of services.

It should be noted that because administrative decentralization is largely an administrative arrangement, politics takes a backseat and the authority that is delegated is basically administrative in character. Moreover, the officials who preside over these decentralized institutions are allowed the exercise of some discretionary authority. This has the advantage of enabling field officers to easily identify the problems of the communities in which they operate and to address them as and when they arise.

However, deconcentration has been criticized for various reasons. It has been criticized for sometimes leading to the creation of another layer of inefficiency.⁶¹ That is, it leads to the creation of sub-governmental structures, which may not, in the final analysis, do any better in addressing the problems on the ground. Deconcentration is also criticized on the basis of the fact that people have erroneously thought of it as a means to facilitate local initiative and the use of authority.⁶² This, it is argued, has not often been the case in practice. Furthermore, although local administration has the prospect of enabling the co-ordination of efforts and the benefit of a common pool of scarce resources, it could sometimes engender rivalry among staff of the various ministries working in these local administrative areas. This occurs when field offices which have better logistical and funding support due to higher budgetary allocations from the national level do not wish to make their facilities available to the less fortunate departments. Finally, deconcentration is criticized on the ground that it could sometimes result in unnecessary interference by the central government in local government administration since the exercise of whatever power that is decentralized to the lower structures is subject to organizational control and influence.⁶³

Pragmatic Approach

According to Schonwalder, the "pragmatic" approach is concerned with decentralization as an instrument for local and regional development, and more especially with how decentralization could serve as a means of promoting.

maintaining, and improving on service delivery in developing countries.⁶⁴ The orientation of the pragmatic approach is liberal in that it calls for improvements in both government and the standard of living of the people. It advocates a partnership between the state and international organizations to help provide better services to the people.

The pragmatic approach is primarily concerned with practical issues connected with decentralization. The concern is derived from the belief that the woes of decentralization programs lie in the weaknesses of their planning and implementation. The assumption is that the social, economic, and political milieu in which decentralization is carried out does not determine the success or failure of the program. Thus effective decentralization is only possible when planning and execution mechanisms are strengthened and made more efficient with the active participation of the people. It has been argued that the pragmatic approach makes available for public consumption a wealth of knowledge on the practical problems that could confront decentralization.⁶⁵ This is due to the fact that several studies have been conducted from that perspective under the sponsorship of international organizations.

However, the pragmatic approach has been criticized for ignoring the crucial role and influence of politics and hence power in decentralization. This is because since decentralization is by definition a political issue, and concerns itself with the distribution of power over a given area, it impacts on all aspects of life wherever it is implemented. That is, decentralization is a program for specifying who is to

rule in what area. And, arising from this therefore, Samoff argues that decentralization programs should be seen first and foremost as political processes and consequently, as a “site for political struggle”⁶⁶ over the issue of power and influence. Furthermore, because the pragmatic approach treats the issue of decentralization as non-political, this is reflected in the way it views the subject of popular participation. That is, because the pragmatic approach neglects the linkage between decentralization and politics, it views popular participation only at the instrumental level where people only participate in the implementation of programs already drawn up from elsewhere and imposed on them.

Political Approach (Devolution)

The political approach to decentralization, which is referred to as “devolution,” sees decentralization as occurring in a political setting. Consequently, it makes political issues the focus of its analysis. Smith states that this approach sees decentralization as involving both administration and government.⁶⁷ The political approach regards decentralization as a vehicle for political reform, a means to democratize the governmental apparatus, which it views as the chief obstacle in the path of participatory democracy at the grassroots. Political decentralization, therefore, seeks to establish and or strengthen sub-government units at the local level by transferring functions and authority to them. Martinussen states that this approach is based on the assumption that political power and legitimacy naturally belong to the central state, which could, out of its own will, decentralize it to lower

structures.⁶⁸ Thus the primary concern of political decentralization is to effect the transfer of decision-making authority to hitherto marginalized groups who should now take an active part in decision-making on issues that directly affect them. It is expected that the transfer of decision-making authority should lead to the empowerment of the people. However, in instances where this does not occur, it will be assumed that political decentralization has either not been effected or is ineffective.⁶⁹

Two ways have been identified through which these changes could be manifested.⁷⁰ First, because the chief aim of political decentralization is a restructuring of the governmental apparatus, it will result in the transfer of resources, functions, and authority to local government units. This will make local governments less dependent on the central government and therefore, enable them to determine their own developmental priorities. Additionally, and given the relative closeness of local government to the population, it is envisaged that it will be more accountable and responsive to the people.

Second, it is believed that political decentralization will facilitate the direct popular participation of the people at the grassroots, thereby promoting representative democracy when the people elect their representatives. Thus, the end result of political decentralization is to incorporate the majority of the people into the political system and for that matter into decision-making, either directly or indirectly, to enable them to contribute their inputs to the building of their localities.

However, as a political process, decentralization has been contested. To start with, there is no guarantee that the decentralized institutions will be secured even when established. This is because the economic, social, and political problems that have become attendant with the daily lives of many people in the countries of the South do not create the enabling environment for the survival of these institutional arrangements. Thus, for decentralization to succeed, it should be tied to the enhancement of broader goals of political and economic democracy without which it cannot serve any meaningful goal.

According to Fesler, the political and administrative character of decentralization engenders certain probable consequences which have not been adequately treated in the literature.⁷¹ First, it leads to a situation where there are differences in policy outcomes between decisions taken at both the local and national levels over any given issue. That is, because decisions on issues are taken at different levels, there is the likelihood of differences in their outcomes and conflict as a result. Second, there is the possibility that the national aggregates of local decisions over any given policy issue could differ or may even be at variance with that of the central government. Fesler argues that these two consequences could be due to variations in participation in decision-making at both local and central government levels but more importantly, they could be the result of the different orientations of both sectors involved in the decision-making process.

It should be indicated that the importance of these approaches to decentralization in our context is that Ghana's decentralization program is a

combination of all of them. It is on the basis of this that we shall conduct our study.

THE DECENTRALIZATION DEBATE OF THE 1980s

The years of the 1950s and 1960s saw formal decentralization policies being implemented throughout the Third World. According to Crook and Manor, these policies were aimed at moving governments closer to the people at the local level and to also ensure the mobilization and utilization of both human and material resources for national development.⁷² However, by the birth of the 1970s, it was clear that these initial attempts at decentralization were doomed to failure due largely to the centralized nature of the post-colonial states.

By the start of the 1980s, the issue of decentralization had returned to the fore and seized the attention of governments, academia, the United Nations and its agencies, and international donor agencies especially the World Bank. Even back in the 1970s, Norman Furniss foresaw the overwhelming popularity of decentralization when he proclaimed that, "Decentralization is rapidly replacing God, Country and Motherhood in popular favor."⁷³

It is important to note that the decentralization debate in the 1980s was woven around two core issues, namely the need to facilitate development and as a channel for ensuring democratic participation in public issues. With regard to development, Cheema and Rondinelli have argued that the chief reason for the decentralization revolution was its appropriateness to the new approaches to

development that were being adopted at the time as a result of the perceived failure of the centralized state to facilitate development.⁷⁴ According to them, the theories of development that emerged in the 1950s and 1960s had focused on the central state as the chief provider of development. This resulted in centralized planning and management being adopted by all the newly independent countries. Centralized planning was expected to facilitate economic development and national integration, and help improve the living conditions of the poor. However, it was argued that because centralized planning had “failed,” decentralization provided the only viable alternative approach to development since it would involve the participation of the people in determining their development needs.⁷⁵

However, this line of thinking is criticized for having been unduly influenced by structural-functionalist ideas. This is because it builds its argument on the assumption that once the decentralized structures are put in place, the new orientation to development that it envisages would logically occur. This, as we shall show in the course of this study, is not automatic.

According to Hart, the second debate around the issue of decentralization links it to the idea of democracy.⁷⁶ Hart has argued that although there are many reasons for decentralization, the primary justification is that it provides the optimal condition for citizen participation and the enhancement of the democratic character of the individual.

There was therefore the belief that because decentralization and democracy are synonymous, once the former is established, all the good attributes of the latter would naturally occur as a matter of course.

It is important to note that, one of the chief actors in the decentralization debate at the time was the World Bank in the context of its Structural Adjustment Programs. In fact it has viewed decentralization as part of its “good governance” agenda. According to the Bank, decentralization will encourage participation, pluralism, free press, and respect for human rights, concepts that have been associated with liberal democracy.⁷⁷ In a sense, those who see decentralization as facilitating democracy believe that it will serve as a means of liberalizing the political space to facilitate competition among interest groups.

It should be pointed out that the linkage between decentralization and democracy was not surprising. This is because by the 1980s, most of the countries in the Third World were reeling under one party states or military dictatorships and it was diagnosed that the economic and development crisis being faced by them was due to the absence of liberal democratic practices. In fact the World Bank’s concept of “good governance,” for instance, calls for the presence of the rule of law and checks and balances, issues that lie at the heart of liberal democracy.⁷⁸ Moreover, it hopes that all sorts of constituencies – women, minorities, small businessmen, artisans, marginal farmers, the urban poor- will either get elected to office or have greater access to officeholders.⁷⁹ This will give them representation, a vital ingredient in empowerment. As a result of this

empowerment, the people will initiate policies that will serve the interest of the majority, leading to better living conditions and therefore a reduction in poverty. Moreover, it was also assumed that this would inevitably lead to policies that will conform to structural adjustment policies. The World Bank literature therefore advocates the creation of local government structures to facilitate these goals. Thus for the World Bank, since the state in Third World did not encourage democratic practices, it must carry the blame for the crisis. Hence the Bank's program of "good governance" was meant to strip the state of the trappings of power in so far as this would allow for the liberalization of the political space.⁸⁰

The link between decentralization and democracy has been criticized. Fesler has argued that although decentralization is supposed to serve as a means to an end, its association with democracy has turned it into an end-value on its own, thereby leading to its romantic idealization.⁸¹ It is assumed that decentralization would facilitate democratic decision-making among people living within the same communities and familiar with one another, thereby enriching their participatory capabilities. Furniss has argued that the link between decentralization and democracy is tenuous and should therefore not be taken for granted. This is because independent and decentralized structures can even work against democratic principles. In sum, the argument of the critics of the decentralization-democracy nexus is that although decentralization could promote democracy, "decentralization is one thing, democracy is another."⁸²

According to Diana Conyers, the idea that decentralization would promote popular participation has three fundamental weaknesses.⁸³ First, she argues that the concept of "popular participation" is itself very vague and does not adequately describe what sort of participation is applicable and under what circumstance. Thus there is the need for more explanation on who are to participate- the poor or the rich, rural or urban, minorities or majorities- and the degree of participation that is intended. Second, there is the possibility that decentralization policies might even not promote the expected popular participation. Furthermore, Conyers argues that the problems that mass participation could engender may be so overwhelming as to even retard the desired goals of participation.

Finally, as regards the World Bank's concept of "good governance," it is an ambiguous and contested one, which needs further investigation in its own right.⁸⁴ The fundamental weakness of the concept is its limited view of politics, which allows it to ignore an analysis of the vested interests which stand to gain or lose from structural adjustment policies.

Much of the recent literature on decentralization in Africa has been on the general pattern displayed in the debate of the 1980s. According to Wunsch and Olowu, by the 1980s, it was realized that the centralized state in Africa had failed to deliver on its development goals.⁸⁵ More importantly, it was realized that centralized planning had three main adverse consequences on human development in Africa. First, it has led to the concentration of political power in the hands of a few, who use it to abuse and exploit the powerless majority. Second, it has the

effect of increasing the possibility of errors in the performance of the national bureaucracy. This could be avoided if decentralization results in more people getting involved in planning and administration. Third, centralization has undermined the positive roles that such non-state actors as labour unions, traditional political authorities and voluntary organizations could play in development if decentralization frees space to facilitate their involvement. Thus in order to promote development, there is a need to promote "self-governance" which will allow for the creation of opportunities at the local level through which people could take part in development planning. The role of the state will then be confined to providing the legal framework, which will seek to encourage the involvement of citizens in development.

However, although decentralization has been identified as the alternative development model to centralized planning, advocates have failed to explain what measures will be put in place to ensure that the "self-governance" that is required for Africa's development is not interfered with by the central government. Moreover, the literature does not seriously attend to the subject of power and its location since this constitutes the hub of decentralization.

As earlier noted, there was a form of decentralization within the political set up in Ghana before the advent of colonialism. In the colonial era, chieftaincy provided the basis for decentralization through the policy of Indirect Rule. Ayee, Kwame-Osei and others have argued that decentralization under Indirect Rule did not facilitate any independent decision-making among the chiefs in the Gold

Coast.⁸⁶ Although the period of internal self-rule between 1951 and independence in 1957 saw decentralization being effected by the government of Dr.Kwame Nkrumah, the sub-government structures which were supposed to facilitate decentralization were used to serve the purposes of Nkrumah and his Convention Peoples' Party (CPP). Ayee and others argue that until December 1981, the decentralization programs that were implemented in Ghana were largely geared at attaining efficiency and effectiveness in government and to facilitate development.⁸⁷ These goals were, however, not attained.

Zaya Yeebo and Adotey Bing have stated that the most ambitious decentralization program in the history of Ghana was that of the PNDC which began in 1982.⁸⁸ The main aims of this program were to facilitate development, ensure the efficient delivery of services, but most importantly, to facilitate the popular participation of the people in the decision-making process, thereby leading to their empowerment. They have argued that the initial radical phase of the decentralization policy during which the P/WDCs provided the decentralized structures through which popular participation in decision-making was effected, was abandoned in favour of the District Assemblies due to the implementation of the Structural Adjustment Program. Yeebo has argued that the use of the defence committees had been part of the agenda of Rawlings and his friends before the coup of 31 December 1981 that brought them into office. However, Ayee, Oquaye and others have argued that the use of the defence committees was part of

Rawlings' populist strategy to galvanize support in the face of the national economic crisis that the PNDC inherited.

The criticism of the local literature on the decentralization program is that it has been unduly influenced by its diverse background: former functionaries of the PNDC who fell out with it on ideological grounds; local intellectuals who had either suffered at the hands of the revolutionaries or simply detested the military background of the PNDC; or supporters/sympathizers of the PNDC. With regard to the foreign writers, they have either been influenced by neo-liberal ideas or simply for the sake of not wanting to offend the political establishment in Ghana, are not critical of the decentralization program. All these factors have in one form or another influenced the literature in the sense of these biases exerting tremendous influence on the analyses. However, their common ground is that the implementation of the SAP has greatly influenced the decentralization program.

It should be noted that responding to the desire of individuals to participate in decision-making in their societies calls for the best environment that will facilitate that participation. Thus on the bases of proximity, familiarity, and supposedly shared common aspirations, the local level is where the widest possible and most meaningful involvement of the people in decision-making could be expected to occur. At this level, structures could be put in place to bring the maximum number of people directly into the decision-making process. This is possible because communication tends to be face-to-face through open meetings and consultations, coupled with participation in collective implementation and evaluation efforts.

For popular participation in effective decision-making to occur, therefore, there should be clear-cut national policy decisions on the creation of structures within which the participation would be carried out. These structures must allow for the participation of all citizens who must freely take and implement decisions that have been arrived at in the course of deliberations. In sum, whatever structures that would be established to facilitate popular participation of the majority of the people in decision-making in the local areas must be representative of all sections of society.

According to Hart, the reality of decentralization could only be determined by the degree of power delegated to the local structures coupled with the willingness of the delegating authority to restrain itself from interfering with and accepting the independent decision-making authority of these sub-national structures.⁸⁹ This implies that institutions/structures established to promote decentralization must be able to facilitate effective decision-making.

It is important to note from the discussion that there is an assumed relationship between popular participation and decentralization. That is, the literature sees popular participation in an effective decision-making process occurring only within a decentralized system of government with structures established at the local levels. It is in this light that we shall discuss the degree to which Ghana's decentralization program during the period covered in this study (1982-1994) has facilitated popular participation in effective decision-making in both the P/WDCs and the District Assembly system.

3 The Research Problem

This study is about the nature of the relationship between popular participation and political decentralization in Ghana. A central problem in popular participation is the question of the effectiveness of political decentralization in facilitating decision-making within decentralized structures of government. The central concern of this study, therefore, is to determine the nature of popular participation within the P/WDCs and the types of participation occurring within Ghana's District Assembly system and then examine whether the decentralization program during the period covered in the study facilitated popular participation in an effective decision-making process. That is, the study seeks to examine popular participation in effective decision-making in the P/WDCs and Ghana's District Assembly system.

4 Thesis Statement

The thesis of the study is that decentralization allows people who were previously sidelined in decision-making to participate in an effective decision-making process, thereby leading to their empowerment only under certain conditions. If these conditions are not met, then decentralization and participatory development do not result in empowerment. In the case of Ghana, the decentralization program initiated from above by the government failed to provide an effective vehicle for

the popular participation of the majority of the people in an effective decision-making process and thus their empowerment. —

5 Research Methodology

The methodology used is a case study of popular participation and political decentralization in Ghana. The study involves an in-depth analysis of the nationwide set-up and functioning of the P/WDCs and the District Assembly system as the chief instruments of the political decentralization program and to determine how far they facilitated popular participation in decision-making. In order to examine the research question, the study will identify and collect data on the relationship between political decentralization and popular participation in Ghana, covering the period of study. Additionally, the study will also identify and collect data on the evaluation of the P/WDCs and the District Assemblies since the 1980s.

In fact, since political decentralization in Ghana pre-dates colonialism, data on the pre-colonial era and on the British colonial policy of Indirect Rule will be collected and examined. The importance of the data on Indirect Rule lies in the fact that some elements of Ghana's post-independence decentralization programs can be traced to that policy.

Finally, the study will rely on the researcher's diary and "participant observation," both as an activist at various levels of the P/WDCs and as a Government Appointee to the South Tongu District Assembly from 1990-1997.

The study will then examine participation in decision-making in the defence committees and also discuss two decisions taken by the South Tongu District Assembly to determine to what extent Ghana's political decentralization program facilitated popular participation in the decision-making process.

It is important to note that any attempt to evaluate measure the degree of popular participation in any political decentralization program is problematic. There is an extensive debate in the literature as to the criteria for such an evaluation/measurement exercise.⁹⁰ This is because power, which is the main ingredient in political decentralization, is a complex phenomenon the distribution of which is difficult to measure.⁹¹ According to Ayee, the situation is more daunting in a developing country like Ghana, where as a result of insufficient resources, there seems to be a dearth of adequate data.⁹² As a compromise, Ayee argues that any such evaluation/measurement should be done on the basis of the stated objectives of the program. It is important to note that when in 1981 the PNDC launched its political decentralization program, it stated that it was meant, "inter alia," to facilitate the popular participation of the majority of the people in the decision-making process. This study will therefore, evaluate Ghana's political decentralization program on the basis of the government's stated objective of promoting popular participation in the decision-making process by the majority of the people. Thus the study will examine the experiences of the P/WDC period in addition to two examples of decision-making by the South Tongu District

Assembly to determine the degree of popular participation in the decision-making process in Ghana's political decentralization program.

6 Plan of Presentation

The study is divided into five main chapters. Chapter 1 opens with a brief background to the study. The purpose of this background is to provide a general historical setting for political decentralization programs in the South. The chapter includes the central and subsidiary questions that will be addressed in the course of the study. It should be noted that there is an overwhelming volume of literature on decentralization and participation in the South. However, the chapter only deals with the literature in as much as it is of direct relevance.

Chapter 2 provides a historical background to the period of central concern to this study. This Chapter traces decentralization in Ghana to the pre-colonial era. It discusses how the British colonial decentralization policy, symbolized in Indirect Rule, affected the earlier practice of chieftaincy. The Chapter then discusses the decentralization policies implemented in Ghana between 1951, the year of internal self-rule, and 1981. The selection of 1981 as the end point of this Chapter is influenced by the fact that the study regards the decentralization program after that period as an entirely new phenomenon in Ghana's history, and therefore deserving of separate attention.

Chapter 3 forms the first decentralization policy of the PNDC, when popular participation was effected through the Peoples' Workers' Defence Committees. It

discusses the economic and political problems that faced the PNDC on its assumption of power. Further, it discusses the nature of participation in the decision-making process and the problems that it engendered in defence committee-government relations. It is argued that the central issue in participation is the location of power, which lay at the core of the conflicts that the defence committees had with the PNDC. It will be argued that although other factors could have accounted for the PNDC's decision to abandon its experiment in popular participation through the P WDCs in favour of the District Assemblies, by and large, it was the implementation of the IMF/World Bank sponsored Economic Recovery Program, Structural Adjustment Program which led to this change. That is, it will be argued that the de-politicization of the defence committees was largely due to the conditions attached to the implementation of the ERP/SAP.

Chapter 4 will take up decentralization and popular participation under the District Assembly system. It will discuss the structures of the decentralization policy as spelt out between 1988 and 1994. Further, it will examine the degree of participation in the District Assembly system, using the South Tongu District Assembly as a case study. Finally, it will discuss two examples of decision-making in this District Assembly to illustrate the effectiveness of popular participation in the decision-making process in the District Assemblies.

Chapter 5 is a summary and conclusion of the study. It will try to determine to what extent the research question has been answered. Further, we will attempt to identify who are the main beneficiaries of Ghana's political decentralization

program if it has not facilitated popular participation in the decision-making process. The Chapter also makes suggestions for strengthening the decentralization program to enhance popular participation and concludes with suggestions of areas of attention for future studies.

7. Endnotes

¹ There were a number of critical counterparts of this approach which as Veltmeyer (1998) notes, takes numerous forms. One of the first, was the formation of the Dag Hamerskjold Foundation and its Structural, Development Dialogue in 1974. On the various schools of Another Development, see Henry Veltmeyer, "Neoliberalism And The Search For Another Development," in Veltmeyer, Henry and Petras, James, The Dynamics of Change in Latin America (London: Macmillan Press/NY: St. Martin's Press, 1998).

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CHAPTER 2

DECENTRALIZATION IN GHANA: FROM THE PRE-COLONIAL ERA TO 1981

2 Introduction

The purpose of this Chapter is to trace the history of decentralization policies in Ghana from the pre-colonial period to the end of 1981. This is important to enable us to show the trend of these policies over the period and to see to what extent they influenced each other. The Chapter therefore identifies the policy objectives of the decentralization policies of the various governments covering the period. Further, there is a discussion of the various structures which were created to facilitate decentralization, the character of the relationship between the central and local governments, and the level of participation of the people in the activities of the decentralized structures. Finally we shall show that because of the centralized nature of the post-colonial state, decentralization policies up to the early 1980s had the practical intent and effect of centralizing political and administrative authority.

1 Pre-Colonial Era

The history of decentralization in Ghana (until independence on 6 March 1957, it was known as the Gold Coast), pre-dates colonialism.¹ It is important to note that the institution of chieftaincy provided the framework for the administration of Ghanaian society in the pre-colonial period. Within the large kingdoms and empires, there were various degrees of decentralization in which title holders such as paramount chiefs, divisional chiefs, sub-chiefs, village heads and lineage heads

exercised authority over their respective areas of jurisdiction within a given political set up. This was a form of integrated overall administration in which decision-making over such issues as land distribution and the administration of justice were left to the respective structures although owing allegiances to the highest political authority. By this arrangement, decision-making in the lower structures was limited to specified areas. Thus by and large, the higher authority exercised a degree of control over the lower structures. That is, the power relationship was skewed in favour of the center.

From the mid-15th century onwards traders from various European countries began to be involved in the activities of the Gold Coast. The first Europeans to have got into contact with the Gold Coast were the Portuguese sailors who, later in 1482, built a fortress at 'El Mina' (Portuguese word for 'the mine'). In the following years, nationals of such other European nations as Denmark, France, and Britain also entered the Gold Coast which became a vital trading post in such articles of trade as slaves, gold, and spices, among others.

By 1922, the British had assumed full political control over the Gold Coast, having purchased the possessions of the other European traders. Moreover, and in order to facilitate its activities in the Gold Coast, the British had earlier entered into various treaties with chiefs of the coastal trading towns, the most famous of such treaties being The Bond of 1844. Thus in 1922 when the League of Nations handed over the German Mandated Togoland, which was taken away from

Germany after the First World War to Britain, it assumed full control of the Gold Coast as a colonial power.

2 Colonial Era: Indirect Rule and Decentralization

In 1878, Britain introduced what became known as Indirect Rule in parts of the Gold Coast that were under its control. As a colonial policy, the British had earlier practiced Indirect Rule in the colony of Tanganyika in East Africa. Bourret has argued that one of the principal objectives of the policy of Indirect Rule, as shown in the Native Jurisdiction Ordinance of the Gold Coast in 1878, was the intention of the British colonial establishment to govern its territories through the existing indigenous political institutions.² It has also been argued that the essential aim of the Indirect Rule was to both maintain and shore up the institution of chieftaincy against the disintegrating influences of 'modernity' and therefore, prepare it for effective participation in modern administration.³ Thus, by the policy of Indirect Rule the British administered local government through the institution of chieftaincy in the Gold Coast as in other British colonies in which the policy was practiced.

The structure of Indirect Rule in the Gold Coast was made up of the Governor (as head) who was assisted in the discharge of his functions by the Provincial, District, and Assistant District Commissioners and the Chiefs (see Figure 1). Unlike the chiefs who were enstooled by their elders according to customary practices, the other functionaries in the implementation of the policy of Indirect

Rule were appointees of the British Government. To facilitate the participation of the chiefs, the British established Native Authority Councils throughout the Gold Coast through which the chiefs exercised their influence. Among other things, the Native Authority Councils exercised administrative, judicial, and political authority over their spheres of jurisdiction and were linked to the colonial establishment in the discharge of these functions through the District Commissioners. In all these functions, the Native Authorities were seen as local government institutions. However, the Provincial Councils of Chiefs, which stood above the Native Authority Councils, provided another linkage between the latter and the colonial government only in so far as issues pertaining to the institution of chieftaincy were concerned.

In spite of the Native Jurisdiction Ordinance of 1878, it was not until the passage of the Native Authority Ordinance of 1944 that any serious efforts to integrate the institution of chieftaincy into local government could be said to have begun. The new Ordinance provided for the setting up of local treasuries, strengthened the authority of the chiefs to raise revenues, and created Native Courts under the control of chiefs with jurisdiction over specific offences. By this Ordinance, chieftaincy was provided the fullest backing from the colonial establishment to function as a local government institution.

It is important to note that Indirect Rule, in theory, was aimed at relying on the chiefs in local government administration. In practice, however, it was a mixture of direct and indirect rule since the colonial government interfered as and when it

felt that its interest was at stake.⁴ This meant that although by the policy the chiefs were allowed some degree of authority over their areas of jurisdiction, this was permitted only in so far as it did not endanger the overall colonial interest of exploiting the resources of the colonies. Indirect Rule to all intents and purposes had a tremendous influence on the role and status of the chief in society. Hitherto, the institution of chieftaincy was the highest political and administrative authority around which society was built. The chief therefore commanded all that he could survey although under the guidance of the stool elders. However, the introduction of Indirect Rule changed all that. Thenceforward, the chief owed allegiance to a higher political authority (government) which would increasingly interfere as and when it deemed necessary in matters concerning chieftaincy. By this policy, the control that the elders had previously exercised over the chiefs was also greatly undermined since the colonial administration always relied on the threat or actual use of force to ensure that its directives were carried out.

However in spite of the Ordinance, Indirect Rule as a colonial policy began to decline soon after the Second World War. According to Crook, one main reason for this decline lay in the fact that the chiefs had begun to detest the increasing attempts by the colonial authority to interfere in their affairs and accommodated colonial directives only in so far as they did not undermine their own positions.⁵ In spite of the fact that Indirect Rule protected the chiefs, especially those who were prepared to do the bidding of the colonial administration, from being destooled by their elders, nevertheless, they (chiefs) had come to realize their increasing

insubordination to an alien authority which had curtailed their influence in society and they therefore resented this intrusion. This explains why during the 1937-38 cocoa hold-ups in the Gold Coast when farmers held back their produce from the market in protest against low prices, the chiefs were said to have secretly urged the farmers on in their protest. Hindin has argued that the cynicism with which the District Commissioners (DCs) implemented Indirect Rule partly accounted for the decline of the policy." According to her, the District Commissioners, who were in daily contact with the chiefs were aware of the degree to which the policy was detested by them, when they were supposed to be directly in charge of its implementation. In such a hostile environment, the DCs felt that there was no long-term prospect for the policy. Third, Bourret has argued that although the policy of Indirect Rule was, in theory, meant to provide the basis for local government, it did not create an opportunity for the expression of popular demands. This was because any opportunity for the expression of popular demands would have provided an avenue to the local people for questioning the policy. Following from this lack of popular demands and participation by the general public in government, the policy came under severe criticism from the rising educated class, which was made up of lawyers, medical officers, clerical officers, but overwhelmingly of unemployed youth who felt that they were being left out of the government of their own country. Moreover, the educated class saw in Indirect Rule a grand design by colonialism to use the chiefs in the exploitation of the mineral resources of the Gold Coast, more so when they had realized that

the colonial administration was supporting the chiefs against them. In fact in order to weaken opposition to its presence, the colonial administration developed the habit of playing on the fear of the chiefs that the educated class was set on usurping their historic role as leaders of society.

Ayee points out that there were two crucial factors which shaped British colonial policy in the immediate post-World War II period.⁸ First, the Labour Party, which was more favourably disposed toward the interests of the colonial peoples, had defeated the Conservative Party and assumed government in London. Additionally, even within Labour itself was the influential progressive philosophical group known as the Fabian Society. The Society added a new fillip to Labour's efforts when it began calling for a new local government system in the British colonies which would combine the elective principle and selection (by local people) of their own representatives. Furthermore, the Society argued that any meaningful local government system must allow for a certain degree of decentralization of authority to allow for local planning and implementation of policies. The second reason for the new British post-War colonial thought, as identified by Ayee, was the general feeling in the colonial establishment at the time that its efforts to turn the native authorities into efficient instruments of modern local government administration had failed.

It should be noted that the immediate post-war period provided a fertile ground for anti-colonial feelings throughout the world. There are various reasons for this, including the support of the Soviet Union as a super power after the war. More

importantly, there was the feeling on the part of the war veterans and the educated class that if the colonial people could fight for the freedom of Europe, then they had every right to fight for the freedom of their own countries. In the Gold Coast, the educated class, which had been left out of government in preference for the chiefs, had long protested against colonial policies by way of petitions and even delegations to the Colonial Office in London. This class therefore saw in Indirect Rule and any other administrative arrangement between the colonial power and the chiefs, a grand design to perpetuate "the domination of an antiquated and oppressive authority." " In their opinion, since the institution of chieftaincy was unrepresentative there was a need for the participation of the society in general in the local and national politics of the Gold Coast.

3 Reports of the Watson and Coussey Commissions

By 1947, the anti-colonial sentiment on the Gold Coast had gathered momentum, being led by the United Gold Coast Convention (UGCC) which was agitating for independence. However, besides political issues (demand for independence) that had provided the platform for the anti-colonial movement, there were also economic factors at play. In fact by the close of 1947 relations between the colonial administration and farmers had worsened due the government's inability to compensate cocoa farmers whose crops were being cut down in order to prevent the spread of a virus known as the "swollen shoot." Moreover, local businessmen had their own grievances against foreign.

particularly Syrian and Lebanese businesses, which had assumed monopoly control over trade in the Gold Coast. Furthermore, ex-servicemen, who had served in World War II, felt let down by the colonial government by its failure to deliver on promises that were made to them. Thus when in 1948, the UGCC called for the boycott of European goods and services, it simply added fuel to an already bad situation. It was during this call to boycott that ex-servicemen, who had marched to present a petition to the colonial government, clashed with the Police who were on guard duty at the Christiansborg Castle, Osu, the seat of government, resulting in the death of one of the former, Sergeant Adjetei. The boycott and the strikes that followed culminated in rioting in Accra and other towns of the Gold Coast, coordinated by farmers' groups, trade unions and some radical chiefs, notable among them was Nii Kwabena Boonie, Osu Alatta Mantse (chief of Osu Alatta).¹⁰

The findings of the Watson Commission that was set up in 1948 to investigate and report on the causes of the rioting were important for the future of decentralization policies in the Gold Coast. In its Report, the Watson Commission identified the lack of participation by the educated class in the government of the Gold Coast as one of the chief underlying political causes of the riots. In order to remove this frustration, the Commission recommended the creation of Regional Councils to perform executive functions as well as supervise constituent local authorities, which should be equipped with the power to enact bylaws. Furthermore, the Commission recommended the creation of local government

units devoid of any participation by the chiefs. Arguing for the non-involvement of the chiefs in its proposal for a new local government system, the Commission expressed its surprise at, "...the failure of the Government to realize that, with the spread of liberal ideas, increasing literacy and a closer contact with political developments in other parts of the world, the star of rule through the Chiefs was on the wane..."¹¹ The Commission's recommendation barring the Chiefs from participation in local government administration was a slap in the face of a colonial policy which saw the institution of chieftaincy as the cornerstone of its local government system. The Commission erroneously thought that the removal of the chiefs from local government administration would assuage the increasingly radical educated class, which had resented their collaboration with the colonial administration, thereby slowing down the nationalist agitation.

Although the government accepted the Commission's view on the need to strengthen local government administration, it disagreed with its recommendation on the Chiefs, arguing that a modernized institution of chieftaincy could still play an essential and beneficial role in the development of the Gold Coast.¹² However, the Government agreed in general terms with the broad principles underlying the Watson Report on the need for an efficient and democratic local government administration in the Gold Coast.

In response to the Watson Commission recommendation for a Commission to examine the issue of constitutional reforms, the government set up an all-African Committee under the Chairmanship of Mr. Justice (later Sir Henley) Coussey in

1949. The Coussey Committee, as it became known, was therefore assigned the task of making recommendations for constitutional reforms in the Gold Coast.

It should be indicated that although the Coussey Committee made broad recommendations on constitutional reforms, this study is only concerned with those aspects that had to do with decentralization. On the continued participation of the chiefs in local government, the Committee disagreed with the Watson Report, calling instead for a combination of chiefs and the ordinary people in local government. The Report therefore argued that, "...we believe that there is still a place for the Chief in a new constitutional set upThe whole institution of chieftaincy is so closely bound up with the life of our Communities that its disappearance would spell disaster...."¹³ It therefore advocated the reservation of one-third position in the District Councils to chiefs, with the remaining two-thirds being contested on the basis of universal adult suffrage. The Report stressed the importance of decentralization to help in providing speedy and local solutions to problems.¹⁴ It therefore recommended a three-tier local government structure based on population and composed of District Municipal Councils, Urban/ Rural Area Councils, and Village Area Councils referred to respectively as classes A, B, and C.

Ayee has argued that the Coussey Report called for a new local government system that would be an inter-marriage between the common interests and the level of political consciousness of the respective local areas, while at the same time recognizing the representative and democratic character of the culture of the

Gold Coast.¹⁵ In recommending the continuous involvement of the chiefs in local government, the Coussey Report felt that they would continue to provide local sympathy for the administration, ensure the least disturbance to the social structure, and finally that they would make their rich experience available to the Councils. Thus whereas the Watson Report felt that chiefs had outlived their usefulness in local government administration, the Coussey Report thought otherwise. However, in spite of its support for the chiefs, the Coussey Report was of the opinion that local government would be enriched through the combination of the chiefs and the representative principle.

4 CONVENTION PEOPLES' PARTY AND DECENTRALIZATION, 1951-1966

Acting upon the Coussey Report, the colonial government supervised the drafting of a new constitution for the Gold Coast in 1950, on the basis of which elections were held in 1951. The result of that election was significant for the future of decentralization policies in the Gold Coast. The victory of Dr. Nkrumah, and his Convention Peoples' Party (CPP) led to the introduction of certain radical measures into local government administration. These new measures were aimed at strengthening the elective principle on the one hand and on the other, geared toward undermining the role of the chiefs, who were seen by Dr. Nkrumah and his Party as unprogressive and unrepresentative elements, who were facilitating the colonial exploitation of the Gold Coast. The CPP's views recalled the earlier

complains by the educated class against the chiefs, which was later reflected in the Watson Report.

The opposition of the CPP to the chiefs was clearly amplified when in his presentation of the Local Government Bill (1951) to Parliament, the Minister for Local Government stated that the Bill had aimed at "...a departure from the dominant influence of the traditional elements" and "...a breakaway from the existing centralized and official framework of government..."¹⁶ The Minister further threw light on the new local government system which was to be based upon, "...popularly elected councils, which will in large measure assume the powers and discharge the administrative responsibilities now exercised by traditional authorities on the one hand or by officials on the other."¹⁷ It is clear then that the focus of the CPP's decentralization policy was the democratic and representational character of local government at the expense of the chiefs who had long provided that focus. By shifting this focus, the Local Government Bill aimed at undermining chieftaincy and effect a transfer of power to the elected representatives, who the CPP was convinced would be its members. In fact, the chief purpose of introducing the representative principle was to enable the CPP to control local government administration, thereby giving more power to the center.

The Local Government Bill, having been passed into the Local Government Ordinance of 1951, provided the basis for the decentralization policy of the CPP government. The structure of the new decentralization policy was a four-tiered one, made up of Regional Administrations, District Councils, Local and Urban

Councils, and Town, Village, and Area Committees (see Figure 2). The composition of the Local and Urban Councils were to be made up of two-thirds elected members, with the remaining one-third position reserved for the representatives of chiefs. In spite of the fact that the new Councils were dominated by the elected majority who were largely activists of the CPP, the government claimed that it still believed in a continuing role for the chiefs in local government administration.¹⁸ The District Councils, on the other hand, were to be composed of the elected representatives of the lower structures.

The functions of the new local government system were not much different from those under colonialism, although certain new tasks were added. The Urban and Local Councils were principally expected to ensure the provision of such basic services as schools, ensuring adequate sanitation, and the construction of markets, whereas the District Councils were to undertake large-scale projects, maintaining roads, and ensuring law and order in their areas of jurisdiction. The Regional Administrations were tasked with supervising the functioning of the respective District Councils whereas the Town, Village and Area Committees were to ensure the development of their areas.

The result of the elections to the new Councils that were held in 1952 was a landslide victory for the CPP. This was due to the boycott by the United Gold Coast Convention (UGCC), the main opposition party, for fear of being humiliated at the polls as it had been in the election of the previous year that ushered Ghana into an internal self-government in 1950. This dominance of the Councils by the

CPP led to constant political interference in their activities by the Party. This resulted in a further poisoning of the relationship between the representatives of the chiefs and the elected representatives of the people. Consequently, there were frequent quarrels in the Councils between these two groups over the control of stool lands and the question of who really was the true representative of the interest of the Gold Coast people.¹⁹ Although the chiefs always protested, this was as far as they could have gone since the government had threatened destoolment against "recalcitrant" chiefs. The soured nature of the relationship between the elected two-thirds majority and the representatives of the chiefs became a feature of the District Councils until the provision for the representation of chiefs was abolished in 1959.

The election to the first post-independence government was held in 1956 and was won by Dr. Kwame Nkrumah and his CPP. It was therefore generally expected that Dr. Nkrumah, now designated Prime Minister, would pursue the decentralization policies as provided for under the Local Government Act of 1951. However, two issues were to shape his decentralization policy.²⁰ The first of these was the Greenwood Commission Report of 1956. It was set up by the colonial government to examine and report on, among other things, the structure and finances of local government units in the Gold Coast. The government of Dr. Nkrumah largely incorporated the recommendations contained in its Report in the Local Government Act of 1961.

The Act adopted the policy objective of local government as recommended in the Greenwood Report for fewer and larger local councils to make for greater government attention and efficiency in local government administration. Furthermore, the new local government system was based on the single-tier structure of City, Municipal, Urban, or Locals as recommended by the Greenwood Commission. The functions of the first two included the construction and maintenance of roads and health facilities, whereas the last two were to perform such functions as might be assigned to them from time-to-time by the Minister of Local Government.

With regard to composition, the one-third reservation for the chiefs that had become a feature of local government was abandoned for a new arrangement, which called for the election of the entire membership of the Councils. The elimination of the one-third representation for the chiefs in the Local Government Act of 1961 was no surprise since the CPP and its leadership had always detested a role for the chiefs in local government, largely on the ground that they were partners of the colonial authorities. Thenceforward, local government structures were to be dominated by activists of the CPP, resulting in the frequent political interference of the Party in local government administration until its overthrow in the military coup of February 1966. Moreover, there developed a tendency during this period for the reshuffling of the number of local government units. In fact between in 1957 and the overthrow of Dr. Nkrumah's government in 1966, local government units had shot up from 57 to 183.²¹ The chief explanation for the

frequent changes in the number of the local government units during the first post-independence government was the desire of Dr. Nkrumah and his Party to satisfy their political constituencies. The end result of this fragmentation of local government units was that the boundaries of local council areas shifted from time to time, thereby making for a lack of stability for purposes of planning and the implementation of programs.

The second issue that shaped Nkrumah's decentralization policy was Local Government Act of 1961. Under this Act, District Commissioners, who were directly appointed by the government were in charge of the day-to-day administration of the District Councils. There was also a staff of civil servant-employees of the Ministry of Local Government on hand to assist the District Commissioners in the performance of their functions.

Ironically, Dr. Nkrumah and his Party took an active interest in the formation of Town and Village Development Committees, through which each village organized its development activities. The level of popular participation in the Town and Village Development Committees was only in so far as it promoted the singular objective of facilitating the interests of the Convention People's Party, these committees having been turned into local organs of the Party. This was due to the fact that it was difficult to differentiate between the Town and Village Development Committees or their executives and those of the CPP, since both virtually dovetailed into each other. Hence Amonoo could comment that the Town and Village Development Committees had become "...party creatures by 1963."²²

As seen from the discussion, it is clear that local government structures under the first post-independence government were not free to take any initiatives on their own. In a sense, this meant that the high degree of control and interference in the functioning of these structures put local government directly under the control of the central government. This again meant that the views of the people were not sought on issues related to local government administration. Thus there was a negligible, if any level of participation in local government, since party activists made decisions in conformity with the interests of their party, without any room for local consultation. It is therefore not far from the truth to describe local government administration during the first post-independence government as nothing short of an extension of the central government apparatus and therefore a means of re-centralization of authority. This is because, the power to ensure effective decision-making was not decentralized to the lower structures, rather, the center held on to it. This centralizing character is most clearly visible in the CPP's attempts at taking over control of even the TVDCs. Thus all the structures of local government were re-focused to satisfy the whims and caprices of the Party. It was therefore correct when the Siriboe Commission later commented in 1968 that, "Local government in Ghana is at present in a state of chaos..."²³

5 NATIONAL LIBERATION COUNCIL AND DECENTRALIZATION, 1966- 1969

On the 24 February 1966 when a military-cum-police coup ended the life of the government of Dr. Nkrumah, as expected, his policies went out with him. The new government, the National Liberation Council (NLC) took steps to re-organize local government administration as part of its general national re-structuring program. This led to establishment of three Commissions - Mills-Odoi (1967), Akuffo-Addo (1968), and Siriboe (1968) - which were charged with the responsibilities of formulating a viable local government system for Ghana.²⁴ The main focus of the decentralization policy of the NLC, arising from the recommendations of these Commissions, was to ensure the effectiveness of local government administration. The importance of a new local government system lay in the fact the NLC was determined, at least in theory, to undo the "excessive centralization of authority and resources" of the previous government in favour of local government administration. This was in line with the government's policy of dismantling the highly centralized and authoritarian administration of the Dr. Nkrumah era.

These recommendations led to the setting up of a four-tier structure of Regional Committees, District Councils, Local Councils, and Town and Village Development Committees. The Regional Committees of Administration were made up of a membership of the Regional Heads of the Army and Police, with the most senior civil servant in the region as its other Member. Principally, these

Regional Committees were to ensure the protection of law and order and the promotion of government policies. They also served as transmission belts for information to government about the needs and feelings of the people in the constituent Districts, which were not different from the functions of the CPP era.

In order to facilitate the functioning of the Regional Committees of Administration, the National Liberation Council, in October 1967 established broad-based and non-political Regional Planning Committees with memberships drawn from diverse professional backgrounds. Furthermore, Regional Management Committees were also set up in June 1969 with the Regional Chief Executive as its Chairman. Other members of the Regional Management Committees were the Regional Heads of Government Departments. The Committees were to serve as advisory bodies to the Regional Chief Executives.²⁵

To ensure efficiency and cost effectiveness in local government administration, the government drastically reduced the number of former administrative districts from 161 to 47.²⁶ It set up District Committees of Administration in each district, with each made up of a Police Officer and the most senior Civil Servant in the District. These District Committees were to maintain law and order, in addition to coordinating the activities of government departments within their Districts. To further strengthen local government administration, Local Councils were established in each District with their administration put in the hands of local Management Committees.

In order to bring local government administration closer to the people, the government maintained the Town and Village Development Committees of the Nkrumah era, but this time they were chaired by chiefs and sub-chiefs. The chiefs were given this position because it was felt that their experiences would be made available to the Committees. These Committees, like in the past, were to ensure the upkeep of their most immediate environment but unlike previously, they were not turned into appendages of the government. They were therefore to make decisions that facilitated the welfare of their communities. According to Akuoko-Frimpong, since the decentralization policy allowed the Town and Village Development Committees to take decisions on their most immediate needs, it amounted to taking the "decision-making function in respect of matters of a purely local significance away from the national capital and closer to the areas where the decisions are implemented."²⁷ However, in spite of this assertion, there were no forms of participation or representation in the higher structures, which were composed of appointees of the central government to which they owed their allegiance and for their tenure. It is important to note that by returning the chiefs to local government administration, the National Liberation Council sought to reverse the policy of the Convention People's Party, which had barred chiefs from participation in local government administration. In fact this was strategic in the sense that being a non-elected government, the National Liberation Council needed the support and goodwill of all influential sectors of Ghanaian society and the chiefs constituted one vital element of that sector.

It should be pointed out that the decentralization policy of the NLC, like in the past, was only manifested in terms of the creation of structures. This is because the composition of these structures with civil servants was to ensure that they dutifully supervised the implementation of policies of the government. With specific regard to the District Councils and the TVDCs, they simply lacked decision-making authority. In the case of the former, they were more of administrative units charged with the duty of religiously implementing government directives than institutions with the power to take decisions. Their situation was worsened by the fact that the District Councils had to rely on funding from the government to meet their daily administrative needs. In spite of the fact the TVDCs were closer to the people, they could not function independent of government influence since the chiefs who chaired them wanted to show gratitude to the NLC for returning them to local government administration, having been sidelined during the CPP era. In the light of these, coupled with the fact that there was minimal consultation even at the level of the TVDCs, the NLC's decentralization policy was not different from the CPP era. It was in fact, more administrative than political decentralization.

6 PROGRESS PARTY AND DECENTRALIZATION, 1969-1972

In 1969, the National Liberation Council transferred power to the democratically elected government of the Progress Party (PP) under Dr. Kofi Abrefa Busia as Prime Minister. The 1969 Constitution, which ushered in the new

government devoted Chapter 16 to "Chieftaincy and Local Government." The importance of this chapter underscored the fact that those who drafted the Constitution believed in the centrality of chiefs in a viable local government system, since they were still regarded as repositories of knowledge which must be tapped for both local and national development.

These constitutional provisions on local government were largely shaped by the recommendations of the Mills-Odoi, Akuffo-Addo, and Siriboe Commissions. The Constitution provided for the setting up of Regional Councils, with a membership of the elected representatives of District Councils, two representatives of the Regional Houses of Chiefs, and Regional Heads of Department who would serve as ex-officio members. The Regional Councils were to be chaired by Regional Commissioners, who were appointed by the Prime Minister. The Regional Councils were to perform such functions as the coordination of the affairs of their constituent Districts and provide general political direction to the regions. Additionally, they might perform any other new functions that Parliament might assign from time to time. The Constitution accepted the elective principle at the district level whereby two-thirds of the membership of the District Councils were to be elected on the basis of universal adult suffrage with the remaining one-third position being reserved for the chiefs. Finally, there was to be created a Local Government Grants Commission, which would both ensure the ready availability of funds to facilitate the smooth running of the new local government system and also serve as an independent source of funding and therefore a guarantee against

the unnecessary political interference in the affairs of the Councils.²⁸ The 1969 Constitution, therefore, provided a framework for the decentralization policy of Dr. Busia and his Progress Party government.

The Local Administration Act (Act 359) of 1971 had the objective of providing “something more than local administration by civil servants, but a good deal less than local government by elected councils.”²⁹ The main concern of the Act was the desire to place an emphasis on development which would be realized when the people took control of their district councils through which they would determine their own developmental needs.³⁰ In a sense, one could argue that the Local Administration Act had its focus on the developmental functions of local government administration.

Under the Act the structure of local government administration was to be a three-tier one. There were to be Regional, District, and Local Councils, as provided in the Constitution. The Regional Councils were to be made up of the Regional Chief Executives to be appointed by the Prime Minister (as Chairmen), the respective Regional Administrative Officers as Secretaries, and Regional Heads of Department as ex-officio members, who together were regarded as constituting Regional Management Committees. As provided for under Chapter 16 of the Constitution, two representatives of each Regional House of Chiefs which completed the membership. The principal functions of the Regional Councils were to undertake regional planning, coordinate the activities of the various Districts, and to allocate public funds to the constituent Districts.

At the District levels, the highest structures were the District Councils, which were to be equipped to enable them to carry out functions that could be performed locally to speed up the development of the Districts. These Councils were to be primarily concerned with issues of development, in addition to any other functions that might be determined by the Minister of Local Government. However, the composition of the District Councils was to be determined by the National Electoral Commissioner.

It is worth noting that although Local Councils constituted the closest unit to the people in the new local government system, they were not given any specific functions. Rather, they were to play supportive roles to the efforts of the District Councils, while at the same time catering for the needs of their areas. The decentralization policies as contained in the Local Administration Act of 1971, like those of previous governments, was largely an extension of central government to the local levels. As already indicated, both the Regional and District Councils were to be chaired by appointees of the central government to whom they owed their loyalty and tenure. Additionally, the Secretaries of these Councils were to be civil servants in the employment of the central government. It was difficult to envision a situation in which these appointees would have acted against their political benefactors. Moreover, the fact that the Act provided for the Minister of Local Government to assign responsibilities to the District Councils, which were seen as the "fundamental local government unit," showed that there could be interference by the government in the functioning of these Councils.

What is worse was the fact that the focus of the Local Administration Act of 1971 was on the District Councils where the political appointees could be subjected to central control, rather than the Local Councils, which were closest to the people. The centralizing character of the Act, was unapologetically justified by the Minister for Internal Affairs and responsible for Local Government, who stated that "In practical terms there is no gainsaying the fact that the (1969) Constitution envisages that the new local government bodies shall be extensions of the central government..."³¹

The elections to the District Councils as provided for under the Local Administration Act of 1971, which were slated for April 1972, could not be held due to the military coup of 13 January 1972. It has been suggested that although the Local Government Administration Bill was introduced in Parliament in 1971, the delay of the government in passing the Act for an early election was the result of Dr. Busia's intention of reverting to the policy of the first post-independence government by transforming "local government into a combination of government apparatus and political machinery" for the Progress Party.³² This, Haynes further argues, was necessary to ensure the political control of the Districts which were described in the Bill as the "fundamental local government unit."

7 NATIONAL REDEMPTION COUNCIL – PEOPLES' NATIONAL PARTY AND DECENTRALIZATION, 1972-1981

The coup that toppled the government of Dr. Busia on 13 January 1972 led to the establishment of the National Redemption Council, with Colonel (later

General) Ignatius Kutu Acheampong as its Chairman and Ghana's Head of State. However, until 1974 the National Redemption Council (NRC) did not indicate the direction it intended to take on decentralization. Haynes and Ayee have argued that the delay by the government in putting forward its local government policy was due to the fact that it was immediately pre-occupied with both securing its position and building legitimacy.³³ In fact, earlier in December 1972, it had passed NRC Decree 138 to extend the life of the old management committees that had been in place during the tenure of the previous government.

The decentralization policy of the NRC was to a large extent derived from the recommendations of the Mills-Odoi and Siriboe Commissions. Thus, ironically, the new decentralization policy was largely based on the Local Government Act of 1971 as amended by the Local Administration Decree (NRCD 258) of May 1974. The main purpose of the policy as in the past was to ensure the transfer of decision-making authority from the center to local government units. This would be done by allowing decision-making over local issues to be taken at the local government level. However, there were other objectives such as making for maximum administrative efficiency and "combining the positive aspects of traditional practices with modern administrative techniques."

Structurally, the new decentralization policy was to be based on a four-tier structure made up of Regional Councils, District Councils, Municipal, Urban, and Local Councils, and Town and Village Development Committees. The Regional Councils were composed of two elected representatives each of the constituent

District Councils and the Regional Houses of Chiefs, with the Regional Administrative Officer and the Regional Heads of Department as ex-officio members. Regional Commissioners of the respective Regions, who, as appointees of the Head of State, were expected to provide political leadership to the Regions, chaired these Councils. The Regional Councils were, among other things, to be involved in development planning, programming, and coordination, and in the supervision of the activities of the District Councils within their areas of jurisdiction.

The number of Administrative Districts was re-organized into sixty-two District Councils, with their membership constituted on a non-elective basis. The government was responsible for the appointment of two-thirds of the membership with the remaining one-third being left to be chosen by the chiefs from among themselves or their representatives in consonance with traditional and customary practice. As in all previous instances the government appointed the District Chief Executives.

In terms of their functions, the District Councils were largely deliberative and consultative bodies, but also had an added responsibility of seeing to the development of their areas of jurisdiction. They were to draw up development plans, which would ironically be funded by central government. This meant that these Plans needed the approval of the Regional Administrations before they could be implemented. Moreover, this could only be done within national budgetary allocations. What this amounted to was a situation in which although the District

Councils could draw up development plans, by and large, these plans were not implemented as a result of the continuous centralization of planning. Each District Council had a Management Committee, which was charged with the function of drawing up and implementing development programs that had to be given prior approval by the Regional Councils. Until elections to the Chairmanship of the District Councils were held in February 1977, the District Chief Executives also doubled as the Chairmen of their respective District Councils.³⁴

The Municipal, Urban, and Local Councils on the other hand were composed of chiefs and the elected representatives of the Town and Village Development Committees. As in previous instances, their functions were basically concerned with the developmental requirements of their areas of jurisdiction in addition to any other new functions that the District Councils might delegate to them. Furthermore, they were to serve as the focal points for the mobilization of the people and to cooperate with the Local and District Councils in the performance of their functions especially in the area of public education.

From the discussion, it is clear that the decentralization policy as pursued by the National Redemption Council did not differ in substance from those of past governments since independence. The fact that the Regional and District Councils were headed by appointees of the central government, coupled with the non-elective character of the District Councils, points to the high degree of involvement of the central government in the day-to-day administration of the Regional and District Councils, even if indirectly. Furthermore, the structures

below the District Councils (Municipal, Urban, and Local Councils, and the Town and Village Development Committees) were tied to the apron strings of the District Councils, which were already controlled by central government, and now had the authority to make appointments to the Town and village Development Committees. On the basis of the above therefore, one could safely argue that the decentralization policy that was pursued by the National Redemption Council was simply a continuation of the centralizing tendencies that were inherent in previous decentralization policies.

However, on 5 July 1978 new life was breathed into the decentralization policy of the time when General Acheampong was removed in a palace coup and replaced by General F.K. Akuffo, who was his second-in-command, leading to the formation of the Supreme Military Council-II (SMC).³⁵ The decentralization policy of the Supreme Military Council-II was contained in the Local Government (Amendment) Decree, SMCD 194 (1978). According to Lt. General Akuffo, the new decentralization policy, "attempts a fusion of traditional functions of local authorities with those of local departments of decentralised ministries and departments ...who will offer advice to the council."³⁶

Furthermore, General Akuffo stated that while policy decisions would remain the preserve of the elected representatives, the management of the daily business of the District Councils would be in the hands of the District Chief Executives with technical inputs from the heads of department. However, the overall responsibility of local government administration was in the hands of the central

government. For General Akuffo, the separation of policy-making from the day-to-day running of the District Councils was geared toward enhancing the operational efficiency of the Councils through the introduction of modern management concepts into local government administration.¹⁷

Although the old decentralized structures were maintained, there were innovations in the composition of the District Councils. The new District Councils maintained the one-third reservation for the chiefs whereas the two-thirds membership, unlike under General Acheampong, were to be elected. The novelty was that the elected members of the District Councils were to be re-elected by their fellow councillors for another three-year term if they should put themselves up for re-election, after which the power to re-elect them would revert to their constituents. The idea of allowing councillors to elect their fellow councillors developed from the government's belief that, having worked with each other for a three-year term, the councillors were well placed to assess each other's performances. With regard to the one-third membership, representatives of the institution of chieftaincy could seek and be re-appointed to the District Councils on the expiration of their first tenure. SMCD 194 also provided for the election of the Chairmen of the District Councils from among the councillors for a three-year term, renewable up to a third successive term. Furthermore, for the first time in Ghana's history, SMCD 194 stipulated a deposit of GHCD 5,000 (the cedi is Ghana's currency, ie US\$ 250) payable by candidates in the District Council elections. The monetary requirement was meant to help to pay for the cost that

would be incurred by government in conducting the elections. Finally, the fact that policy-making and the day-to-day administration were separated and respectively vested in the councillors and the District Chief Executives and their staff, who were civil servants, shows that SMCD 194 was aimed at a combination of political and administrative decentralization.

The elections to the new District Councils were held on 17 November 1978 but barely a year later, on 4 June, 1979 there was another military coup, led by Flt. Lt. Jerry John Rawlings, leading to the formation of the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC). The Armed Forces Revolutionary Council spent a little over three months in office and handed over after Dr. Hilla Limann and his People's National Party, which had won the democratically conducted elections held on 18 June 1979. It must be pointed out that the SMC's decentralization policy also followed the previous policies.

The 1979 Constitution, which provided the basis for the elections, was very emphatic in its concern with decentralization. The Constitution, in the section on "The Directive Principles of State Policy," called on governments to, "...decentralise the administrative machinery to the Regions and districts in order to permit, to the extent...consistent with sound and effective administration and control the transaction of government business at the regional and district levels."³⁸

The Constitution provided for a three-tier structure, made up of Regional and District Councils, and Town, Village, and Area Committees, Regional Ministers,

who were appointed by the President, headed the Regional Councils, with the earlier membership of the Regional Councils being maintained. The Constitution also re-established the Local Government Grants Commission as was provided for under the 1969 Constitution to perform the same functions. Furthermore, the Local Government (Amendment) Act (403) of 1980 also specified, 'inter alia,' the functions and compositions of the Regional and District Councils which were to be filled on elective basis.

However, the initial delay in the full implementation of the new decentralization program, coupled with another military coup, again led by Flt.Lt. Rawlings, led to the suspension of the program since the Constitution that provided the basis for it was itself suspended on 31 December 1981.

8 Conclusion

It is clear from the foregoing discussion that decentralization policies in Ghana during the period up to 1981 largely served as a means of political control by the central government over the activities of local government institutions. As noticed in the study, the transfer of decision-making authority did not accompany the policies to the local government structures. This means that although all the decentralization policies were ostensibly aimed at facilitating local decision-making, in practice, local government was an extension of the center. Thus in a sense, decentralization during this period could be summed up, ironically enough, as a policy for the re-centralization of authority. It is against this background that

the next Chapter will discuss the decentralization policy of the Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC) through the P'WDCs. It will discuss the structure of the defence committees and examine the character of popular participation in the decision-making process in the committees. Further, it will discuss how decision-making in the P'WDCs led to conflicts with the PNDC. Finally, an attempt will be made to explain the de-politicization of the defence committees as the focus of the decentralization program.

9. Endnotes

¹ Ayee, An Anatomy 8.

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³ Lucy Philip Mair, Native Policies in Africa (New York: Negro University Press. 1969) 12-18; Ayee, An Anatomy 14.

⁴ Rita Hindin, Local government in the Colonies (London: Allen & Unwin. 1950) 96.

⁵ Richard Crook, "Decolonisation, the Colonial State and Chieftaincy in the Gold Coast," African Affairs 85, 338 (1986): 94.

⁶ Hindin, op.cit., 98.

⁷ See Bourret, op. cit., 185-188.

⁸ See Ayee, An Anatomy 27-29.

⁹ Bourret, op. cit., 48.

¹⁰ Austin, op. cit., 97.

¹¹ "Report of the Commission of Enquiry into Disturbances in the Gold Coast. 1948", reproduced in Metcalfe, G.E. Great Britain and Ghana. Documents of History. 1807-1957 (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd., 1964) 682.

¹² See Metcalfe, *ibid.*, 686-688; Bourret, op. cit., 202.

¹³ "Report of His Excellency the Governor by the Constitutional Reform Committee, 1949," reproduced in Metcalfe, *ibid.*, 689.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* 690.

¹⁵ Ayee, An Anatomy 34.

¹⁶ See Gold Coast, Local Government Ordinance 1951 (Accra: Government Printer, 1951).

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ George Padmore, The Gold Coast Revolution (London: Dennis Dobson, 1953) 159.

¹⁹ Austin, op.cit., 158; William Tordoff, "Ghana," in Rowart, Donald C. ed., International Handbook on Local Government Reorganization, Contemporary Developments (Westport, Connecticut, 1980) 380.

²⁰ See Ayee, An Anatomy 48-53.

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²⁴ Besides the Siriboe Commission Report, the two other Commission Reports were, Report of the Commission on the Structure and Remuneration of the Public Services in Ghana, (Mills-Odoi Commission Report) (Accra: Ghana Publishing Corporation, 1967); Report of the Constitutional Commission (Akuffo-Addo Commission Report) (Accra: Ghana Publishing Corporation, 1968).

²⁵ See Robert Pinkney, Ghana Under Military Rule (London: Methuen, 1972) 100-105.

²⁶ Tordoff, op. cit., 381.

²⁷ Akuoku-Frimpong, op. cit., 22.

²⁸ Ronald Wraith, Local Administration in West Africa (London: Allen & Unwin, 1970) 23.

²⁹ "Ghana's Local Government Framework," West Africa 30 January-5 February 1971: 130.

³⁰ Tordoff, op. cit., 381.

³¹ N.Y.B. Adade. "Local Government under Act 359". Paper presented at a seminar held at the University of Science and Technology, Kumasi, for senior government officers and published in Local Government and You 5. 2 (1971): 4. cited in Ayee, op. cit., 88.

³² Jeff Haynes. "The PNDC and Political Decentralization in Ghana, 1981-1991." The Journal of Commonwealth and Comparative Politics Vol. 29. 3 (Nov. 1991): 286.

³³ Ibid. : Ayee, An Anatomy 90.

³⁴ Akuoku-Frimpong, op. cit., 21.

³⁵ In October 1975 General Acheampong dissolved the NRC, which was replaced with the Supreme Military Council-I (SMC-I). The dissolution of the NRC led to the replacement of the original members and architects of the 1972 coup, with Service Chiefs of the Armed Forces. The dissolution was rumored to have been due to protests from the original members of the NRC against the corrupting tendencies of General Acheampong and his close associates outside the NRC.

³⁶ F.W.K. Akuffo, interview with WEST AFRICA 3199, 6 Nov. 1978: 2218.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ghana, Republic of. Constitution of the Republic of Ghana (Accra: Ghana Publishing Corporation, 1979).

Figure 1: Structure of Indirect Rule in the Gold Coast.

Source: Ayee, An Anatomy, 1994: 18

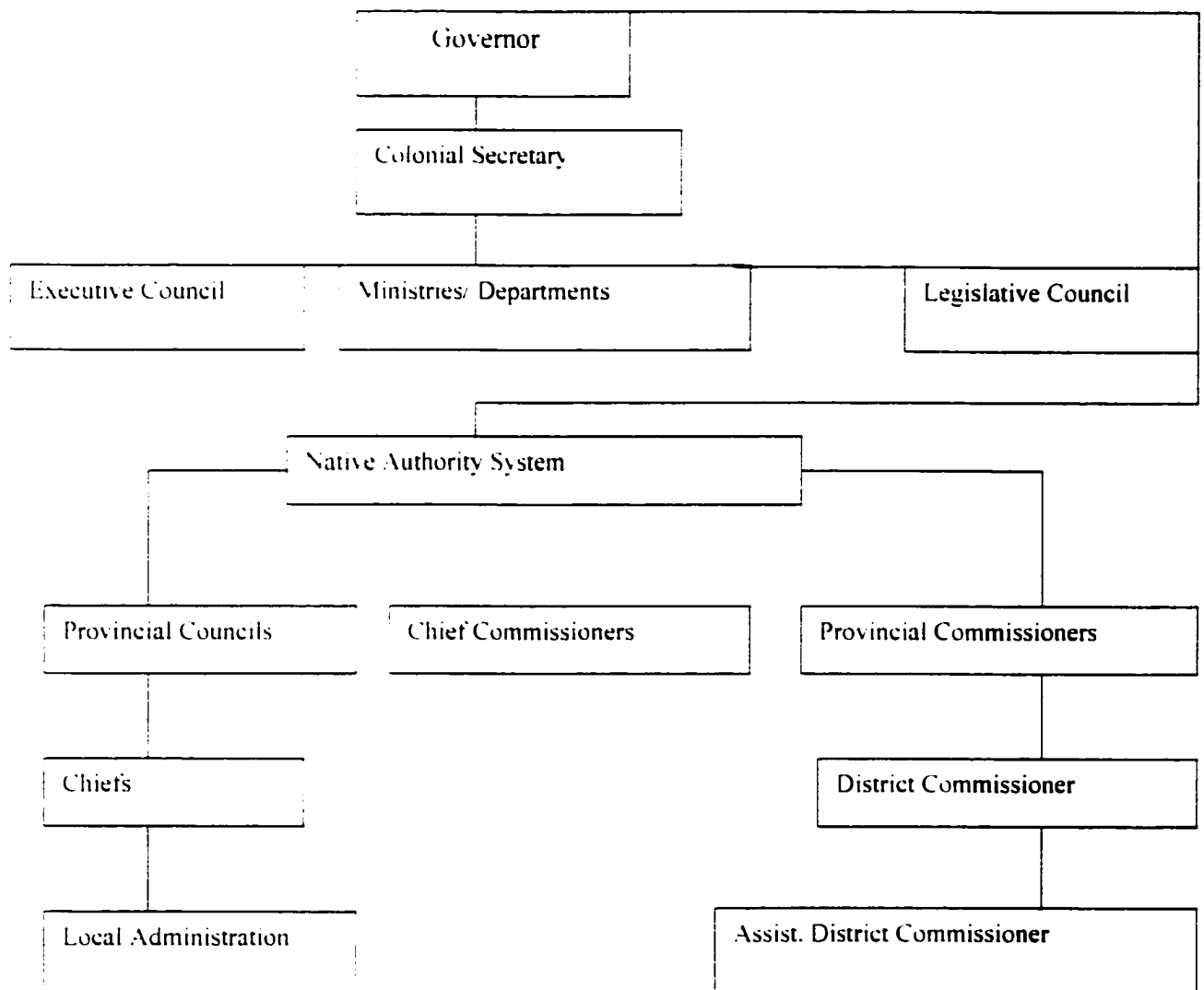
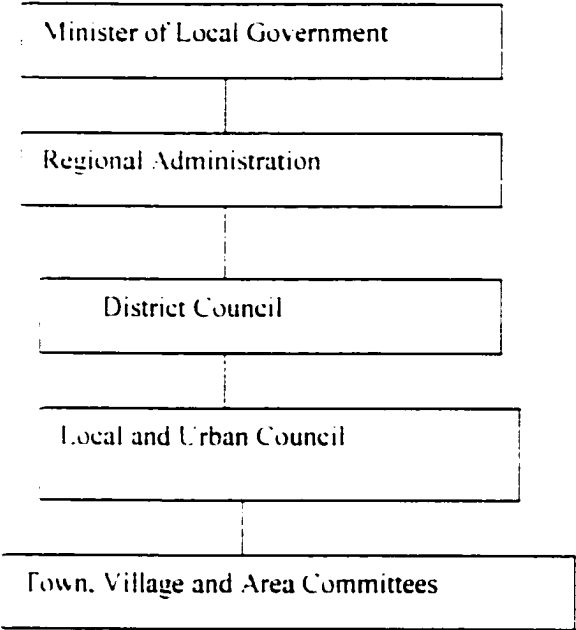


Figure 2: Structure of Local Government under 1951 Ordinance.
Source: Ayee, An Anatomy, ibid.: 41



CHAPTER 3

THE DEFENCE COMMITTEES AND DECENTRALIZATION: 1982-1983

3 Introduction

This chapter will discuss the first of the two decentralization policies of the PNDC as implemented between 1982 and 1983. This was the period during which the Peoples' Workers' Defence Committees (P WDCs) provided the decentralized structures through which popular participation in the decision-making process was effected. The chapter will therefore discuss the nature of popular participation in the decision-making process within these committees. It will be argued that during this period the issue of the location of power was at the center of the contest between the decision-making authority of the defence committees and the PNDC. It will also be argued that although there was a combination of factors that influenced the shift of focus from the defence committees as the centerpiece of the decentralization program, implementation of the IMF/World Bank sponsored Economic Recovery Program/ Structural Adjustment Program (ERP/SAP) largely accounted for that shift.

1 The Economic and Political Crises

As of 31 December 1981 when Flt. Lt. Jerry John Rawlings returned to power for the second time, Ghana was in an economic crisis. The years of the 1970s

were ones of severe economic downturn for the country. In broad terms, the causal factors for the economic situation were put down to immediate and long-term causes.¹ As regards the immediate factors, the 1970s saw a combination of drought and rain failures which seriously affected agricultural production: the two oil price hikes, which led to about 50 per cent of export earnings being committed to the nation's petroleum requirements by 1981; and a general decline in export earnings from the chief export items of cocoa, gold, and timber as a result of inadequate domestic attention to these sectors, coupled with unreliable world commodity prices. The long-term causes, on the other hand, were located in the continuous dependent mineral and agricultural primary product export orientation of the economy and the state-led economic policies pursued since independence, with their attendant centralized development planning that was vested in the state. Furthermore, since independence there had been a continuous lack of attention to state infrastructure, which had deteriorated with time, plus the overvalued nature of the national currency, leading to inflation. A third level of explanation for the problem lay in the lack of long-term structural policy solutions adopted by governments in the post-1966 era due to the limited period of their respective tenures. The debilitating economic situation had an effect on the state. In fact, it led to a weakening of the capacity of the state to continue to provide the focus for development planning and administration, corresponding to what Orunsola has described as the "withdrawal propelled from top-down" by the state.²

At the political level, events between the national elections in 1979 and 1981 had polarized Ghanaian society. Because the government of Dr. Limann and the PNP had simply failed to grapple with the economic situation it led to political demands being made on the government to resign. As in past situations since the 1970s, it was the National Union of Ghana Students (NUGS) which led the way with strikes and demonstrations. The government's response to the activities of the NUGS was to resort to the security services in coming down heavily on demonstrators. Moreover, workers under the leadership of the Trades Union Congress (TUC) also began to call on the government to resign for having failed to measure up to the national economic situation. Further, the workers had demanded that because corruption had become rife in public life, there must be probity and accountability from public office-holders, which must start with the politicians. Further, there was relentless pressure on the government from politicized groups, for instance, the National Democratic Movement (which was made up of Marxist-leaning intellectuals, students, and youth) and the political parties in opposition in Parliament, all of which had accused the President of an uninspiring leadership and therefore called on him to resign. What was worse, the ruling party was itself torn into factions over appointments and allegations of corruption against one another.

The result of the combination of the above economic and political factors was that by 31 December 1981, Ghana's economy was on the brink of collapse. It should be pointed out that between 1974 and 1981, real wages went down by 80

per cent: export earnings fell by 52 per cent: and the budget deficit rose by 15 per cent.³ This was the picture of the Ghanaian political and economic landscape when Rawlings overthrew the government of Dr. Hilla Limann and the Peoples' National Party in the military coup of 31 December 1981.

The gravity of the situation resulted in Rawlings and the Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC) that was formed by the coup-makers adopting a "series of radical mass mobilization techniques."⁴ At the level of the economy, the PNDC resorted to emergency measures by among other things, reducing state expenditure and pursuing an aggressive policy of tax collection and the tracking down of previous tax defaulters. At the political level, the government introduced a populist decentralization program in which defence committees (Peoples' Defence Committees/ Workers' Defence Committees) were set up both at work-places and in the communities to provide the focus for the program.⁵

2 Rationale for the Defence Committees

The idea of setting up defence committees to, among other things, facilitate the participation of the people in the decision-making process, had all along been held by Jerry Rawlings and his leftist ideological friends since he handed over power to a democratically elected government on 24 September 1979. On 4 June 1981 (the second anniversary of his first coup), Rawlings on behalf of the June 4 Movement called for the formation of 'Revolutionary Committees' throughout Ghana.⁶ The response to the call by Jerry Rawlings on 4 January 1982 for the setting up of

Peoples' Defence Committees and Workers' Defence Committees was ecstatic. Within a matter of weeks these committees were formed across the length and breadth of the country, by the working class, peasantry, middle and lower petty bourgeoisie, students and youth, and the lower ranks of the Armed Forces and Police Service.⁷ In fact the propertied class, the powerful, and the wealthy were initially excluded from active involvement in these committees having been identified as people whose corrupt activities had resulted in the national economic and political crisis. However, even before this restriction was removed some of the rich, who were regarded as public spirited by way of their contributions to the development of their communities were allowed to participate in the activities of the defence committees. This meant therefore that wealth and power "per se" were not regarded as bad in themselves. The introduction of the PDCs/WDCs gave a new and radical orientation to Ghanaian politics, and vindicates the argument of Stiefel and Wolfe that in situations of this nature, "...governments generally rejected the traditional instruments of representative democracy, but made popular participation an explicit and central feature of policy, expressed in new institutions, laws, mass parties and public ideology."⁸ It was expected that the participation of the majority of the people in the decision-making process through the defence committees would lead to their empowerment. It should be noted that although the formation of the PDCs/WDCs was populist it is incorrect for scholars like Ayee and Oquaye to argue that the idea to form them came out of the blue in response to the economic crisis, which the PNDC had inherited.⁹

These committees--the Peoples' Defence Committees and Workers' Defence Committees-- in the communities and workplaces respectively, were to serve as vehicles for the popular participation of the majority of the people in the decision-making process.¹⁰ In the stated opinion of the PNDC, there was a need to bring into the decision-making process the overwhelming majority of the people, who had been previously marginalized by the "parasitic urban elite." The defence committees were described as "the bed-rocks of popular participation in the decision-making process."¹¹ These committees were therefore expected to introduce new forms of "people's democracy," "participatory democracy," "popular participation," or "power to the people." There were other functions that the defence committees were expected to perform, which included the organization of anti-smuggling activities, ensuring the payment of basic rates, performing watchdog roles to check malfeasance in the communities, conducting price controls, mobilizing to defend the rights of the downtrodden, and any other functions that were deemed to have been in consonance with the "principles of the revolution."¹²

According to Zaya Yeebo, who was one of Rawlings' first Secretaries (the designation for Minister at the time), the fundamental reason for the call for the setting up of revolutionary committees was the broader question of "democratic participation of the ordinary people in the national political and economic issues."¹³ In the maiden edition of the mouthpiece of the June Four Movement, the *Workers Banner*, published in September 1981, three months before Rawlings'

second coup, the role and functions of the revolutionary committees were clearly spelt out when the paper's front page story read:

These committees of the ordinary people will hold mass meetings such as **durbars** of the other ranks in the barracks or people's congresses in the towns and villages, on the farms, in the factories, mines, shop floors, everywhere to debateand take decisions affecting the lives of the ordinary people. That is why the people's committees represent the highest form of democracy- grassroots democracy- because through them all the people will participate in taking vital decisions and in running the country....¹⁴

It was therefore against this background that Rawlings made the call for the setting up of Peoples' Defence Committees and Workers' Defence Committees to "demystify" government, thereby facilitating the participation of the majority of the people in the decision-making process. Thus, the argument that the setting up of the defence committees was a mere populist response by the PNDC to the national crisis that it had inherited is incorrect and without any historical basis. Hence the fact that the call for their formation coincided with the national economic crisis does not, "ipso facto" imply that they owed their origin to the crisis itself.

3 Structure of the Defence Committees

At the apex of the defence committee structure was the Interim National Coordinating Committee (INCC) of PDCs/WDCs (see Figure 3). As the

designation shows. it was charged with the responsibility of coordinating the activities of the revolutionary committees nationwide. In order to facilitate its functions various departments were created at the INCC. These were Administration; Information and Press; Monitoring and Coordination; Education and Research; Complaints and Investigations; and Projects and Programs. The INCC was headed by a Coordinator, who was a member of the PNDC, an indication of the prime of place that was given to the defence committees. Besides serving as a liaison between the PNDC and the Defence Committees, the Coordinator had the personal responsibility of guiding the formation and development of the committees. However, the INCC was dissolved soon after the coup attempt of 23 November 1982 in which some of its leading members were implicated. It was replaced with the National Defence Committee (NDC), with a Standing Committee of Six under the Chairmanship of Jerry Rawlings, Chairman of the PNDC.¹⁵

At the immediate sub-national level were Regional Secretariats of PDCs/WDCs, which were headed by Regional Coordinators, with departments at the National Secretariat, being replicated. After the events of 23 November 1982, the Regional Secretariats were re-designated Regional Secretariats of the NDC. Their main functions were to give direction to and coordinate the activities of the committees in the constituent districts.

In each administrative district in Ghana was a District Secretariat of PDCs/WDCs, with a District Coordinator who had the responsibility of

coordinating and supervising the activities of these committees. Each PDC/WDC District was coterminous with the normal administrative district. The District Secretariats also had the same departments as provided at the regional levels. Below the District Secretariat was a Zonal Secretariat since every District was divided into Zones. The Zones were further divided into Areas, with the latter again being sub-divided into Units, as the lowest levels of the hierarchy and the closest to the people in terms of proximity. In between the Unit and Area Committees were supposed to be established Block and Neighborhood PDCs. However, these were only established in the urban areas, where the delineation of residential apartments was more easily identifiable. Each Unit Committee was made up of a population of about 500 people and between two and three Unit Committees constituted an Area PDC. With regard to the size of a Zone, it was often made up of between five and six Area PDCs. The Unit Committees elected their own executives, whereas the Area Executives were the elected representatives of the constituent Unit Committees. The District Coordinators appointed the Area Coordinators on the recommendations of Zonal Coordinators. Whereas the Zonal Coordinators were appointed by the Regional Coordinators on the recommendations of the District Coordinators, the District Coordinators, on the other hand, were appointed by the PNDC on the recommendations of the Regional Coordinators. It should be pointed out that, at the level of the WDCs, the executives, who were elected by the workers, worked through the Zonal to the District Coordinators of the PDCs/WDCs. In December 1984, the defence

committees were again re-designated the Committees for the Defence of the Revolution (CDRs), with its head re-designated Political Counsellor for the Economic Development of the CDRs. The Regional and District heads were now called the Regional and District Organizing Assistants to the Regional Secretaries and District Secretaries respectively.

Some have argued that this re-designation of the defence committees was a "reflection of the PNDC's desire to include all patriots and to emphasize the national democratic phase of the revolution" and to ensure that the committees were now "mainly involved in mobilisation at the grassroots."¹⁶ However, as will soon be shown, contrary to these assertions the re-designation was, in fact, a diplomatic coup at the behest of the World Bank and the IMF, which still saw the presence of some radical elements in the leadership of the NDC as a continuous threat to the implementation of structural adjustment policies.¹⁷ This accounted for the reason why the Regional and District heads of the Committees were now made Organizing Assistants to the Regional and District Secretaries respectively, who were thought to be well-placed to curb the radical tendencies of the members of these Committees. Moreover, because the District Secretaries reported regularly to their Regional Secretaries, who in turn did report to the PNDC, it was thought that the government would be much more abreast with developments within the committees.

4 Popular Participation

It should be noted that by its grassroots nature, popular participation could best be done within institutions that are closest to the people. And this was what happened within the defence committees. At the workplaces the defence committees (WDCs) were actively involved in decision-making concerning promotions, demotions, transfers, and increased productivity.¹⁸ To this end, Interim Management Committees were established with representatives of workers, management, and trade unions to run public corporations. The decision-making efforts of the IMCs were strengthened by inputs, which were made at regular meetings of workers called for such purposes. Nugent has argued that decision-making by workers through the WDCs and IMCs was unprecedented in the history of Ghana.¹⁹ It should be noted that in certain instances the decision-making authority of workers went beyond their respective workplaces. For instance, as will be shown later in this chapter, the take over of factories were usually coordinated among both workplace and community defence committees.

It should be pointed out that since the Peoples' Defence Committees were community-based they were basically concerned with decision-making around issues of concern to their communities. In this sense, decision-making within the community defence committees centered on the provision of primary health care facilities, school buildings, road maintenance, and community sanitation. At these levels, participation in decision-making took place when the people regularly met to identify their priority development projects and discussed ways of raising funds

to finance them. In most cases, community farms cultivated with food crops were established with the proceeds being used to finance these projects. Decisions at these meetings were arrived at after thorough discussions of the issues and on the basis of voting. These decisions were either implemented through sub-committees or by the entire community when deemed appropriate. However, the issues that needed further attention were referred to the Area Committees. It was the responsibility of the Area Executives to ensure that those issues that could not be adequately dealt with at their levels were forwarded to the higher structures in the hierarchy. It should be noted that the outcomes of these referrals were communicated back to the people at community meetings called for such purposes. Importantly, because decision-making in the communities largely concerned community development, it rarely led to conflicts with government.

However, there were some instances when the decision-making authority of the defence committees brought them into collision with the PNDC. These were on occasions when the government read extreme radicalism and the contest for power between itself and the defence committees in the decisions. It should be pointed out that the main source of conflict between the defence committees and the government was the subject of the location of power. This was the result of the fact that the committees viewed the issue of power as the "hub of the whole question of participation." On some occasions, the defence committees went out of their ways to dismiss District Secretaries, who were appointed by the government, thereafter calling on the government to ratify their decisions. And in some of these

cases, the government upheld the decisions of the defence committees when the allegations over which the decisions for dismissals were made were found to be true. In that sense the defence committees posed the greatest challenge to the neo-colonial political and social order which had centralized power in the state.

On those occasions that government disagreed with the decision-making authority of the defence committees the situation often resulted in contests for power. In fact this clash between the committees and the PNDC more often than not occurred in the urban areas, where the more articulate working class used every opportunity to flex its muscles in defence of its decisions. The advantage of the defence committees was due to the fact that they could easily mobilize the working people by way of demonstrations, which often-paralyzed life momentarily in the urban centers. The demonstrations and their accompanying work-to-rule or full strikes became vital weapons in the hands of the defence committees, which paid off when the government compromised over certain issues in favour of the committees. However, in some other instances, the PNDC reversed decisions of the defence committees especially when they were found to have amounted to open contests for power with the government or threatened what government often referred to as "national stability," an euphemism for lawlessness. For example, in May 1982 when there was a conflict between the Workers' Defence Committee and the Management of the Accra Mental Hospital, the intervention of the Interim National Coordinating Committee (INCC) of PDCs/WDCs on the side of Management, resulted in the reversal of some

resolutions passed by the Workers' Defence Committee and a transfer of two members of the executive on punitive grounds, for having "hijacked" the decision-making process.²⁰

The accusation that the executive had "hijacked" the decision-making process brings into focus the question of who was to determine whether and when the decision-making process had been "hijacked"? This was a classic instance of the fact that the idea of participation in decision-making was sometimes found to have been ambiguous, especially when the decisions taken in the P/WDCs were either at variance with those of the PNDC or contrary to its position on issues. In fact Nugent has argued that in 1982, there were two interpretations that were given to participation within the PNDC.²¹ First, one group, made up of people who were referred to as pragmatic, argued that because of the novelty of the defence committees, there was a need for guidance and lessons to these committees on participation in decision-making. In this sense, any lapses in participation in decision-making in the defence committees could be corrected along the path to maturity. The second group had felt that the defence committees should be allowed to develop and that their experiences with the decision-making process would in itself provide them with lessons that would guide them in their development. Thus the action of the INCC in the Accra Mental Hospital case stemmed from its belief in the first interpretation. The fact was that most of these disputes concerned industrial issues and the health sector, which the government could not have ignored because of the consequences for society at large. By and

large, participation in the decision-making process by the defence committees and especially the power of demonstrations and strikes that were readily used by the committees was a constant threat to the PNDC. This was not only worrisome for the PNDC in terms of national political decision-making but it created problems for the government in its relations with Trans-National Corporations and private local capital, which were regarded by the defence committees as responsible for exploiting the economy. In fact in a show of strength in 1983, defence committees all over the country, especially in the urban centers organized demonstrations which condemned that year's budget, with placards condemning the IMF/World Bank for their exploitative lending conditions.

It should be noted, however, that the mass character of participatory decision-making in the defence committees did not "ipso facto" mean that all individuals could raise their concerns at the meetings of the defence committees. The meetings, especially in the villages and small towns, were most often dominated by few people. However, the fact that decisions were arrived at through voting was a strong indication of the degree of participation in the decision-making process in these committees. Moreover, in spite of the fact that these committees were established throughout the country to provide the institutional basis for the popular participation of the majority of the people in decision-making, by and large, this participation was confined to people at the lower strata of society. The explanation was that the "well off" in the society refused participation in the committees, describing them as instruments for an attack on "decency.

achievement, and lacking in orderliness.” The attitude of the “well off” could be explained by the fact that it was mainly the working class, peasantry, patriotic middle and lower petty bourgeoisie, who saw the aspirations of the committees as having coincided with theirs.²² In so far as real decision-making in the local communities and a sense of empowerment was concerned, there was a general feeling among the lower strata of society that these committees had provided an opportunity for their participation in decision-making. Commenting on the nature of popular participation in decision-making within the defence committees, Donald Ray states that, “...the defence committees have drawn into the decision-making process large numbers of people who, lacking the previous qualifications of wealth, advanced age, and high social status (e.g. university graduates and chiefs), had not been able to participate effectively in the running of their lives and communities.”²³ Ray further states that:

These people had often been excluded from pre-revolutionary power structures. Those wealthy enough to fund the political parties were able to dominate the former electoral system, and hence government...In both chieftaincy and party politics the elders had kept a stranglehold on the decision-making process..... The defence committees broke this stranglehold and acted as a democratizing force in this regard.²⁴

Following from the quotations above, it is therefore understandable why the “well off” in society shunned the defence committees, although the law initially barring their participation in them was repealed. Hence the argument of Ayee and Oquaye to the effect that participation in decision-making within the committees

was unruly.²⁵ thereby preventing the well-off from participating is largely mistaken, taking cognizance of the degree of responses to and enthusiasm for decision-making that had occurred in these committees. However, this paper does not deny the fact that in certain instances, excesses could be found in the decision-making process within these committees. For example, at one stage defence committees in Accra and Tema passed a resolution of non-confidence in the Judiciary and took over the Supreme Court, calling on government to abolish the old judicial system. The government did not act according to the wishes of the committees in this instance because it found that decision to be too excessive. But these lapses should be measured against a backdrop of the near-national social, economic, and political collapse at the end of 1981 and the euphoria that naturally follows such radical political changes.

Alongside the defence committees, the PNDC took other steps to implement its decentralization program. In June 1982, for instance, the government passed PNDC Law 14, which formally dissolved the District Councils, elected since 1978, but which had been in abeyance since the coup of 31 December 1981. It established District Management Committees to replace the former District Councils, with the new political heads of the Districts designated District Secretaries, who were to be appointed by the government. Furthermore, the government also published a pamphlet, "Decentralization in Ghana," which was in general terms aimed at focusing attention on the development of the rural areas as a way of stemming the tide of rural-urban migration.

5 De-Politicization of the Defence Committees

However, by 1983 the PNDC had begun to de-emphasize the PDCs/WDCs as the decentralized structures through which popular participation of the people in the decision-making process was being effected. It therefore began a "search" for an alternative structure to replace the defence committees but with the same purpose of facilitating popular participation in the decision-making process. The debate about the reasons why the PNDC de-emphasized the defence committees has yielded three explanations.

According to one interpretation, the rationale for the de-politicization of the revolutionary committees was partly the result of the intense ideological conflict between Jerry Rawlings and his closest advisors and the leadership of the defence committees, represented in the Interim National Coordinating Committee (INCC) of PDCs/WDCs.²⁰ This disagreement was over the direction of the Revolution, in that whereas the radical elements in government mostly represented in the leadership of the defence committees wanted a closer working relationship with the then Communist block of countries, coupled with a reliance on mobilized domestic resources for development, the moderates, who found voice with Jerry Rawlings, advocated dialogue with the international community. This, it was argued, would ensure financial support from Western countries and international financial institutions. It was this ideological in-fighting that resulted in the abortive coup of 23 November 1982. The fall out of the events of November 1982 led to the arrest and detention for long periods of time of the leading figures in the

INCC, with the subsequent emptying of that institution of any influence in government. In this sense, it could be argued that as rational actors, Rawlings and those who shared his views within the PNDC saw their political survival in the de-politicization of the defence committees. Although it is true to say that the internal disagreement could have, and indeed as Ayee and Oquaye suggest, did provide the "raison d'être" for the de-politicization of the revolutionary committees, this study will argue that the chief reason is identified by a second explanation, as will soon be shown.

According to the second view, the PNDC was forced to 'abandon' the P/WDCs as vehicles for popular participation in decision-making due to the fact that the reality of the national economic situation had compelled it to accept the conditions accompanying the IMF World Bank economic package.²⁷ Some of those who share this view see Jerry Rawlings as a pragmatist, who responded to the reality of his country's economic malaise by discontinuing his populist policies on the realization that they could not provide the necessary answers to the prevailing economic problems.

Between 1982 and 1983, Ghana's economic situation had still not improved, in spite of the stop-gap measures that had been adopted by the government. By June 1982, most factories were running at 20 per cent capacity with a 70 per cent dependence of the manufacturing sector on foreign exchange.²⁸ In 1983 real GDP and real GDP per capita was only 4.6 per cent and 7.1 per cent respectively, with inflation climbing up to 123 per cent from a low 40 per cent in the 1970s.²⁹

Moreover, there was a continuous, unhealthy balance of payments deficit, resulting from the low returns on exports. Furthermore, in 1983, there was a combination of a severe drought that swept the length and breadth of the country and the expulsion of over one million Ghanaians from Nigeria, who together with other foreign nationals were blamed for that country's own economic predicament. Whereas the drought affected agricultural production and led to low crop output and food shortage, the latter situation forced government to look for funds to re-settle the "returnees." In a sense, these had the collective impact of worsening an already fast-deteriorating economic situation.

It is important to note that in August 1982, the government's Economic Advisory Committee, having convinced itself of the need to look beyond the national borders for financial and economic assistance, had on its own prepared an economic program (Economic Recovery Programme), to attract aid from the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund in particular, and the international financial community at large.³⁰ It is clear, therefore, that by 1983 Jerry Rawlings and his key economic advisors had concluded that there was no real alternative to the negotiations that the government had already entered into with the Bretton Woods duo of the International Monetary Fund/World Bank. As Rawlings himself stated in the face of the deteriorating economic situation, ".....In simple terms, we had to look quickly for financial help from the international community on (a) bilateral as well as (a) multilateral basis."³¹

The Economic Recovery Program (ERP), which was announced in December 1982 was in two phases.³² The first phase (1983-1986), which was financed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), aimed at halting the decline in industrial production and commodity exports. This was to be the stabilization period. The second phase (1987-1989), which constituted the Structural Adjustment Program and financed by the World Bank, focused on economic development. Unlike in the case of the ERP, it was widely known that the SAP was, by and large, prepared by the World Bank and literally forced on Ghana. According to Loxley, some World Bank staff agree that rarely were their proposals rejected by the government and that it was common knowledge that major agreements were typed in Washington, D.C., for signature by Ghana government officials.³³ However, contrary to this position, Ghana had been able to negotiate some of its own policy preferences and resisted some IMF/World Bank policy proposals.³⁴ In order to implement both phases, the state and its agencies were to be restructured, leading to the reduction of the function of the state. It was expected that the state bureaucracy would now concentrate on the production of infrastructure, while leaving economic activities to the private sector. Thus with the implementation of the ERP/SAP, it was clear then that the government had to make concessions on its radical political program. This was because the Bretton Woods Institutions were noted for attaching conditions to their lending policies which local level political actors could not be allowed to defy. In line with this second explanation,

therefore, the national economic situation weighed heaviest on the Provisional National Defence Council's scheme of things at the time.

Arising from the demands of the economic situation therefore, there was the need to de-emphasize the defence committees if Ghana was to benefit from any international financial package from both the IMF/World Bank and the West in general. This was due to the fact these committees were viewed in the West as symbols of Marxism and therefore anti-capitalist institutions, which would interfere with the functioning of private capital. This view stemmed from the fact that the ideas for the formation of the committees had been borrowed from Libya and Cuba, where they play frontline roles in national politics. Moreover, since their formation in Ghana, they had displayed anti-capitalist tendencies by, for instance, calling on the working people to take over the management of their workplaces and establish Interim Management Committees to run them. In fact, the P WDCs led the take over of factories. A key case in point was in 1982, when the Ghana Textile Printing Company (GTP) at Tema, a Ghana Government-United Africa Company (UAC) joint-partnership, was taken over by workers, with an Interim Management Committee established to run it.

This take over of the GTP was seen in the West as the climax to the attacks on transnational business concerns and therefore, a serious threat to private capital. Thus, it did not surprise observers when the PNDC began to sideline the defence committees at the start of the implementation of the ERP/SAP. And in order to satisfy its donors and at the same time keep "faith" with its grassroots support

base, the government had to look for alternative structures within which to pursue its decentralization program to ensure popular participation in decision-making. This was because by de-politicizing the P-WDCs, there were no structures in place to promote grassroots participation in the decision-making process. Hence Zaya Yeebo correctly argues that "...it was in the context of the economic crisis that the December 31 process was reversed."³⁵

A third explanation, which was adduced by some elements within Rawlings' own initial government, was that Jerry Rawlings himself was no revolutionary, which accounted for the speed with which he had embraced the "stick-and-carrot" politics of the IMF World Bank, leading to the sidelining of the defence committees. Those who pursue this line of thought argue that Rawlings was not well noted for treating cadres of the committees with compassion. If this last argument is worthy of any consideration, it then implies that although the idea of the formation of defence committees had been with Jerry Rawlings and his close friends since 4 June 1979, there was no consensus as to their proper roles in any given revolutionary situation.

In spite of its implementation of the ERP/SAP, the PNDC did not abolish the revolutionary committees, but simply kept them limping along while ensuring that their radical tendencies were curtailed. This was done by way of arrests and detention of its leading figures. However, the continuing importance of these committees was demonstrated in the active support they provided to soldiers loyal

to the PNDC in putting down the attempted coup of 19 June 1983, which was the closest the PNDC came to being removed from office in a military coup.

6 Conclusion

This chapter has made an attempt to explain the national economic and political crisis, which faced Ghana in 1982. As shown in the chapter, the idea for the formation of the defence committees to serve as decentralized structures through which to facilitate popular participation in the decision-making process had been dear to Rawlings since his first coup in 1979. There have been attempts to explain the nature of participation in the defence committees and the attitude of government to some decisions of the committees that the government found to have amounted to questioning its very survival. Further, an attempt was made to explain the government's reasons for de-politicizing the defence committees. It is clear from the discussion that there was a combination of factors that led to the undoing of the defence committees as structures through which participation in the decision-making process was effected. However, looking at the economic indexes in 1982 and the fact that even Rawlings himself argued that there was no alternative economic path to be pursued, it is clear that since the IMF/World Bank are by nature opposed to the anti-private capital sentiments that were being expressed by the P/WDCs, the reasons for their de-politicization largely lay with Ghana's implementation of the ERP/SAP.

Chapter 4 will discuss the District Assembly system between 1988 and 1994. This was the period in which the District assemblies replaced the defence committees as the decentralized structures through which participation in decision-making was promoted. It will discuss the various levels of participation in decision-making in the District Assembly system as occurred in the South Tongu District Assembly and then use two examples of decision-making in that Assembly to test the effectiveness of decision-making in the District Assembly system.

7. Endnotes

¹ See Eboe Hutchful. "From 'Revolution' to Monetarism: The Economics and Politics of the Adjustment Programme in Ghana." in Campbell, Bonnie K. and Loxley, John eds., Structural Adjustment in Africa (England: Macmillan, 1989) 94-98.

² See Victor Orunsola with Dan Muhwezi. "State Responses to Disintegration and Withdrawal: Adjustments in the Political Economy." in Rothchild, Donald and Chazan, Naomi eds., The Precarious Balance. State and Society in Africa (Boulder: Westview Press, 1988) 189-207.

³ World Bank. Ghana: Policies and Programs for Adjustment. (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 1984) 17; Callaghy, Thomas M., "Lost Between State and Market: The Politics of Economic Adjustment in Ghana, Zambia, and Nigeria." in Nelson, Joan M. ed., Economic Crisis And Policy Choice. The Politics of Adjustment in the Third World (Princeton, New Jersey: University Press, 1990) 274.

⁴ Callaghy, *ibid.*

⁵ Ayee, An Anatomy, 106; Mike Oquaye, *op. cit.*, 209; Donald I. Ray, Ghana: Politics, Economics and Society (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., 1986) 69.

⁶ Yeebo, *op. cit.*, p.66: The June Four Movement (JFM) was the political grouping that was formed by Rawlings and some leading figures of the AFRC, with a massive following within the progressive student's and worker's front after Rawlings had handed over to constitutional rule on 24 September 1979. The main aim of the JFM was to "protect the legacy" of that period. In fact Yeebo was the PNDC's first Secretary for Youth and Sports and a leading exponent of the PDC/WDC concept.

⁷ Bing Adotey, *op. cit.*, 92.

⁸ Stiefel & Wolfe, *op. cit.*, 9.

⁹ Ayee, An Anatomy 106; See Mike Oquaye, *op. cit.*, 209-210.

¹⁰ Ray, *op. cit.*, 68.

¹¹ Ghana. Republic of. Guidelines for the Formation of the Defence Committees (Tema: Ghana Publishing Corporation. 1982).

¹² Ray, op. cit., 68; Zaya Yeebo, op. cit., 68; See Paul Nugent, "Educating Rawlings: The Evolution of Government Strategy Toward Smuggling," in Rothchild, Donald ed., Ghana The Political Economy of Recovery (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1991) 75-79.

¹³ Yeebo, *ibid.*

¹⁴ Workers Banner (Accra) September 1981, cited in Yeebo, *ibid.*

¹⁵ Ray, op. cit., 68.

¹⁶ Ray, *ibid.*, 69; Ayee, An Anatomy 107.

¹⁷ It was made clear by a senior figure at the National Secretariat of the NDC, on the first working day following the weekend re-designation. He in fact, told the staff at an informal meeting that the World Bank, had for sometime been demanding the dissolution of the NDC, as a further condition for continued support for Ghana's economic re-structuring.

¹⁸ See Guidelines, op. cit.

¹⁹ Paul Nugent, Big Men, Small Boys and Politics in Ghana. Power, Ideology, & the Burden of History, 1982-1994 (London: Pinter, 1995) 53.

²⁰ Adotey, op. cit., 92.

²¹ Nugent, Big Men 84.

²² Yao Graham, "The Politics of Crisis in Ghana: Class Struggle and Organisation, 1981-84," Review of African Political Economy 34 (1985): 55.

²³ Ray, op.cit., 70.

²⁴ Ray, *ibid.* 71.

²⁵ See Ayee, An Anatomy 106-7; Oquaye, op. cit., 210.

²⁶ Ayee, *ibid.*, 108; Oquaye, *ibid.*, 210.

²⁷ Adotey, op. cit., 102.

²⁸ Ibid., 101.

²⁹ Callaghy, op. cit., 274.

³⁰ John Kraus, "The Political Economy of Stabilization and Structural Adjustment," in Rothchild, op. cit., 124.

³¹ Ghana, Republic of, National Programme for Economic Development (Tema: Ghana Publishing Corporation, 1987) 3.

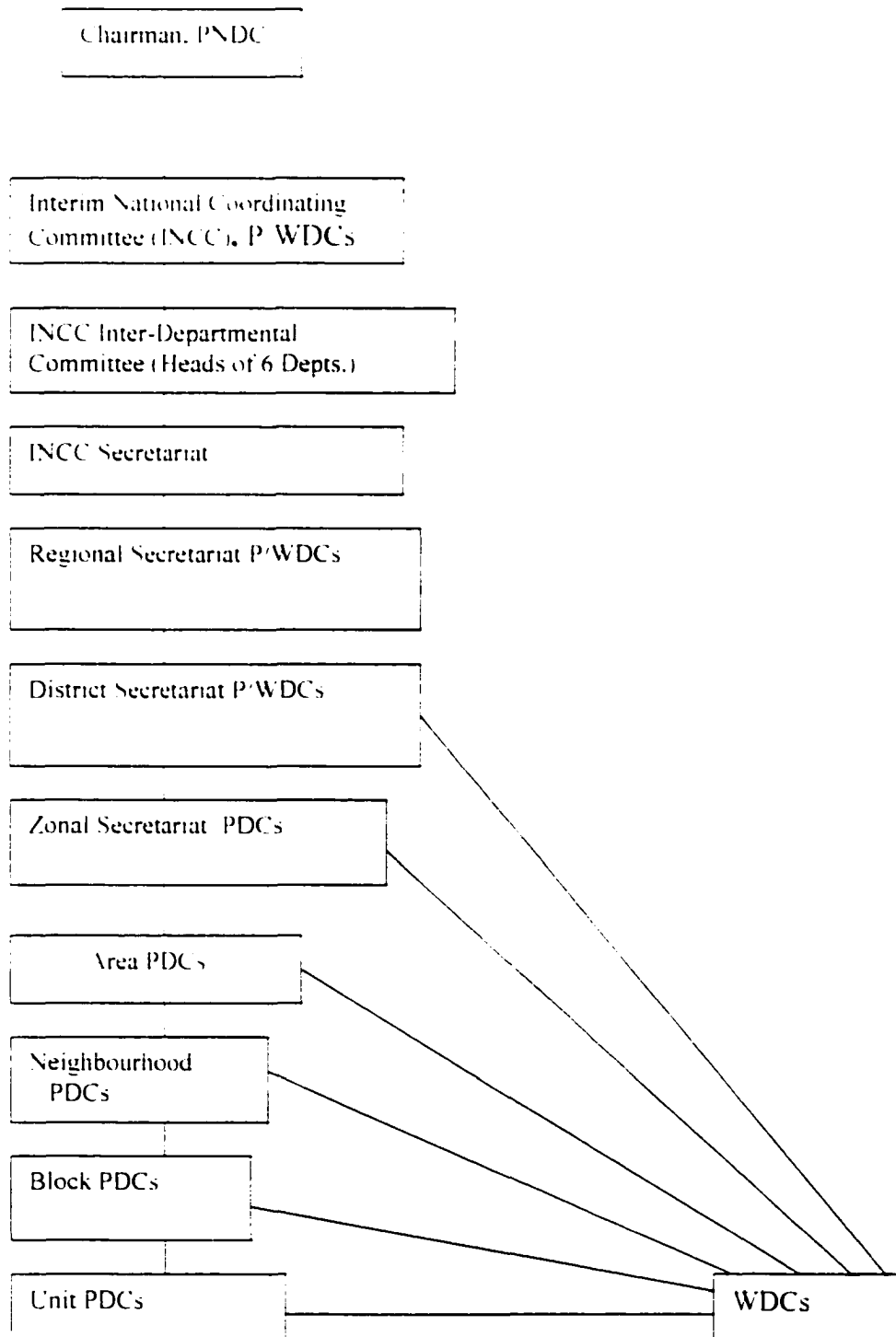
³² Graham, op. cit., 59;

³³ John Loxley, Ghana: The Long Road to Recovery (Ottawa: North-South Institute, 1991) iv.

³⁴ See Matthew Martin, "Negotiating Adjustment and External Finance: Ghana and the International Community, 1982-1989," in Rothchild, Ghana 235-263.

³⁵ Yeebo, op. cit., 71.

Figure 3. The Structure of the Defence Committees. 1982.
Based on Ray, 1986: 67.



CHAPTER 4

THE DISTRICT ASSEMBLIES AND DECENTRALIZATION: THE CASE OF PARTICIPATION IN THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS IN THE SOUTH TONGU DISTRICT ASSEMBLY

4 Introduction

This chapter discusses the District Assembly system as a replacement for the defence committees for the facilitation of, among other things, the popular participation of the people in the decision-making process. I will identify the structure of the District Assembly system and discuss the various forms of participation in the decision-making process as pertains to the Assemblies, using the South Tongu District Assembly (STDA) as a case study. Finally, I will discuss two examples of decision-making by the South Tongu District Assembly, to illustrate the point that contrary to the objectives of PNDC's decentralization policy as stated in PNDC Law 207 and the 1992 Constitution, the District Assembly system has not provided the much-publicized vehicle for popular participation in the decision-making process. That is, the decentralization policy of the PNDC and the government of the National Democratic Congress under the District Assembly system, like past policies, have led to a re-centralization of authority in the state.

1 Background

The sidelining of the revolutionary committees from the center-stage of decision-making created a vacuum that had to be filled. Thus, from 1983, when Ghana

began the implementation of the ERP, later to be followed by the SAP, the PNDC was engaged in a long process of creating a new framework for a political decentralization program that would establish a local government system based on the District Assemblies. This would have as one of its central objectives the promotion of popular participation of the people in the decision-making process from the District levels downward, but without the radical grassroots character of the previous program. This coincided with efforts by the World Bank from the mid-1980s to promote its own decentralization policy. For the World Bank, decentralization would partly serve as the panacea to the myriad problems that had engulfed Africa at the time since it would lead to the multiplication of the centers of power and strengthen civil society.¹ Thus, the PNDC's search for new structures for decentralization to facilitate popular participation coincided with the World Bank's own decentralization program which had focused in another direction, one aimed at facilitating "good governance." Thenceforward, there was a shift in Ghana's political decentralization program, from a focus on popular participation in decision-making to one in which the subject of "good governance" became the cornerstone. That is although popular participation in the decision-making process would continue to be one of the goals of the decentralization program, the chief focus would now be on the "good governance" agenda which was expected to promote effective government.

To facilitate public discussions the PNDC published two documents in 1983 and 1987 titled "Decentralization in Ghana" and the "Blue Book" respectively.² It

was, for instance, argued in the "Blue Book," that the District Assemblies were necessary "...in order to democratise state power and advance participatory democracy and collective decision-making at the grassroots," and that they will serve as "...decentralised political and administrative authorities with elected representatives of the people...exercising state power as the people's local government." These two publications, among others, contained the PNDC's proposals for a new decentralized system of local government based on the District Assembly system. The end result of the public discussions and a final review by the government was the passage, in December 1988, of a new Local Government Law (PNDC Law 207), which set out to create District Assemblies as the basis of the new decentralization program. In spite of the implementation of the Structural Adjustment Program, the Law still identified popular participation in the decision-making process as one of the chief goals that it envisaged for the District Assemblies.

The Law stipulated that the District Assemblies "shall exercise political and administrative authority in the District, provide guidance, give direction to, and supervise all other administrative authorities in the District." The District Assemblies were therefore expected to function in "deliberative, legislative and executive capacities." The Assemblies were also expected to guide, encourage and support sub-district local government bodies. In a sense, this is a combination of both political and administrative decentralization, whereby a certain degree of administrative and political powers would be transferred to the district levels.

On several occasions, leading members of the government in public speeches gave further explanation to the Law and the entire decentralization program. Earlier in 1987, Rawlings as Chairman of the PNDC was reported to have stated that, "For the first time, we are seriously shifting the focus of decision-making in areas which directly affect our lives to the grassroots where they really matter..... We are according primacy to the local level in the evolution of democracy."³ This reference to "the grassroots" by Jerry Rawlings, was a reference to the District Assemblies since the lower tiers in the decentralization hierarchy below the District Assemblies (i.e. Area Councils and Unit Committees) were not legally set up until 1991.⁴ In a keynote address at the University of Science and Technology (now re-named Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology) at Kumasi in 1991, the then Secretary for Local Government and Rural Development, Mr. Kwamena Ahwoi provided a further explanation of the program when he stated that, "...In its totality, our decentralization programme has two broad dimensions: -political decentralization of state power to enhance participatory democracy through local level political institutions:-decentralization of administrative, development planning, implementation and budgeting decision making."⁵

The Law envisaged that the District Assemblies would constitute the highest political decision-making body in the districts. The District Assemblies were therefore to be seen as institutions through which to "democratise state power and advance.... collective decision-making at the grassroots."⁶ It is clear from the

above citations that by the provisions of PNDC Law 207, the principle of popular participation in the decision-making process was intended to be realized through decentralization represented in the District Assemblies and their sub-structures.

2 STRUCTURE OF DECENTRALIZATION UNDER PNDC LAW 207

Structurally, the new decentralization program, as provided for under PNDC Law 207, was to be a four-tier one. It was to be made up of Regional Coordinating Councils (RCCs), District Assemblies (DAs), Town and Area Councils, and Unit Committees serving as the lowest units of the structure (see Figure 4). The Law increased the number of local government administrative Districts from 65 to 110 (including three Metropolitan Assemblies). The government's rationale for the increased number of districts was explained by Rawlings as "...a practical translation of the ideals of the revolution that would further ensure that a large majority of Ghanaians not only have a say in Assemblies but also contributed positively towards nation-building."⁷ This increase had become necessary due to the fact that because the districts were few and therefore large in terms of size, it was difficult for people to have access to the district capitals, which had all along provided the focus of local government. Thus, the increase would not only reduce the sizes of the districts but would also ensure greater accessibility to the District Assemblies, which were to provide the focus for the decentralization program.

Regional Coordinating Councils

The Regional Coordinating Councils were composed of Regional Secretaries (as Chairmen), Deputy Regional Secretaries as ex-officio members, and all District Secretaries and Presiding Members of the Constituent District Assemblies. According to Law 207, the Regional Coordinating Councils were to be tasked with monitoring, coordinating, and evaluating the performances of the District Assemblies in the Regions. From its composition, it could be seen that with the exception of the Presiding Members, who were elected by members of the respective District Assemblies, the remaining substantive membership of the Regional Coordinating Councils were appointees of the government who would naturally represent its interests. To facilitate the work of the Regional Councils, the Regional Administrative Officers were made Secretaries, with the Regional Heads of Department serving as ex-officio members without voting rights and tasked with the responsibility of providing technical advice to the Councils. Thus, the Regional Councils, by their composition could not have been expected to take any decisions independent of the government's interests.

District Assemblies

However, the central focus of the decentralization program, as already indicated, was on the District Assemblies. It has been argued that decentralization programs usually focus on the district level for two basic reasons.⁸ First, the Districts are seen as providing an important unit for the deconcentration of central

government administration as a result of their proximity to the people. That is, the districts are identified as the most convenient administrative points to which government could be decentralized. Second, the Districts are preferred because they are too small to pose any political threats to national stability, especially in countries, which have the potential of being drawn into inter-regional conflicts, which could lead to secession.

The composition of the District Assemblies as provided for under the Law, was made up of the District Secretaries, who were appointed by the government; Presiding Members elected from the membership of the District Assemblies by at least two-thirds of the members present and voting; two-thirds representatives of the Electoral Areas, who were elected on the basis of universal adult suffrage; and a one-third membership appointed by the government in consultation with the traditional authorities (chiefs) and organized productive economic groupings in each District. On the criteria for the nomination of the one-third membership, the PNDC would look out for persons with specialized skills, proven honesty, integrity, and with commitment to the development of their districts.⁹ Gyimah-Boadi has argued that the PNDC utilized the opportunity for appointing the one-third membership of the District Assemblies to reach out to the middle and upper classes, which had hitherto opposed the revolution, having been the initial victims of it.¹⁰ However, although the appointment of the one-third membership was a prerogative of the government, the main factor in the appointment was the acceptability of the appointees to the people in the Districts.¹¹ The authority to

remove any of the government appointees was vested in the PNDC and in theory, is done when 75 per cent of the members of a District Assembly recommended such action to the PNDC.

The one-third reservation as provided for in the new Law had by now, become a feature of Ghana's decentralization policies since the Coussey Commission Report of 1949. In keeping with this trend, the PNDC did not only want to be seen as keeping to past practice, but more importantly, it had introduced a new dimension to the criteria for the appointments. By appointing professionals and technocrats to the District Assemblies, the government intended to see a qualitative improvement in the output of the Assemblies.

To promote the work of the District Assemblies, Law 207 provided for the establishment of 22 decentralized government departments and organizations in each District, which were placed under the direction and control of the District Assemblies. The heads of the decentralized government departments were made ex-officio members of the District Assemblies without voting rights and tasked with the responsibility of providing technical advice that would enrich decision-making. Furthermore, the law constituted District Assemblies into planning authorities to facilitate planning and budgeting at the district levels, with professional staff posted to the Districts for such purposes. Finally, for purposes of effectiveness, Executive Committees were created within each District Assembly, which would coordinate plans and programs, implement resolutions, oversee the day-to-day administration of the District Assemblies and were

empowered to dissolve their own "ad hoc" committees. To assist the Executive Committee in its functions, five sub-committees were created: Finance and Administration, Social Services, Economic Development, Justice and Security, and Technical Infrastructure. These sub-committees were to report on their respective activities to the Executive Committees, which then collated these reports into single comprehensive ones to the general sessions of the District Assembly, by way of the Sessional Addresses of the District Secretaries at the start of each Assembly Session. It should be noted that there was a provision for a check on the exercise of the powers conferred on the Executive Committee. This check was located in the provision that resolutions by two-thirds of the memberships of District Assemblies on proven grounds of inefficiency would result in the dissolution of the Executive Committees. The Law empowered members of the District Assemblies to re-constitute a new Executive Committee on the dissolution of standing ones.

It should be pointed out, however, that although the District Assemblies were supposed to be the highest political institutions in the Districts, with powers of decision-making, some of these decisions were subject to the approval of the PNDC. For instance, by-laws passed by the District Assemblies had to be deposited at the Secretariat of the PNDC for 21 days after which they became effective. The 21-day period was to provide the government with the opportunity to examine them and to ensure that they were in "conformity with national aspirations."

Town/Area Councils and Unit Committees

The composition of the Area Committees consisted of five persons appointed by the District Secretaries in consultation with District Organizing Assistants of CDRs, five elected Assembly members within the jurisdictions of constituent Area Councils, and ten representatives of the respective Unit Committees, who were elected at general meetings of the communities. The Town and Area Councils were essentially consultative bodies and performed functions delegated to them by the District Assemblies, for instance, by mobilizing the communities for self-help projects and assisting the District Assemblies in the collection of revenues for which they were paid commission.

The Unit Committees, on the other hand, were composed of 5 appointees of the District Secretaries on the same procedure as in the case of the Town/Area Councils, together with 10 elected members from within the Unit's area of jurisdiction. The Unit Committees now replaced the Town and Village Development Committees, which had become part of the decentralized local government, set up since the Nkrumah era. Although there were no clearly defined functions for the Unit Committees, they could be called upon to perform such functions as public education on government policies, the organization of communal labour, and any other functions that the higher structures might assign them. Finally, in order to give further realization to the decentralization program, District Assembly elections were held throughout the country between December 1988 and February 1989 to elect the two-thirds majorities of the Assemblies. The

next step in the implementation of the decentralization program was a series of seminars and orientation programs that were organized for the members of the District Assemblies, after which the Assemblies began to function.

To ensure the widest possible participation in the elections, some novelty was introduced into the electoral process. First, unlike during the first post-independence government of the Convention People's Party (CPP), where political parties were allowed to contest elections to the District Councils, PNDC Law 207 prohibited any such organized party involvement. This prohibition might have stemmed from the experiences during the CPP era, when frequent quarrels between representatives of the chiefs and party activists became a feature of the day, hampering the smooth functioning of the District Councils. Another innovation in the electoral process was that the government entirely financed the elections with the aim of eliminating any monetary influences. It was believed that the lack of financial resources could prevent some competent but poor citizens from putting themselves up as candidates for the elections. Moreover, there was the added fear that, where candidates who had no financial resources of their own were financed by special interest groups, the tendency that they would devote their time in the District Assemblies to trying to satisfy those interests could not be ruled out. Third, all candidates to the District Assembly elections were made to campaign on the same platforms created by the National Commission for Democracy (NCD--the national electoral body in charge of the elections). This was meant to enable the electorate to have a better way of assessing the

candidates, whose capabilities could best be judged when they all featured together on a single platform and responded to similar questions from the electorate. Finally, the electoral process removed any language barriers, meaning that local languages could be used in the deliberations of the District Assemblies, a clear departure from the past when English was the “lingua franca” of the District Councils. This is important because unlike in the past, people who did not have formal education could now contest elections to the District Assemblies.

The Town and Area Councils were established in 1991, three clear years after the District Assemblies had commenced work. This delay in setting up the sub-District structures to provide the necessary back up in the functioning of the District Assemblies has been attributed to the PNDC’s request to the Assemblies for recommendations on the nature and functions of the sub-District structures. However, Ayee has argued, that the real reason for the delay lay elsewhere- that is in the fact that the Area and Unit Committees of the Committees for the Defence of the Revolution (CDRs) were already on the ground and the government found it difficult to side-step them, by creating new Unit Committees for the District Assemblies.¹² This delay could also be attributed to the uncertainty of the government on how the sub-District structures would function, since the decentralization program had already literally lost sight of popular participation as one of its central themes, the focus now being placed on the District Assemblies. For Ayee, therefore, the government was literally forced to act at the time it did because some elected members of the District Assemblies had gone out of their

way to establish their own Unit Committees, which led to conflicts with the Area and Unit Committees of the CDRs. These conflicts arose because the Unit Committees of the CDRs looked upon the new Unit Committees as "usurpers." The case of the defence committees had always been that because they had played an "avant-garde" role since 31 December 1981, they had always laid claim to primacy of place in the government's scheme of things. This was, in fact, one of the chief areas of disagreement between the committees and Jerry Rawlings, who had all along argued for the "inclusion" of people who shared the same revolutionary visions but who were seen by the revolutionary cadres as opportunists.

It is significant that the involvement of the World Bank in Ghana's decentralization program as a result of the country's implementation of the ERP/SAP, resulted in a massive dose of the Bank's funding for the program. It has been shown that in 1990 and 1991 the World Bank provided support to Ghana's decentralization program to the tune of US\$7.5million and US\$ 70 million respectively.¹³ These and other huge financial commitments to Ghana's decentralization program were indications of the degree of involvement by the World Bank and goes to establish the strong relationship between Ghana's decentralization program and the World Bank/IMF-sponsored ERP/SAP.

3 THE 1992 CONSTITUTION AND DECENTRALIZATION

By 1990 the PNDC had come under both intense domestic and international pressure to free the political space by allowing for a return to multi-party democratic rule. As the SAP tended to be opposed especially by organized labour, students, and the intelligentsia, it became necessary for the government to shut off public discussion of the adjustment and other government policies by such civil and professional groups as the National Union of Ghana Students (NUGS), the Ghana Bar Association (GBA), the University Teachers' Association of Ghana (UTAG), and the Ghana Medical Association (GMA). Further, the government also put down such opposition by the suppression of the elements spearheading opposition to the SAP and by outlawing or restricting strikes and crushing mass demonstrations by the violent use of state power.¹⁴ At the international level, the 1990s was a decade during which the international donor community had demanded the return to multi-party democracy as one of the conditions for loan guarantees.¹⁵

It should be noted that since 31 December 1981, the government had denied participation in national issues to groups that it had regarded as being hostile to its programs. These groups were largely made up of the upper and middle classes and the conservative professional class, dominated by the old lawyers. It should be noted that in order to nip opposition to its programs in the bud, the government frequently resorted to arrests, detentions, and the frequent closure of the Universities, which had since the 1970s become the hotbed of politics in Ghana.

Furthermore, and in order to control workers, the government encouraged radical workers, who had shared its political agenda, to assume the leadership of the various Unions constituting the Ghana Trades Union Congress, thereby interfering in union activities. All these forms of high-handedness led to a docile political environment and gave rise to what Jerry Rawlings himself later referred to as "the culture of silence." These measures in dealing with dissent grew out of the PNDC's belief that there was the need for a singleness of purpose in dealing with the numerous problems that had confronted the nation, instead of "wasting" national resources in organizing multi-party elections and allowing for open debates of national issues which could sometimes be acrimonious. Moreover, the government was impatient with the dissenters because of its conviction that these people were the same old politicians whose misconduct in the past had resulted in the crisis. In a sense, the government was of the view that these dissenters had no moral justification in opposing remedies to problems that they had created either intentionally or by default. It must be pointed out that, typical of military regimes, the PNDC's position was the result of the fact that it was opposed to views that did not emanate from its own circles and viewed them as detrimental to national interest.

However, having in a way caved in to the pressure, the government's position was that, any new political arrangement should include guarantees for decentralization to ensure the popular participation of the majority of the people in the decision-making process at the local levels. This therefore meant that in the

government's opinion, there was the need to put PNDC Law 207 at the center of the discussions of the future political program. Thus when the series of consultations of constitutional experts and public discussions were begun as part of the process of drafting a new Constitution for Ghana, PNDC Law 207 became central to that process, and in the end, was incorporated into the 1992 Constitution.

It has been speculated that since popular participation had been eased out of the decentralization program, the government's only intention for making Law 207 central to the debate on the new Constitution was political.¹⁶ That is, by maintaining the structures of the District Assembly system the PNDC had hoped to use its control of the committees already on the ground to political advantage (which any incumbent would have done). This was because it had already become clear by now that the PNDC was metamorphosing into a political party to contest the 1992 Presidential and Parliamentary Elections. Furthermore, the fact that the Consultative Assembly, which was tasked with the responsibility of drafting the Constitution, accepted without much debate the centrality of Law 207 to the discussion on decentralization served to strengthen that suspicion. It should be pointed out, that the overwhelming majority of the membership of the Consultative Assembly was drawn from institutions and organized groupings sympathetic to the PNDC, but coming from the lower strata of Ghanaian society. That is, because the majority of the members of the Consultative Assembly were government sympathizers/supporters, there was a general feeling especially,

among groups opposed to the government that they were there to do government's bidding.

The constitutional arrangements for multi-party rule do not concern us here but suffice it to say that the constitutional provisions on the decentralization program were, by and large, a reproduction of the chief features of PNDC Law 207. The Constitution identifies popular participation in decision-making as one of the main aims of the decentralization. Moreover, it also retains the structure and composition of the District Assemblies with only minor changes. For instance, the Member of Parliament in a Constituency within a District Assembly's area of jurisdiction now serves as an ex-officio member without voting rights. Their inclusion in the District Assemblies is to keep them informed about the issues being debated; provide them with the opportunity for briefing the Assemblies on parliamentary affairs; and finally this will create an occasion to enable the members of the Assemblies provide inputs into the work of Parliament. By the inclusion of the Members of Parliament in their respective District Assemblies, the Consultative Assembly had envisioned that it would lead to mutual benefits that would enrich debates in both Parliament and the District Assemblies. The new heads of the District Assemblies were designated District Chief Executives (the new designation for District Secretaries). Furthermore, the modality for the appointment of the District Chief Executives is a departure from that of the appointment of District Secretaries. The District Chief Executives are now appointed by the President, subject to the prior approval of two-thirds of the

members of the District Assemblies present and voting. The Constitution has provided for the creation of a District Assemblies' Common Fund, reminiscent of the Local Government Grants Commission of the past. This time there is the specific requirement of not less than 5 per cent of the total national revenues being deposited in the Fund and shared among the District Assemblies on a formula drawn up by Parliament. This Fund, like the Grants Commission in the past, was to help provide ready financial resources to meet the developmental requirements of the District Assemblies.

4 Popular Participation

There were various dimensions of the participation of the people in the District Assembly system. First, there is what would be described as electoral participation. This occurred when people in the District Assemblies' areas of jurisdiction participated by way of voting during elections to the District Assemblies. The participation here is seen as crucial since it resulted in the election of the two-thirds majority of the members of the District Assemblies. Moreover, the elections provided the occasion for the electorate to participate in the public vetting of the candidates. What is important about these elections was that because they were not organized on party lines, success or otherwise was dependent on the ingenuity of the candidates to run their own campaigns. Moreover, the fact that all candidates were vetted on public platforms ensured that, by and large, people who either had criminal backgrounds or were not previously

involved in community development activities would find it difficult to put themselves up as candidates only to be embarrassed. In fact one's past involvement in community activities was the litmus test for candidature in the elections.

The first elections to the District Assemblies under the PNDC were held between December 1988 and February 1989. It took that long because the country was divided into zones due to the inadequate logistics available to the National Commission for Democracy. According to Crook and Manor, the total number of registered voters nationwide in 1988 was 5,895,098, which represented 89 per cent of the total adult population of Ghana.¹⁷ The turnout in the elections nationwide is given as above 58 per cent.¹⁸

It has been argued that the large voter turnout nationwide in the District Assembly elections was the result of the intensive and well-funded registration and election educational program that was carried out by the PNDC in order to enable it to remove any shades of doubt in the public's mind about its democratic intentions.¹⁹ Although this position is partly true, the main explanation lies elsewhere. At about this time, a combination of internal and external pressures on the government to return the country to democratic multi-party rule was gathering speed. It was quietly speculated at the time that if there was a need to return to multi-party politics, the PNDC should form a political party to contest that election. And in order to assure itself of a future election victory, the government decided to do everything to prepare an electorate that would be ready to do its

bidding. This accounts for the high degree of public education activities, especially in the rural areas, where the majority of the people reside since the urban population, which was hardest hit by impact of the structural adjustment policy was dead set against the government. Gyimah-Boadi is therefore correct in attributing a political motive to the degree of enthusiasm with which the PNDC carried out the educational campaign for both the registration exercise and the District Assembly elections.²⁰

The response to the District Assembly elections of 1988 in the South Tongu District, for example, was tremendous. There was a voter turnout of 9,881 out of a total number of 10,562 registered adult voters.²¹ This turnout represented 93.55 per cent of the total number of registered voters in the District. With regard to the candidates, in spite of the fact that as many as five candidates were allowed to contest in each Electoral Area, ²² in most cases in the South Tongu District, not more than two candidates contested each electoral seat. This is explained by the fact that some candidates later opted out of the elections in order to provide support to "their friends." It is important to note that one remarkable result of the participation of the majority of the people in the South Tongu District in the elections was that, by and large, most of the elected candidates to the District Assembly came from low-income family backgrounds. This was because most of the so-called high profile candidates were rejected at the polls by the electorate. The main reason for this outcome lay in the fact that the majority of the electorate preferred the "unknown but locally-resident" candidates, whom they could easily

relate to, over the high profile ones, who contested the elections only because they had satisfied the requirement of being "nominal residents."

According to Crook and Manor, the level of interest shown in the District Assembly elections in 1994 was low compared to the previous election.²³ In spite of this assertion, the voter turnout in the South Tongu District was equally encouraging. Although the results showed a lower voter turnout when compared with the previous election, out of the total number of 13,679 registered voters in the District, 11,992 went to the polls, representing 87.67 per cent participation and an encouraging sign by any standards.²⁴ This high voting figure was attributed to the continuing influence of the revolutionary committees in the South Tongu District, which had intensified their educational campaign. Their goal was to ensure that their cadres/sympathizers entered the District Assembly, to enable them have a continuing influence on the decision-making process. Thus, in so far as the District Assembly elections were concerned, there was a feeling among the electorate in the South Tongu District, that they were not only allowed participation in the activities of the District Assembly, but more importantly that they had the power to make their own choices, more so when they were able to ensure victory for the "unknown" candidates over the "big guns." The outcome of the elections in the South Tongu District showed that the era when the candidates took the rural electorate for granted was past, at least as was demonstrated in these two elections. Moreover, the fact that the electorate had the opportunity to participate in the public vetting of the candidates was a further demonstration of

their level of participation and power over the candidates in so far as electoral participation was concerned.

Another level of the popular participation of the people in the activities of the District Assemblies was to be manifested in the relationship between the elected members of the District Assemblies and their respective electorates. The nature of the relationship between the elected members of the District Assemblies and their electorates, as Peterson has observed, is of fundamental importance.²⁵ The two-thirds elected members of the District Assemblies, unlike the one-third government appointees, were expected to represent the interests of their Electoral Areas. In order to ensure that this was done, the Law required of the members of the District Assemblies that they maintain close contacts with their respective electorates, holding regular consultations with them at least once in a month in order to exchange views and receive their inputs regarding the functioning of the District Assemblies by way of suggestions. Furthermore, these elected members were required to effectively present the views and aspirations of their electorates in the course of discussions on the floor of the Assemblies. The failure on the part of elected members to fulfil these requirements could attract sanctions by way of re-call, which could be initiated by a petition signed by one-quarter of the electorate in an Electoral Area to the District Election Committee with clearly stated reasons. If the District Election Committee established a "prima facie" case, a referendum was then organized in which at least 40 per cent of the electorate were needed to vote on the issue, with 60 per cent of the vote's cast being in favor

of the petition. Any invocation of the power of recall was regarded as a further demonstration of the participation of the electorates in the affairs of the District Assemblies. However, as will soon be shown this rarely occurred. With regard to the removal of the government appointees, this could be effected when at least, 75 per cent of the members of the District Assemblies petitioned the PNDC, which would then examine the validity of the grounds for the petition and institute action accordingly.²⁶

It should be pointed out that the relationship between the elected members of the South Tongu District Assembly and their respective electorates in the period under study had been generally cordial except in the few Electoral Areas where chieftaincy disputes were played out in that relationship. In general terms, a majority of the elected members held meetings with their electorates to discuss issues pertaining to the District Assembly, although these waned with time. However, in some instances where some elected members failed to hold frequent interactions with their electorates especially by way of meetings, frequent informal complaints were made to the District Secretaries and the District Organizing Assistants of CDRs, who on those occasions invited the concerned members to discuss the complaints. This inability to call regular meetings was blamed by the elected members of the South Tongu District Assembly on the lack of logistical support by way of bicycles and outboard motors for instance, for travelling to inaccessible areas. Although PNDC Law 207 and the Local Government Act of 1993 provided for the power of re-call of defaulting elected Assembly members.

these provisions were not invoked in the South Tongu District Assembly in the period covered in the study. Moreover, in spite of the high level of response in the South Tongu District to the two elections to the District Assemblies in 1988 and 1994, ironically, the interest of the electorates in the actual functioning of the Assembly and meetings called by the elected members was very low.

There were various reasons, which could be attributed to either the failure and/or inability of the people to invoke the power of re-call and the lack of active interest in the functioning of the South Tongu District Assembly. First, this could be partly explained in terms of apathy, arising from the fact that the high cost of living, which was heightened by the implementation of the structural adjustment policy, had begun to be felt in the rural areas. And as a result, the people became more pre-occupied with their basic needs for daily sustenance than with whatever went on in the District Assembly. In this way, any concern with the activities of the District Assembly was thought of as time wasting. Another reason for the lack of continuous interest was that the electorate found it difficult to organize campaigns of re-call against the elected members who lived in the same locality as them. This was largely the result of the fact that the social system provides for an extended family system, which links most people in the Electoral Areas. In a sense, this meant that any attempt to invoke the provision for the re-call of an elected member would have been seen as amounting to undermining "one's own," a practice seriously frowned upon by the society. Moreover, the very cumbersome nature of the process of re-call could also be time-wasting for the rural peasant

electorate. Finally, with the return of multi-party democracy in 1992, a majority of the people in the South Tongu District have since been either card-carrying members or sympathizers of the National Democratic Congress (NDC), which had metamorphosed from the PNDC. And because of this dominance of the governing party, most of the elected members of the South Tongu District Assembly had (and still have) affiliations of one sort or another with the party. Thus, any attempt at re-calling any member of the South Tongu District Assembly would have been interpreted by the party establishment as destabilization, with the perpetrators being accordingly sanctioned. Thus for these and other personal reasons, the power of re-call, which constituted a crucial strand in the popular participation of the electorate in the activities of the South Tongu District Assembly, was never exercised.

Another level of the participation of the people in the decision-making process of the District Assemblies occurred when the members of the District Assemblies, as representatives of the people, took decisions that were seen to have been effective. It is important to indicate that the ultimate test for the popular participation of the people in the decision-making process in the District Assembly system could only be determined within the District Assemblies themselves. This was where the enhanced participation in the decision-making process could have been determined since the sub-District structures were virtually non-existent in the period covered in this study. Moreover, as already shown earlier in this chapter, by the provisions of PNDC Law 207, the District Assemblies were to serve as the

focus for the decentralization program, and by implication, the theatres in which the popular participation of the people in the decision-making process was to be effected. At these levels, members of the Assemblies were required to take decisions representative of the interests of the people of the Districts. To ensure this, there was the need for a certain degree of independence in the decision-making authority of the District Assemblies, if these decisions were to be effective. This meant also that there must be little or no government interference with the decision-making authority of the District Assemblies, which were to have constituted the highest political institutions in the Districts. This need for a free hand by the District Assemblies in decision-making leads us to the discussion of two examples of decision-making within the South Tongu District Assembly in connection with the Assembly's rejection of its District Secretary and nominee for the post of the District Chief Executive in 1990 and 1994 respectively.

4.1 Example 1

Being the highest political position in a District in Ghana, the performance or otherwise of a District political head could determine the fate of any District. As a result therefore, throughout Ghana's history and especially since independence, people have followed with a measure of interest appointments to this position. Under colonial rule, the District political head known at various times as the Government Agent and District Commissioner was the local representative of the

Governor. His functions were both political and administrative and could include any other new functions that the Governor might assign from time to time.

Since independence, such designations as District Secretary and District Chief Executive have been given to the occupants of the office of the District political head. In fact, it is important to note that even in the post-independence period the respect for the occupants of this office has, by and large, followed the practice under colonialism. According to Ayee, the District political head as the representative of the central government "is usually specifically charged with the responsibility for explaining government policies to the people and for mobilizing support for the government."²⁷ As the local representative of the government, the district political heads are to ensure implementation and compliance with government policies in their respective districts.

Consistent with the practice in the appointment of district political heads since the period of colonial rule, the PNDC had on coming into office vested that authority in itself. In 1988 this authority was provided for under the new Local Government Law, PNDC Law 207. By this Law the authority to appoint District political heads, now called District Secretaries, was exclusively vested in the PNDC. Because the Law was silent on the location of the authority to effect the dismissal of a District Secretary it was therefore assumed that having vested in itself the authority of appointment, the PNDC equally possessed that of the dismissal of its appointees.

The PNDC District Secretary, as in previous cases was the direct representative of the Head of State and was therefore charged with the responsibility of giving direction to and ensuring the implementation of the policies of the government. Given the fact that the PNDC had declared itself a revolutionary government, the PNDC District Secretaries, like all other political appointees, were expected to be good at organizing grassroots support for the government. The Government therefore regularly called on the District Secretaries to provide a new kind of leadership in a "revolutionary era," by being humble to enable them to endear themselves to the people in the Districts and cooperate with the members of their respective District assemblies.

Early in 1990, and taking a cue from the removal of District Secretaries elsewhere on the initiatives of the people as a result of well-established reasons, the people of South Tongu began to agitate against their District Secretary, Mr. Paul Kofi Agbalekpor, and called for his dismissal by the government. Meanwhile within the District Assembly itself there was a popular demand for the removal of the District Secretary. According to several members of the Assembly, the District Secretary had frequently set aside the decisions of the Executive Committee, the Assembly's highest decision-making body without any reasonable explanations. Furthermore, the District Secretary was alleged to have denied the Committee the opportunity of policy implementation, while personally refusing to comply with the directives of the Executive Committee on expenditure and budgetary allocations. Moreover, the meetings of the Executive Committee became

battlegrounds for verbal exchanges between the members of the Executive Committee and the District Secretary.²⁸ The conduct of the District Secretary was regarded as a violation of the trust of the people in the District Assembly and therefore a denial of the peoples' right through their representatives to participate in the decision-making process of the Assembly.

As a precautionary measure, members of the Finance and Administration sub-Committee of the Assembly physically removed vital accounting ledgers from the Office of the District Finance Officer and subjected the ledgers to quick audits in the presence of the latter, with results that confirmed their worst fears. There were other forms of restraining measures that were enforced by the Assembly on the District Secretary, including rationing fuel for his official vehicles, with the District Organizing Assistant of the Committees for the Defence of the Revolution (CDRs) being made the enforcement officer. It is important to note that although since December 1984 the District head of the revolutionary committees (CDRs), were made Organizing Assistants to the District Secretaries, and were therefore appointees of the government, the two did not always agree on issues as sometimes speculated. In this particular case, the District Secretary had lost favour with the 'revolutionary organs' (CDRs), with its leadership accusing him of having ignored them and "behaving in a typical fashion of a colonial civil servant as if nothing has happened since 31 December" (a reference to the date of the military coup that brought the PNDC into office).²⁹ In fact elsewhere, some District Secretaries were noticed to have turned themselves into "tin gods."³⁰

Having realized that its efforts at “correcting” the District Secretary had failed, the District Assembly passed a unanimous vote of non-confidence, after an earlier motion to that effect was moved by a group of Assembly members. The Resolution containing the decision was accordingly delivered to the PNDC Secretary for Local Government, whose Ministry supervises the District Assemblies. It is interesting to note that in the course of the debate that preceded the vote, one Assembly member after another reminded the government of its objective for promoting decentralization, which would among other things create opportunities for the popular participation of the people in effective decision-making. In the opinion of the majority of the members of the South Tongu District Assembly, therefore, the decision of the Assembly for the removal of the District Secretary represented the interests of the people and should therefore be respected.

In an effort to resolve the impasse, the PNDC Secretary for Local Government and Rural Development, Mr. Kwamena Ahwoi personally requested for a meeting with members of the South Tongu District Assembly. Having realized that the members of the Assembly were not prepared to rescind the decision, the Local Government Secretary was alleged to have stated that because some Assembly members had been disrespectful to him, the “District Secretary will not be removed for so long as I remain the Secretary for Local Government.”³¹ Furthermore, he was alleged to have reminded the Assembly members that the authority to dismiss a PNDC District Secretary was vested in the PNDC as the appointing authority, and he therefore threatened punitive measures if the

Assembly members refused to work with the District Secretary. In fact, Article 34 (1) of PNDC Law 207 provided that the PNDC could, by executive instrument, declare an Assembly to be in "default" and as specified in sub-section (b) of the same clause, the government would then transfer the functions to any person or body it might deem fit. This provision therefore became a virtual political lever in the hands of the government with which to control the District Assemblies.

It is worthy of note that PNDC Law 207 was not explicit on the location of the authority to dismiss an erring District Secretary. However, in certain instances where some District Assemblies passed votes of no confidence in their District Secretaries, the government set up committees of enquiry to examine the complaints and if established, the District Secretaries were dismissed from office.¹² The fact that government acted in these instances showed that, although in law the power of dismissal was implied to be exclusively vested in the PNDC, in practice the government believed that since one of the chief reasons for its decentralization program was to ensure popular participation, leading to empowerment, the people should be allowed to exercise that power by calling for the removal of District Secretaries whose performances had fallen short of expectation. However, in the case of the South Tongu District Assembly, the government did not act in the same manner, which goes to confirm Ayee's assertion that the District Secretary "is the only member of the DA (District Assembly) whose appointment cannot be revoked either by the DA or the electorate, so long as he remains the darling of the appointing authority, the

PNDC.”³³ Although Ayee agrees that some District Secretaries were dismissed for “all kinds of misdemeanours, such as corruption, insubordination, arrogance and deceit”, he is right when he further asserts that “most of the time, however, the appeals for the removal of erring DS are ignored by the PNDC.”

4.2 Example 2

As indicated earlier, the second example also concerns the decision of members of the South Tongu District Assembly to reject the President’s nominee for the position of the District Chief Executive in 1994.³⁴

In fact, unlike PNDC Law 207, which vested the authority to appoint and by implication dismiss District Secretaries in the PNDC, the Constitution of the Fourth Republic, which came into effect on January 7, 1993, introduced a new dimension to the appointment of District Chief Executives. According to Article 243(1) of the Constitution, the District Chief Executive “shall be appointed by the President with the prior approval of not less than two-thirds majority of the members of the District Assembly present and voting.”³⁵ The change in the procedure for the appointment of District Chief Executives had been necessitated by the fact that during the series of discussions of the draft Constitution, there was a huge debate on the issue as a result of the past conduct of some District Secretaries under the PNDC. The consensus was that if decentralization was to be meaningful, then the people in the Districts must be allowed a form of participation in the approval of candidates for the positions of District Chief

Executives. It was therefore found convenient to allow this approval to be done by the members of the Assemblies, since the Constitution enjoins them to be in regular consultation with their constituents. It was felt that the Assembly members would consult their constituents before taking decisions on such an important issue as the election of their District Chief Executives. In sum, this approval of the District Chief Executive was to ensure accountability to the electorate.

On 13 August 1993, President Jerry Rawlings (who had won the elections in December 1992) announced a list of 110 nominees for election to the positions of District Chief Executives.³⁶ This had to be delayed due to a legal challenge as to the constitutional propriety of the new elections being conducted under the old Local Government Law, PNDC Law 207 when the Constitution of the Fourth Republic had already come into effect. The decision of the Supreme Court that it was unconstitutional to allow members of the then District Assemblies to elect the District Chief Executives resulted in the deferral of the elections of the District Chief Executives until 1994, after the new District Assembly elections.

According to Ayee, the desire of the government to conduct the elections of the District Chief Executives earlier was the result of the fact that the District Assemblies, as then composed, were overwhelmingly dominated by its sympathizers and the PNDC therefore feared that if people who did not share its policies were elected, there was the likelihood that some of the President's nominees would be rejected by their respective District Assemblies.³⁷

In spite of the fact that the new elections had put an overwhelming number of the PNDC's supporters and sympathizers into the Assemblies throughout the country, several members of the South Tongu District Assembly for example, had indicated their intentions to reject the President's nominee, Reverend Ebenezer Yao Blasu. Thus the period soon after the Assembly elections and the date for the vote on the nominee therefore saw frantic efforts on the part of government officials to pressure the members of the District Assembly to accept and vote for the nominee to "avoid an embarrassment to the President." In some instances, members of the Assembly who were civil servants were allegedly threatened on the quiet with transfers if they voted against the nominee. However, on the day of the voting, there was an overwhelming rejection of the candidate without the alleged threats of transfers being carried out.

4.3 Implications

As noticed from the various dimensions of participation in the second phase of the PNDC's political decentralization program, and more especially from the two examples of decision-making in the South Tongu District Assembly, it is clear that, government could influence popular participation in decision-making in the District Assemblies. To start with, it is clear from the alleged conduct of the Secretary for Local Government, as noticed in the first example, that power, which is the central element in any political decentralization program, still lay with the government, instead of being transferred to the District Assemblies. However,

Ayee argues that the PNDC did not play by the rules and gives an instance, when the membership of a Mr. C.K. Owusu-Sarpong, an elected member of the Ejura-Sekyedomasi District Assembly in the Ashanti Region, was revoked on the recommendation of the then PNDC Secretary for Agriculture, Commodore Steve Obimpeh, when that power was supposed to have resided in the electorate.³⁸ The crux of the matter is that the popular participation in the decision-making process that the PNDC had set out to attain as one of its many objectives was expected to eventually lead to the empowerment of the people. If, however, the government could still call the shots, as illustrated in the first example, then this unwillingness of the PNDC to effect the transfer of power to the District Assemblies constituted a fundamental weakness in its political decentralization program.

It is equally important to note that although Ghana's political decentralization program was supposed to ensure the devolution of power to the District Assemblies, PNDC Law 207 in Article 32(1) (a & b), ironically empowered the PNDC to dissolve District Assemblies that were found to have been in "default." However, the Law was silent on what constituted "default," implying that the government could invoke that Article at its own convenience, thus providing itself with a weapon to deal with District Assemblies that did not toe the "official" line. This undermines the idea of popular participation in the decision-making process since members of the District Assemblies would have been circumspect in decision-making so as not to offend government at the center, as in the first example discussed above.

Finally, because the District Assemblies were dependent on government sources for their financial and development requirements, the tendency for the government to use this power to influence the decision-making processes of the District Assemblies should not be overlooked.

In the second example, it is clear that a determined District Assembly could take decisions that were not "acceptable" to government. However, the fact that the government had been involved in an intense though abortive lobbying effort, accompanied with the alleged threats, serves to illustrate the degree to which no efforts were spared to determine the outcome of that decision. The fact that the government did not invoke the spirit and letter of the "default" clause could have been due to its respect for the legal provisions on the appointment of District Chief Executives.

Further, the location of the authority to appoint and dismiss the District Secretaries in the PNDC was not healthy for popular participation in the decision-making process. As noticed in the first example, because the authority to dismiss the District Secretaries was implied to have been located in the government, the former literally became pliable in the hands of the government. This pliancy of the District Secretaries led to the frustration of decision-making and implementation in the District Assemblies, especially as and when they found those decisions not favourable to the interests of government. Although the modality for the appointment of District Chief Executives as seen in the second example had changed, the fact of the existence of the "default" clause in the Local Government

Act of 1993 still provides a handle with which the government could whip the District Assemblies into line.

Another limitation on the decision-making process was the inability of the government to set up and strengthen the sub-District structures of the District Assemblies. Until 1991, there was no specific law giving effect to the creation of the Unit Committees and the Area Councils. Moreover, even when the law was passed, it was not followed with any active efforts on the part of government to ensure the creation and functioning of these structures, for reasons already speculated on in this chapter. Thus the effectiveness of the decision-making authority of the District Assemblies had been compromised by the fact the sub-District structures, which could have helped in providing teeth to the decisions of the Assemblies, were virtually non-existent.

5 Conclusion

Attention in this Chapter has been focused on the structure of the District Assembly system and the degree of participation in the South Tongu District Assembly. In order to test the effectiveness of participation in the decision-making process, two examples of decision-making in the South Tongu District Assembly have been discussed and the general implications of those decisions were indicated.

As noted, several factors militated against popular participation in decision-making in the District Assemblies. These included the power of the government to

declare Assemblies to have been in “default,” and the fact that by and large, and until the creation of the District Assemblies’ Common Fund in 1992, the Assemblies were financially dependent on the government. This, it has been argued, could provide an opportunity for government interference in the decision-making process in the District Assemblies since Assemblies which did not follow “official” directives, especially in decision-making on certain key issues, could have their financial requests withheld. Further, the fact that the District Assemblies were headed by political appointees, who sometimes frustrated decision-making and implementation, could impede the effectiveness of the decision-making process, thereby retarding the development of the District Assembly system in particular and development in general. That is, in so far as these political heads do not share common views with the members of their Assemblies on key issues, the decision-making process in the Assemblies could be paralysed.

The next chapter (Chapter 5) will constitute a summary of the entire study, on the basis of which a conclusion on the research question will be drawn. There will be an attempt to identify the real beneficiaries of Ghana’s political decentralization program, since it is clear, from the discussion that apart from the brief period under the defence committees, the decentralization program of the PNDC and from 1982 under the National Democratic Congress, especially as seen in the District Assembly system in this study did not provide the much-promised degree of popular participation in an effective decision-making process.

6. Endnotes

¹ D. K. Hart. op. cit., 604; Claude Ake. "Rethinking Democracy." Journal of Democracy Vol. 2, 1 (Winter 1991): 41.

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³ Nii K. Bentsi-Enchill. "Growing the Grassroots." WEST AFRICA 25 January 1988: 124-125.

⁴ Crook & Manor. op. cit., 208.

⁵ Andreas W. Massing. Local Government Reform in Ghana: Democratic Renewal or Autocratic Revival (Saarbrücken: Verlag für Entwicklungspolitik Breitenbach, GmbH, 1994) 138.

⁶ Joyce Aryee, Secretary in the Office of the Chairman of the Committee of Secretaries, interview with WEST AFRICA Jan. 25 1988.

⁷ Jerry John Rawlings. Speech to the people of Duayaw-Nkwanta, Nov. 1988, cited in Oquaye. op. cit., 212.

⁸ Naison D. Mutizwa-Mangiza and Diana Conyers. op.cit., : 81.

⁹ Kwamena Ahwoi, interview with WEST AFRICA, 25 July 1988: 1340.

¹⁰ E. Gyimah-Boadi. "Ghana: Rawlings goes to the country." Africa Confidential 14 April 1989: 3.

¹¹ Kwamena Ahwoi, interview with WEST AFRICA Dec. 19-25 1988: 2375.

¹² Ayee. An Anatomy 117.

¹³ Ayee. An Anatomy 119 & 121.

¹⁴ Akilagpa Sawyerr. The Political Dimension Of Structural Adjustment Programmes In sub-Saharan Africa (Accra: Ghana Universities Press, 1990) 40.

¹⁵ Ayee. An Anatomy 127.

- ¹⁶ Gyimah-Boadi, op. cit., 3.
- ¹⁷ Crook & Manor, op. cit., 214.
- ¹⁸ Crook & Manor, ibid. 214; Haynes, op. cit., 293; Ayee, An Anatomy 118.
- ¹⁹ Ayee, An Anatomy 118; Crook & Manor, ibid., 213.
- ²⁰ E. Gyimah-Boadi, op. cit. 3.
- ²¹ NCD, District Electoral Register, 1988, South Tongu District, Sogakofe.
- ²² Awhoi, op. cit., 25 July 1988.
- ²³ Crook & Manor, op. cit., 214.
- ²⁴ NCD, District Electoral Register, 1994, South Tongu District, Sogakofe.
- ²⁵ P. Peterson, "Forms of Representation: Participation of the Poor in Community Action Programs," American Political Science Review Vol. 64 (June 1970) : 491-507.
- ²⁶ Ahwoi, interview, op. cit., 19-25 Dec.
- ²⁷ Joseph R.A Ayee, "Circumventing Ghana's Constitution," Africa Insight, Vol. 24, 3 (1994) : 201.
- ²⁸ Daniel Amelorku and Anthony Adjadji, the Assemblyman for Kpotame Electoral Area and the District Organizing Assistant of CDRs/Government Appointee, respectively, interview with researcher in 1990.
- ²⁹ Adjadji, ibid.
- ³⁰ Akoto Ampaw, a Lawyer, and executive member of the opposition, Movement for Freedom and Justice, interview with WEST AFRICA 3881 3-9 Feb. (1992): 182.
- ³¹ It was confirmed in interviews with several members of the South Tongu District Assembly in August 1990.
- ³² Ayee, "Circumventing Ghana's Constitution," 201.

³³ Ayee, *ibid.*, 202.

³⁴ The title of District Secretary was re-designated District Chief Executive in the Constitution of the Fourth Republic and became effective on January 7, 1993.

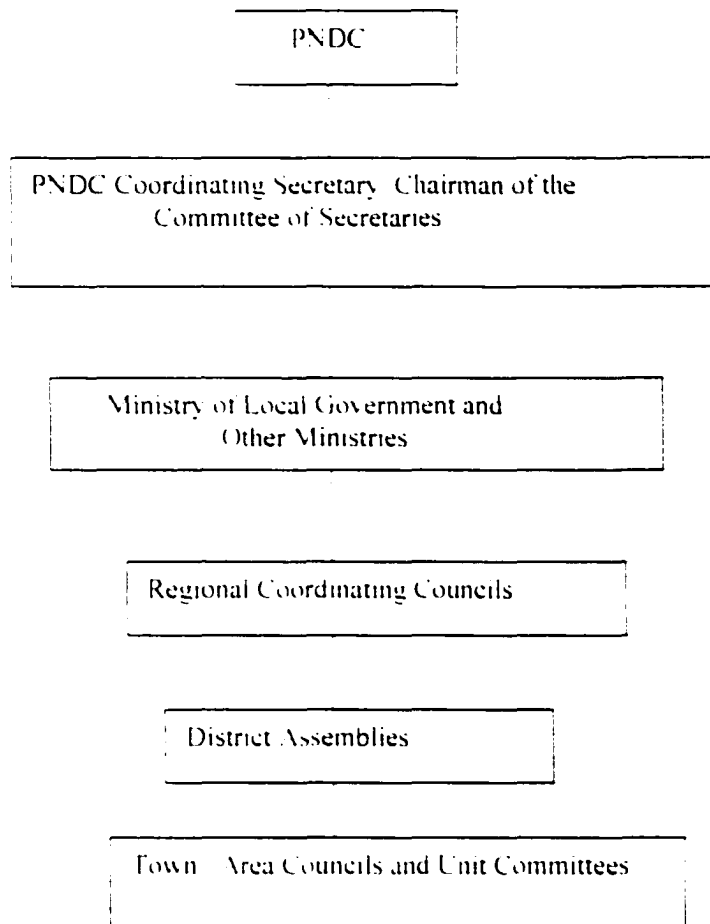
³⁵ Ghana, Constitution of the Fourth Republic (Accra: Ghana Publishing Corporation, 1992).

³⁶ See Daily Graphic and The Ghanaian Times, August 14, 1993.

³⁷ See Ayee, "Circumventing..": 204-5.

³⁸ Ayee, An Anatomy, 166.

Figure 4: Structure of Local Government under PNDC Law 207. 1988.
Source: Ayee, An Anatomy, 112.



CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

I set out in this study to determine the degree to which the political decentralization program pursued in Ghana since the 1980s facilitated popular participation in the decision-making process and the consequences of that participation, that is, whether it resulted in empowerment. More precisely, the focus was on the period 1982-1994, the former marking the commencement of the PNDC's political decentralization program and the latter being the year of the second example of decision-making in the South Tongu District Assembly, which, together with decision-making in the P WDCs was used to test the level of popular participation in the decision-making process in Ghana's decentralization program. Chapter 5 therefore entails a summary of the study and a conclusion derived from the experiences of participation in decision-making in the defence committees but largely from the two examples of decision-making in the South Tongu District Assembly. The conclusion will provide the main reasons for the failure of the decentralization program to provide an effective vehicle for the popular participation of the people in the decision-making process.

An attempt will be made to determine whether the PNDC's "experiment" in popular participation through the defence committees provides any hope for the future of popular participation in decision-making in Ghana. Further, the study will determine who the beneficiaries of the decentralization program were, since

the ordinary people who constitute the overwhelming majority of the population and on whose behalf the program was supposedly launched in the 1980s did not derive the intended benefits therefrom. Finally, I will make suggestions regarding areas of future studies on Ghana's decentralization program and indicate the contribution of this thesis to understanding the Ghanaian situation.

In Chapter 1, I discussed the background to the renewed interest in decentralization in the South since the early 1970s. It is clear that this revival of interest was the result of the realization on the part of the international community that central development planning approach had largely failed. Hence for any real development to occur, there was assumed to be a need for the participation of the people in the decision-making processes that determine those developmental goals. I also identified and reviewed the literature on the various forms of decentralization and participation in general, and in the Ghanaian context in particular, in an attempt to establish a relationship between the two, the basis for our study.

In Chapter 2, it was shown that decentralization had long been practiced in Ghana even before the advent of colonial rule under the indigenous political set up based on the institution of chieftaincy. Under this system, sub-chiefs and other titleholders within a political arrangement had specific areas over which they exercised jurisdiction, whilst at the same time owing allegiance to the central political authority. Within these areas of jurisdiction, the sub-chiefs and titleholders were granted the power of decision-making. This, as we have argued,

was the nature of political decentralization that pertained in the then Gold Coast prior to colonial rule and was adopted and built upon by the British through their colonial policy of Indirect Rule.

It was also argued in Chapter 2 that the decentralization policies that were pursued in Ghana between independence on 6 March 1957 and 31 December 1981 were largely aimed at extending the authority of governments at the center over local government administration. This, as I have shown, was done in order to control local government administration in pursuance of the interests of these governments. However, on some other occasions - for instance, as seen during the period of Dr. Kwame Nkrumah and his Convention Peoples' Party- this meddling in local government administration served an added purpose of assuring the governing Party of support at the grassroots. Chapter 2 thus provided a background to the period of central concern to this study, 1982-1994.

Chapter 3 dealt with the structures through which PNDC's initial political decentralization program was expected to facilitate the popular participation of the people in the decision-making process between 1982 and 1983. This participation, which was carried out through the P WDCs, was expected to empower the ordinary people who belonged to the lower rungs of society. I argued that in spite of the fact that the PNDC encouraged popular participation in decision-making in the defence committees, on occasions when those decisions conflicted with its own positions, the PNDC took steps to reverse them. I also argued that although the radical orientation of participation in decision-making during this period was

empowering, it was discontinued due to the implementation of the ERP/SAP. That is, in the context of the implementation of these liberal economic policies, the PNDC was forced to de-politicise the defence committees as a condition for the continued support of the IMF World Bank for Ghana's economic re-structuring. In spite of the contributions of these policies to the de-politicization of the defence committees, the ideological schism in the PNDC very early in its life and the supposed lack of revolutionary commitment on the part of Rawlings were identified as two other contributory factors.

In Chapter 4, the District Assembly system as the replacement of the defence committees from 1988 onward was discussed. Using the South Tongu District Assembly as a case study, the degree of participation in decision-making by the majority of the people within the Assembly's area of jurisdiction was evaluated. Finally, two examples of decision-making in the South Tongu District Assembly were used to test participation in effective decision-making in Ghana's decentralization program.

It is important to be reminded that this study has been conducted within the framework of Another Development Approach in which it is argued that decentralization will ensure popular participation in the decision-making process and thereby empower the majority of the population when those who were previously neglected in decision-making participate in it. Further, the study looked at the many disparate arguments for decentralization by its other advocates. It is

therefore with this background that the conclusions based on the Ghanaian experience as discussed in this study are drawn.

Following from the discussion, it is clear that in spite of the claim that PNDC's political decentralization program facilitated the popular participation of the majority of the people in an effective decision-making process, the findings of this study show otherwise. It should be pointed out that during the period of the PNDCs, when some degree of effective decision-making occurred, the PNDC often reversed some of the decisions that it found to have undermined its own authority. Moreover, even when the decision-making authority of the District Assemblies was respected and decisions allowed to stand as, for instance, in the second example of decision-making, the decision was made in the teeth of the government's alleged threats and intense lobbying to undermine the effectiveness of the District Assembly's decision-making powers.

It should be emphasized that in spite of the fact that popular participation in the decision-making process was supposed to have engendered empowerment, this did not result from Ghana's decentralization program. As shown in Chapter 4, the alleged conduct of the Minister for Local Government, in connection with the first example, coupled with the location of the power to declare a District Assembly to be in "default" were indications that the subject of power had not been addressed in the decentralization program, although the District Assemblies were supposed to have been "the highest decision-making authorities" in the Districts. And because the District Assemblies lacked any power, even by-laws that were made

by them needed the approval of the PNDC Secretariat and the Minister for Local Government in the pre-1992 and post-1992 periods respectively. It is therefore clear that the idea that the District Assemblies were to be empowered through popular participation in the decision-making process was not made operational and was largely of symbolic significance.

Three explanations have been given as the underlying causes of the failure of the PNDC's political decentralization program to provide the vehicle for popular participation in the decision-making process. First, it is argued that the lack of popular participation in the decentralization program was a matter of policy failure. Smith has noted that the ambitious and sweeping character of policy-making in the countries of the South has sometimes led to the inability of governments to implement these policies.¹ It has been argued by scholars like Ayee, and Crook and Manor that the failure of the PNDC's decentralization program in general terms was partly due to the fact that the program was too ambitious.² They have identified, for instance, the provision in PNDC Law 207 for the decentralization of as many as 22 government departments and organizations to the Districts, which were to be made accountable to the District Assemblies. However, in spite of this requirement, the government did not make enough provisions for their establishment. The Assemblies lacked the necessary logistical capacity and funding, and even when the latter was available through the creation of the Common Fund, its usage was restricted to specified items. Hence it is argued that the decentralization program failed to facilitate popular participation

since it lacked the necessary logistical support to ensure the effective implementation of the policy.

Second, one could be tempted to accept the argument that the PNDC was not really committed to a political decentralization program that would facilitate popular participation in the decision-making process, thereby leading to the empowerment of the people.³ From this perspective, the decentralization program could simply be viewed as a populist ploy by the PNDC to “acquire legitimacy” and shore up support for its own political agenda.⁴ It is on the basis of this view that Ayee again suggests that the decentralization program was a “mask which the PNDC wore to cover a hidden agenda” and that the PNDC’s commitment to the decentralization program was only sustained because “it was tied to the ERP/SAP.”⁵

This suspicion is premised on the argument that more often than not the policy goals outlined by governments, especially in the countries of the South, are not the real intentions those policies were set out to achieve. This argument has some substance. As we have shown, it became clear to the PNDC by the end of 1982 that popular participation in the decision-making process, as pursued through the defence committees, could not go side-by-side with the implementation of the Economic Recovery Program/ Structural Adjustment Program for reasons already discussed in Chapter 3. This was the reason why the government took steps to gradually empty the defense committees of the political power that they had hitherto exercised. Moreover, the government itself had stated that PNDC Law

207 "does not seek to make any district an independent Republic."⁶ This statement, having come from no less a person than the man at the center of the decentralization program was enough indication of the fact that the decision-making authority of the Assemblies was to operate within certain parameters set by the government. If, as shown in the two examples of decision-making, the PNDC was not prepared to allow the District Assemblies a free hand in the decision-making process, why then did it continue to stress popular participation in the decision-making process as one of the chief concerns of its decentralization program? The answer ironically lies in the fact that because the government did not have any strong support base and still needed support from the grassroots for its political survival, it did not want to openly offend this constituency. Thus, popular participation had become more rhetorical than of any practical significance.

However, as we have argued in Chapter 3, there is no gainsaying the fact that the idea of pursuing a decentralization program, especially through the defence committees, had been part of the baggage of Jerry Rawlings since the military coup on 4 June 1979. From the citations given in Chapter 3 it is clear that the defence committees were really intended to provide the structures that were expected to facilitate the popular participation of the majority of the people in the decision-making process. There is no doubt as to the genuineness of the original call for the formation of the defence committees. Hence, to argue that the PNDC pursued the decentralization program as a result of the ERP/SAP is incorrect and

without any historical basis since the decentralization program was begun in 1982, with the call for the formation of the defense committees, at a time that the ERP/SAP had not been negotiated with the IMF/World Bank.

Third, and more fundamental to this study, is the argument that it was the World Bank's agenda of decentralization for "good governance" that diverted the focus of Ghana's political decentralization program and emptied it of popular participation. As we argued in Chapter 3, the initial radical character of the PNDC's political decentralization program was compromised as a result of the government's implementation of the Economic Recovery Program but more importantly, the Structural Adjustment Program. By this implementation, the PNDC's focus of decentralization as a vehicle for popular participation in the decision-making process became compromised and absorbed into the World Bank's decentralization program aimed at facilitating "good governance." It must be pointed out, however, that the PNDC could not have been described as an entirely unwilling partner in the implementation of the ERP/SAP. Since it was the moderate faction within the PNDC, which survived the bitter ideological struggle of its early years, there is no gainsaying the fact that that faction was more accommodating to the neo-liberal agenda represented in the IMF/World Bank and pursued through its lending policies.

In spite of PNDC's "complicity," the influence of the World Bank on the decentralization program was overwhelming and pregnant with implications for popular participation in the decision-making process. This was because the

implementation of the SAP stayed the hands of the government from decentralizing power to the District Assemblies. This decentralization could have derailed its commitment to the IMF World Bank's conditions that accompanied the implementation of the Economic Recovery Program/Structural Adjustment Program. Further, if the moderate faction in the PNDC accommodated the neo-liberal economic agenda of the IMF World Bank, then it could be stated that this faction felt that effective decision-making in the decentralized structures would have amounted to "dis-empowering" the central state, which they could not have encouraged. The end result of this was that the effective decision-making authority of the District Assemblies, especially in the areas of policy-making and implementation, was greatly undermined. Thus, Crook and Manor are correct when they argue that in spite of the fact that the military background of the PNDC accounted for its unwillingness to decentralize political power to the districts, this situation was compounded by the government's implementation of the Structural Adjustment Program, which did not allow the Ministry of Finance and the Office of the Head of Civil Service to decentralize financial and manpower issues respectively to the District Assemblies.⁷ This implied, therefore, that largely as a result of the implementation of the SAP, Ghana's decentralization program was emptied of popular participation. Thus, although the PNDC continued to harp on popular participation in the decision-making process as a key component of its political decentralization program, by and large, whatever degree of participation there was to the program in so far as the District Assemblies were concerned was

largely symbolic. And as a result, the decision-making authority of the District Assemblies was either limited to issues that had been approved of by the government⁸ or were only allowed over matters that were regarded as of strictly local character and therefore not adverse to the implementation of the Structural Adjustment Program.

It should be pointed out that by its revolutionary origin, Ghana's political decentralization program could not have been initiated on behalf of neo-liberal institutions by the state. However, the orientation of the District Assembly period of the program was a betrayal of that historic origin. In the light of Ghana's economic situation at the time, the internal division in government, and the fact that the PNDC had no "alternative" and therefore could not have turned its back on the support of the World Bank, I am of the opinion that any decentralization program with the active involvement of the World Bank in circumstances similar to those of Ghana, cannot facilitate popular participation in any effective decision-making process, thereby leading to the empowerment of the overwhelming majority of the people. It will therefore not be far from right to argue that decentralization policies- at least those with the active involvement of international funding agencies- are simply smoke and mirrors, aimed at furthering the interest of advocates and institutions of neo-liberalism.

Again, it is important to note that like the preceding decentralization policies, the PNDC's political decentralization program led, perversely, to the re-centralization of authority in the government, thus turning the District Assemblies

into units of the central government's bureaucracy. This meant that the District Assemblies in the period under review still operated within parameters established by the government. Hence Woode could comment that, "The relationship between the District Assemblies and the central machinery is close."⁹ That is, the PNDC's decentralization policy, like those of past governments, which had identified popular participation in the decision-making process as one of its key objectives, had taken that participation further away from the people on whose behalf it was initiated and vested it in itself.

It should be noted, however, that although the decentralization program did not deliver on its promise of popular participation in an effective decision-making process, it nevertheless sowed seeds of an experiment in popular participation, especially with regard to the defence committees, and this augurs well for the future. As shown in the study, the mass character of popular participation in decision-making through the defence committees was greatly appealing to the overwhelming majority of the people, especially those occupying the lower strata of society. In spite of the fact that the call for the formation of the defence committees was a revolutionary initiative from above, the speed with which people who were previously neglected in the decision-making process responded to the formation of these committees could be described as equally revolutionary from below. This latent spirit could be rekindled by any future political leadership that is willing and able to commit itself to a political decentralization program that will identify popular participation of the people in the decision-making process as

one of its key objectives. That is, given the right political commitment on the part of the government, grassroots enthusiasm for popular participation could be re-kindled. However, this study is aware of the fact that the nature of globalization makes this optimism a daunting task.

Notwithstanding the positive implication that the PNDC's decentralization program engendered for the future of popular participation in decision-making in Ghana, it is clear that in the period under study it largely failed to provide the vehicle for popular participation in the decision-making process that was expected. In fact, advocates for decentralization have always stressed that its importance lies in the fact that it would ensure popular participation in the decision-making process. However, this did not materialize in Ghana's case. Hence this study clearly indicates that decentralization programs "per se" do not facilitate popular participation in the decision-making process unless other key issues are attended to. First, there must be a demonstrable willingness on the part of governments to decentralize power. This is because, as noticed in the study, whereas on the one hand the PNDC was encouraging popular participation in the decision-making process in the defence committees, on the other hand it tried to restrain the degree of power that should accompany that decision-making. This therefore led to a situation where it reserved and exercised the right to determine when the decision-making process was "hijacked." Hence in order to promote a decentralization program that will facilitate popular participation in an effective decision-making process, political leadership should be prepared to decentralize a sufficient degree

of power to the structures it establishes to promote the policy. Second, governments must equally ensure that the decentralized structures are well established to carry out the assigned functions. As we saw in Chapter 4, the sub-District structure, which was supposed to support the work of the District Assemblies was virtually non-existent. And even where it was found, it lacked the necessary logistical capabilities to enable it to perform any meaningful roles. This implies that until and unless the decentralized structures are well established and provided with the required working tools, decentralization programs will only remain at the policy level without any hopes of successful implementation. On the basis of our findings we can contend that the chief beneficiaries of the PNDC's decentralization program were not the people at the lower rungs of society on whose behalf it was supposedly initiated. Rather, it was neo-liberalism represented in the post-colonial state and its hangers-on. In fact, Ghana's decentralization program did not provide the "magic bullet" that it promised to deliver in so far as popular participation in an effective decision-making process was concerned. In a real sense, the program was more symbolic than real.

It is important to note that our contribution to the debate on decentralization is to re-energize the argument that any decentralization program that aims at facilitating popular participation in an effective decision-making process must go beyond the mere creation of sub-government structures. In terms of further research, it is important to examine the extent to which decentralization programs are designed to ensure an appreciable degree of independent decision-making of

local government structures while at the same time ensuring the unity of the state which is often used as the excuse for not decentralizing power to the lower levels.

In conclusion, it should be noted that although the Another Development Approach and the other disparate advocates rightly identified decentralization as a means of promoting participation in an effective decision-making process, they failed to recognize the centrality of power in decentralization. Thus it could be argued that the Another Development Approach and the other disparate advocates of decentralization were unduly influenced by the structural-functionalist school into assuming that once the decentralized structures are created, effective decision-making logically would ensue from participation. This, as has been shown in the study, does not occur. Thus, a central limitation of the Another Development framework and the arguments of the other advocates is the failure to recognize that decentralization in itself connotes a theatre of power struggle. The issue of the location of power must be addressed if decentralization is to have any meaning.

6. Endnotes

¹ Thomas B. Smith, "The Policy Implementation Process" in Policy Sciences Vol. 4 (1973): 199.

² See Ayee, An Anatomy:106- 31.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Crook and Manor, op. cit., 1.

⁵ An Anatomy, op. cit. 125.

⁶ Kwamena Ahwoi, Ghanaian Times (Accra) 27 June 1990.

⁷ Crook and Manor, op. cit. 284.

⁸ Oquaye, op. cit. 221.

⁹ S. Woode, Making the District Assemblies Work (Tema: Ghana Publishing Corporation, 1989): 28.

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