

## ASSESSING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE DECENTRALIZATION PROCESS: A CASE STUDY OF THE KASSENA NANKANA MUNICIPAL

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### ABSTRACT

**Purpose of the Study:** To assess the influence of decentralization on democracy, participation, good governance, and service quality in the Kassena Nankana Municipal, Ghana.

**Statement of the Problem:** Decentralization is intended to enhance grassroots participation, democracy, good governance, and efficient service delivery. However, the current administrative, legislative, and political arrangements in Ghana allow the Central Government to usurp local authorities' powers, preventing the realization of these goals to a substantial level.

**Methodology:** The study employed a mixed methods approach with purposive sampling techniques to select respondents. Data were analyzed using both inferential and descriptive methods, presented with IBM SPSS software version 20. Data collection methods included questionnaires, interviews, focus group discussions, and observations.

**Findings:** The study revealed that, to a moderate extent (Mean = 3.3333), decentralization is effective in Kassena Nankana Municipal. While there have been successes, complete success in decentralization policy implementation has not been achieved. Challenges include the central government's retention of significant control and the lack of elected Metropolitan, Municipal, and District Chief Executives (MMDCEs).

**Recommendations:** To safeguard and improve decentralization in Ghana, the study recommends ensuring sufficient funding for all responsibilities, regularly building capacities, strengthening sub-district structures, electing MMDCEs through universal adult suffrage, enhancing participatory governance and citizen engagement, and remunerating Assembly Members and Unit Committee Members. Additionally, addressing gender disparities requires structural adjustments to support more women in the decentralization process, including tailored networking initiatives, inclusive representation through quotas, partnership building, advocacy, and promoting women's economic empowerment

**Keywords:** Effectiveness, Decentralization, Decentralization Process, Governance, Decentralization Policy.

## INTRODUCTION

Decentralization has long been employed in developing countries to enhance governance and public service provision. As Seabright (1996) cited in Kauneckis & Andersson (2009) notes, decentralization often aims to increase transparency and accountability at lower levels of government due to competition between units. Ojambo (2012) highlights that decentralization is seen as a mechanism for strengthening local democracy, enhancing transparency, and improving service delivery. The process involves devolving powers, personnel, and resources from central governments to sub-national levels, thereby promoting grassroots democratization and human rights (Ojambo, 2012; Faguet & Sánchez, 2013).

Decentralization can be categorized into three dimensions: administrative, fiscal, and political. Administrative decentralization grants local governments jurisdiction over the civil service, while fiscal decentralization allows them to raise their own revenue or receive unconditional transfers from the central government (Hoffman & Metzroth, 2010, as cited in Kwamie et al., 2016). Political decentralization provides citizens and local officials with greater decision-making authority at the local level. These reforms aim to enhance service delivery, democratize local governance, and improve transparency and accountability (CDD, 2000, as cited in Casey, 2018).

Despite these aims, the effectiveness of decentralization in achieving its desired results remains ambiguous. Mookherjee (2015) argues that the success of decentralization depends on context-specific factors and that implementation often lags behind rhetoric. Ghana, which adopted decentralization three decades ago, presents a mixed picture. While it has been praised for its ambitious devolution of power, it has also been criticized for failing to achieve its objectives. The country's experience highlights a fundamental contradiction between the promise of decentralization and its actual outcomes.

This study focuses on assessing the effectiveness of decentralization in Ghana, particularly in the Kassena Nankana Municipal. It aims to determine whether decentralization has improved service delivery and enabled local communities to better address their needs. Additionally, the study seeks to identify constraints that inhibit the implementation of decentralization in Ghana. By examining the devolution of powers, personnel, and resources from the central government to local levels, this research contributes to understanding the impact of decentralization on governance and service delivery in Ghana.

## Problem Statement

Over the years, many countries have sought to extend local participation in governance to the grassroots level through various methods. In Africa, early methods included indirect rule and centralization. Indirect rule, as implemented by Lord Lugard, a British Governor in northern Nigeria, involved using native rulers to govern under British supervision due to limited administrative staff. Centralization, on the other hand, concentrated decision-making authority at the top, with lower levels following directives from above. Both methods aimed to encourage local participation but faced significant challenges, leading to the introduction of decentralization as a more effective approach.

Decentralization involves transferring authority to lower levels within a political-administrative spectrum. According to Smoke (2003), a key proposition of decentralization theory is that bringing government closer to citizens promotes local democracy, accountability, and transparency, resulting in services that reflect citizens' needs. As a result, many subnational governments have become crucial actors in the public sector. The effectiveness of decentralization in addressing issues of accountability, empowerment, development, governance, and participation is a critical concern, particularly in countries like Ghana.

Ghana's decentralization program, as outlined by Ahwoi (2010) and cited in Adusei-Asante & Hancock (2012), aims to achieve empowerment, participation, accountability, effectiveness, and efficiency. It favors participatory democracy by empowering District Assemblies to create transparent and accountable systems. However, the program's effectiveness has been debated. Researchers like Opare et al. (2012), cited in Kwamie et al. (2016), highlight challenges such as lack of funding, limited managerial skills, and national-level interference, which undermine decentralization efforts. Mohammed (2016) notes that despite creating avenues for participation, these opportunities are often dominated by the educated elite, excluding women, the poor, and marginalized groups, thus defeating the purpose of decentralization. Conversely, Oduro-Ofori (2016) observes that local economic development has been promoted through various initiatives by local governments.

Different studies have produced varying outcomes regarding the effectiveness of Ghana's decentralization process, particularly in local development, governance, and grassroots participation. These inconsistencies highlight the need for further research. Consequently, this study aims to investigate the effectiveness of decentralization in the Kassena Nankana

Municipal, one of the fifteen municipalities and districts in the Upper East Region of Ghana, to provide a clearer understanding of its impact.

### **Research Objectives**

The main objective of this study is to assess the effectiveness of the decentralization process. Specific objectives of the study are to:

- (a) Describe the decentralization process and establish whether the structures exist at the Assembly level.
- (b) Determine whether there are manifestations or indications of the effectiveness of decentralization in the administrative and governance sectors.
- (c) Investigate how decentralization promotes local participation of women, men, and marginalized and vulnerable groups in the municipality.
- (d) Examine the contribution of decentralization to local development in the municipality.
- (e) Investigate the challenges associated with decentralization in the municipality.

### **Research Questions**

To be able to fully understand and assess the effectiveness of the decentralization process in the Kassena Nankana Municipal, the following research questions were identified:

- (a) What is the decentralization process or model being used in the Kassena Nankana Municipal Assembly?
- (b) What are the manifestations or indications of the effectiveness of decentralization in the administrative and governance sectors?
- (c) How has decentralization promoted the local participation of women, men, and marginalized and vulnerable groups in the municipality?
- (d) What is the contribution of decentralization to local development in the municipality?
- (e) What are the challenges associated with decentralization in the municipality?

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Review of Related Literature on the Effectiveness/Impact of Decentralization**

Over the years, various methods have been used to extend local participation in governance to the grassroots level in Africa, including indirect rule and centralization. Indirect rule, as seen with Lord Lugard in northern Nigeria, involved native rulers governing under British supervision due to limited staff. Centralization concentrated decision-making authority at the top, with lower levels following directives. Both methods faced significant challenges, leading to the introduction of decentralization as a more effective approach.

Decentralization transfers authority to lower levels within a political-administrative spectrum. Smoke (2003) posits that decentralization brings government closer to citizens, promoting local democracy, accountability, and transparency, and ensuring services reflect citizens' needs. Consequently, subnational governments have become key public sector actors. The effectiveness of decentralization in addressing accountability, empowerment, development, governance, and participation is particularly critical in countries like Ghana.

Ghana's decentralization program, as outlined by Ahwoi (2010) and cited in Adusei-Asante & Hancock (2012), aims for empowerment, participation, accountability, effectiveness, and efficiency. It empowers District Assemblies to foster participatory democracy and create transparent systems. However, the program's effectiveness is debated. Challenges such as lack of funding, limited managerial skills, and national-level interference undermine efforts (Opare et al., 2012, cited in Kwamie et al., 2016). Mohammed (2016) notes that participation avenues are often dominated by the educated elite, excluding women and marginalized groups, defeating the purpose of decentralization. Conversely, Oduro-Ofori (2016) observes that local economic development has been promoted through local government initiatives.

Inconsistencies in previous research on Ghana's decentralization effectiveness highlight the need for further study. This study aims to investigate the effectiveness of decentralization in the Kassena Nankana Municipal, one of the fifteen municipalities in the Upper East Region of Ghana, to provide a clearer understanding of its impact

### **Overview of the Concept of Decentralization**

The concept of decentralization has been a popular theme in development thinking and practice for at least two decades. It has been conceptualized in various ways, with one definition being the delegation of authority to lower levels within a political-administrative spectrum. The main objective of decentralization is to transform the government's administrative branch into a performance-based entity. According to Bilouseac (2010), decentralization enables the government to provide basic amenities to rural populations, addressing the needs of individuals in rural and deprived communities. Scherer & Palazzo (2008) noted that due to globalization, decentralization has become a significant phenomenon for development in third-world and developing countries.

Ekpo (2008), as cited in Tshombe & Dassah (2017), described decentralization as a vertical power-sharing mechanism within the political system, where responsibilities and competencies are distributed among different government tiers. Mukhopadhyay (2005), as cited in Panday

(2010), argued that for decentralization to achieve its objectives, it must mobilize the voices of subordinate groups in society and create institutionalized spaces for participation and accountability.

Decentralization is seen as a means to reinvent government operations, making them more responsive and effective. It provides avenues for governments to address local needs and improve service delivery, especially in rural areas. As globalization continues to influence development, decentralization remains a crucial strategy for third-world and developing countries to enhance governance and meet the needs of their populations.

For decentralization to be effective, it must not only distribute power but also ensure that marginalized groups have a voice and that there are mechanisms for accountability. This transformation can lead to improved governance and better outcomes for communities, particularly those that are rural and underserved

### **Type of Decentralization**

According to Scott (2009), as cited in Mossberger & Crawford (2013), there are three types of decentralization, namely: fiscal, political, and administrative decentralization. Scott (2009) as cited in Mossberger & Crawford (2013), defined Fiscal decentralization as the transfer of financial resources in the form of grants and tax-raising powers to the sub-national units or local-level governments. On the other hand, Scott (2009) as cited in Mossberger & Crawford (2013), defined administrative decentralization as de-concentration, which connotes a situation where central government functions are transferred to geographically distinct administrative units. Scott (2009) as cited in Mossberger & Crawford (2013), indicated that political decentralization refers to the situation where powers and responsibilities are devolved to elected local-level governments.

### **Decentralisation Policy of Ghana**

Ghana's decentralization policy, as outlined by the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development (2010), aims to enhance local governance by clarifying roles and relationships among government levels and actors, improving human resource and administrative capacity, and strengthening local planning and its integration with national agendas. The policy seeks to promote economic growth, employment, and household welfare, improve funding and financial management of Metropolitan, Municipal, and District Assemblies (MMDAs), and foster local democracy, participation, and accountability. It emphasizes a rights-based approach to development, ensuring equitable access to public resources and inclusiveness in

decision-making, clarifying the roles of traditional authorities and civil society, and optimizing donor resource use for local development.

### **Local Participation in Ghana's Decentralisation Process**

Ghana's decentralization policy, as outlined by the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development (2010), aims to enhance local governance by clarifying roles and relationships among government levels and actors, improving human resource and administrative capacity, and strengthening local planning and its integration with national agendas. The policy seeks to promote economic growth, employment, and household welfare, improve funding and financial management of Metropolitan, Municipal, and District Assemblies (MMDAs), and foster local democracy, participation, and accountability. It emphasizes a rights-based approach to development, ensuring equitable access to public resources and inclusiveness in decision-making, clarifying the roles of traditional authorities and civil society, and optimizing donor resource use for local development.

### **Benefits of Decentralization**

Decentralization and local governance are vital components of democratic governance, creating an enabling environment for decision-making and service delivery. According to UNDP (2002), as cited in Ahmad & Ali (2011), decentralization is crucial for re-inventing government and achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The pressures of globalization and demands for expanded democratization challenge central governments' traditional roles, necessitating a re-evaluation of the state's nature and political power distribution. The UNDP Human Development Report (2003), as cited in Habibi et al. (2003), highlights decentralization's benefits, including improved service delivery and accountability, cost-effective and sustainable development programs, increased participation of marginalized groups, innovative problem-solving, enhanced transparency, and early disaster warnings.

### **Constraints/Challenges of Decentralization**

Decentralization and local governance are vital components of democratic governance, creating an enabling environment for decision-making and service delivery. According to UNDP (2002), as cited in Ahmad & Ali (2011), decentralization is crucial for re-inventing government and achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The pressures of globalization and demands for expanded democratization challenge central governments' traditional roles, necessitating a re-evaluation of the state's nature and political power distribution. The UNDP Human Development Report (2003), as cited in Habibi et al. (2003),

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## METHODS

The study was conducted in Kassena Nankana Municipality, Upper East Region of Ghana, encompassing six zonal councils and a population of 99,895 (GSS PHC Report, 2021). Using a mixed methods approach with an exploratory sequential design, the research aimed to assess the effectiveness of decentralization. Data collection involved questionnaires, interviews, focus group discussions, and observations, with purposive sampling. Data analysis was performed using IBM SPSS software version 20, employing descriptive and inferential statistics to evaluate decentralization's effectiveness, with results presented through percentages, graphs, charts, and tabulations

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the stated objectives of the study, the main findings of the study were as follows.

### Description of the decentralization process in the Municipality:

The first objective of the study aimed to describe the decentralization process in Kassena Nankana Municipality and establish whether the necessary structures exist at the Assembly level. The study revealed that decentralization is practiced extensively (Mean = 4.3250) in the municipality. This involves transferring power, authority, resources, and functions from the Central Government to local-level governments, including the Municipal Assembly. Focus group discussions and interviews indicated that Ghana's local governance system comprises a four-tier Metropolitan and a three-tier Municipal and District Assembly structure, with Regional Coordinating Councils. The Municipal Assembly, led by a Chief Executive appointed by the President, has authority and resources delegated by the Central Government and further transferred to Sub-Municipal Structures like Zonal Councils and Unit Committees through established structures such as the General Assembly, Sub-Committees, Committees, and Departments (KNMA MTDP, 2021).

The study highlighted that the General Assembly, the highest decision-making body in the municipality, performs legislative, deliberative, and executive functions. It consists of 52 members, including elected officials, appointees, a Member of Parliament, and the Municipal Chief Executive. The Assembly operates through various Sub-Committees, including Works,

Development Planning, Finance and Administration, Agriculture, Environmental and Climate Change, Justice and Security, Medium and Small-Scale Enterprise, Social Services, and Women and Children. These Sub-Committees report to the Executive Committee, which in turn reports to the General Assembly. Additionally, the Public Complaints Committee handles public grievances. The municipality is divided into six Zonal Councils and 35 Electoral Areas with 35 Unit Committees and 175 Unit Committee Members, playing crucial roles in enforcement and mobilization at the local level (GSS PHC Report, 2021).

The study confirmed that decentralization in Kassena Nankana Municipality is inclusive, participatory, and representative. Power, resources, and authority are effectively transferred from the Central Government to the Municipal Assembly and subsequently to Sub-Municipal Structures, enabling the provision of basic amenities to citizens. This aligns with Ekpo's (2008) view, as cited in Tshombe & Dassah (2017), that decentralization involves vertical power sharing among different government tiers, and Eryilmaz's (2011) perspective, as cited in Ozmen (2014), that authority, responsibility, and resources are transferred from central to local governments. Additionally, Bilouseac (2010) emphasizes that decentralization addresses the needs of rural and deprived communities, supporting the findings of Honyenuga and Wutoh (2019) regarding Ghana's local governance system (FGD 1, 2, 3)

### **Investigation of how decentralization promotes local participation of women, men, marginalized and vulnerable groups in the Municipality**

The second objective investigated how decentralization promotes local participation of women, men, and marginalized and vulnerable groups in the municipality.

### **Transmission of information from the District Assembly to constituents**

The study investigated how information on District Assembly activities is transmitted to its constituents. Out of the 120 respondents interviewed, 52% had their information from their Assembly Member; 15% had their information from other sources apart from the listed sources; 10% had their information from the listed sources; 9% had their information from their Municipal Chief Executive; 8% had their information from their Member of Parliament; and 6% had their information from their Unit Committee Member. The study results showed that a significant proportion of the respondents (85%) had their information from Assembly Members, Municipal Chief Executive, Members of Parliament, and Unit Committee Members. This high-level information flow between government and citizens is indicative of high participation in the affairs of local governments. This corroborates the position of the Local

Governance Act 936 of 2016, that elected officials and duty bearers are to keep close contact with their constituents. This supports the position of Scott-Herridge (2002), who indicated that decentralization could give citizens and individuals greater influence over the level and mix of government services they consume and a greater ability to hold their officials and duty-bearers accountable.

### **Frequency/Regularity of meetings between Assembly Members and Electorates**

The study investigated the frequency/regularity of meetings between Assembly Members and Electorates. According to the Local Governance Act 936 of 2016, District assemblies are mandated to meet at least three (3) times a year, excluding the inaugural meeting. The Act further mandates Assembly Members to meet their constituents, before and after each District Assembly meeting to share their development concerns as well as to inform them of what actions the Assembly is taking to solve their problem(s).

Out of the 25 Elected Assembly Members interviewed, 52% met with their constituents twice a year; 28% met with their constituents once a year; 16% met with their constituents more than twice in a year; and 4% met with their constituents as many times as necessary. The study results showed that the majority of Assembly Members (80%) can meet with the electorates once or twice a year before and after every General Assembly meeting. This means that the local populace or citizens are not regularly informed about local government programs and policies nor have the opportunity to make input into council discussions and deliberations. This corroborates the position of Ayee (2003), who categorically stated that Assembly Members are not able to meet their constituents before and after District Assembly meetings which is a requirement by law.

### **Participation of women, men, marginalized and vulnerable groups in the decentralization process**

The study sought to ascertain the participation of women, men, and marginalized and vulnerable groups in the decentralization process. The study revealed that to a large extent (Mean = 4.3250), men are involved and participate in the decentralization process; and to a low extent (Mean = 2.5083), women are involved and participate in the decentralization process. Data from the Municipal Assembly reveal that out of a total of 52 General Assembly Members, 96% were males while 4% were females. Additionally, out of a total of 82 Sub-Committee Members, 89% were males while 11% were females. Also, out of a total of 60 Councillors, 93% were males while 7% were females. Of a total of 165 Unit Committee members, 94%

were males whiles 6% were females. Of a total of 52 General Assembly Members, 2% were representatives of vulnerable and marginalized groups. The views of respondents in explaining women's participation in the decentralization process are as follows: *Traditional gender roles, gender-based stereotypes, and discriminatory attitudes and norms hinder women's participation in the decentralization process (KI 1). Inadequate financial resources, inexperience, lack of formal education, and limited access to information hinder women's participation in the decentralization process (KI 2). Inadequate knowledge and inadequate financial resources hinder women's participation in the decentralization process (FGD 2). Social norms drive gender gaps and continue to limit Ghanaian women's access to and use of opportunities at the same rate as men and boys and further exclude them from social and economic empowerment (FGD 1). Traditional beliefs and perceptions, gender discrimination, and low levels of literacy hinder women's participation in the decentralization process (FGD 3). Family patriarchy, women's multiple roles and responsibilities, lack of resources, lack of affirmative action legislation, and male-dominated work patterns in politics and public agenda hinder women's participation in the decentralization process (FGD 4). Low levels of education, financial constraints, and intimidation hinder women's participation in the decentralization process (FGD 5).*

The study revealed significant gender disparities in the decentralization process, with more men participating than women, indicating that Ghana's decentralization policy lacks gender sensitivity. This contradicts Minoletti (2014), who emphasized the importance of women's participation in development and governance, and Robertson (2002), cited in Mohammed (2016), who suggested that decentralization would address gender inequalities. It supports Khan and Ara (2006), who noted women's marginalization in decision-making.

Traditional gender roles, social norms, stereotypes, discriminatory attitudes, inadequate financial resources, lack of education, and other barriers hinder women's participation. This aligns with the Women's Manifesto for Ghana (2004), which highlighted similar obstacles to women's political participation.

The study also found that vulnerable and marginalized groups have low participation in the decentralization process (Mean = 2.2917), with only 2% representation in the General Assembly. Factors such as socio-cultural practices, patronage politics, inadequate resources, and low education contribute to their underrepresentation, contrary to Van de Walle (2003), cited in Mohammed (2016), and Mukhopadhyay (2005), cited in Panday (2010), who argued for the inclusion of subordinate groups' voices in decentralization efforts

### **Determination of whether there are manifestations of the effectiveness of decentralization in the Municipality:**

The third objective of the study sought to determine respondents' views on the effectiveness of the decentralization program in the Kassena Nankana Municipality. The study revealed that, to a moderate extent (Mean = 3.3333), the decentralization process is effective. Respondents highlighted that decentralization has promoted good governance, democracy, and development. They noted improvements in services due to significant investments in education, roads, health, security, water, and sanitation. Furthermore, decentralization has facilitated the creation of institutions and fora for idea exchange, decision-making, and consultation, enhancing transparency and accountability. Respondents at the Assembly level also reported improved timeliness of service delivery, though not without challenges.

Civil Society Organization (CSO) respondents emphasized that decentralization allows CSOs to provide services and oversee government activities. They also mentioned that the policy brings together key stakeholders, leading to holistic development. Community-level respondents indicated that decentralization has improved the quality and quantity of services, increased citizen participation, reduced poverty, and enhanced the overall quality of life. Despite these positives, they noted that the timeliness of service delivery could still be improved. This supports the view of UNDESA (2003), cited in Smit (2021), that decentralization can enhance the efficiency, equity, sustainability, and cost-effectiveness of local services.

However, the study found that fiscal decentralization remains limited, with District Assemblies heavily dependent on central government funds, and lacking genuine expenditure autonomy. Political decentralization is also incomplete, as MMDCEs are not elected by the populace, and the central government retains substantial administrative and political control. Despite these limitations, sub-municipal structures are involved in planning and prioritization, reflecting local needs and aspirations in Assembly plans and budgets. This aligns with Oyugi's (2000) assertion that Africa's local government legal-political design often undermines local democratic culture and initiative in service delivery. In conclusion, while decentralization has moderately promoted good governance, democracy, and development, challenges remain in achieving full fiscal and political decentralization.

### **Examination of the contribution of decentralization to local development in the Municipality:**

The fourth objective sought to investigate the contribution of decentralization to local development in the municipality. This objective was addressed through questionnaires, focus group discussions, and key informant interviews. With regards to respondents' perception of the contribution of decentralization to local development, the study indicated that to a large extent (Mean = 4.41), decentralization has contributed to local development in the municipality. The contribution of decentralization to local development in the municipality is as follows:

- Decentralization has led to infrastructural development (i.e., construction of schools, roads, market facilities, health facilities, water, and sanitary facilities) which is an essential ingredient for development. The views of respondents in explaining how decentralization led to infrastructural development are as follows: *Decentralization improves the planning and delivery of public services through incorporating local needs thus resulting in improved infrastructural development (KI 1). Decentralization improves services delivery thus enhancing the quality of life of citizens (KI 2). School children no longer walk longer distances to access quality education (FGD 2). The sick or rural folks no longer walk longer distances to access quality health care (FGD 1). Reduced time travel to access portable water (FGD 3). We now have improved market infrastructure (FGD 4). Assembly has been able to undertake numerous infrastructural developments in education, roads, security, health, water, and sanitation (FGD 5).*
- Decentralization resulted in enhanced grassroots participation in local-level decision-making. The views expressed by respondents in explaining how decentralization led to enhanced grassroots participation are as follows: *Decentralization offers an opportunity for community participation thus enhancing decision-making and the democratic process (KI 1). Decentralization strengthens democracy by moving the*

*level of decision-making closer to those most affected by government actions (KI 2).*

*Citizens now participate directly in the Assembly's decision-making process (FGD 2).*

*People now walk to the officers of the Municipal Assembly and Zonal Councils and demand services (FGD 4). People are now involved in the implementation of projects and programs in their communities thus resulting in ownership and sustainability of projects (FGD 5). Citizens now hold elected representatives accountable (FGD 3).*

*Citizens now hold duty bearers accountable for their stewardship (FGD 1).*

- Decentralization has resulted in increased and improved local control and ownership of projects and programs.

The views of respondents in explaining how decentralization led to increased and improved local control and ownership of projects and programs are as follows:

*Citizens now decide their felt needs (FGD 4). Citizens now own and control projects and programs in their communities (FGD 5). Citizens now decide what project they want in their communities (FGD 2). Citizens now take control of development activities in their communities (FGD 3).*

The study implies that decentralization in Kassena Nankana Municipality has led to increased infrastructural development, improved grassroots participation in local development, and greater control over developmental projects. This supports the view of UNDESA (2003), cited in Smit (2021), that decentralization enhances the efficiency, equity, sustainability, and cost-effectiveness of local services. Similarly, the UNDP Human Development Report (2003), cited in Habibi et al. (2003), states that decentralization enables local authorities to act quickly according to local needs, improves service delivery, enhances transparency and accountability, makes development programs cost-effective and sustainable, increases participation from diverse groups, and encourages communities to solve their problems innovatively.

### **Investigation of the challenges associated with decentralization in the Kassena Nankana Municipal:**

The study unearthed the following challenges associated with decentralization in the municipality. They are Inadequate finances, Central bureaucracy and excessive subservience

of District Assemblies to the center, huge costs and practical difficulties in obtaining information from remote localities, Inadequate human and material resources, Weak understanding of decentralization, Unfavourable legal framework provisions, and Limited autonomy in the district development planning process. Excerpts from focus group discussions convey that “*Assembly is unable to mobilize enough resources to undertake its numerous developmental projects (FGD 4). Most citizens do not understand the decentralization concept (FGD 1). The Assembly is confronted with inadequate funds and logistics, inadequate and unqualified personnel, late and untimely disbursement of funds from the central government, the apathy of community members towards planning and budgeting as well as political interference (FGD 5). Some urgent and critical services are not available in the Municipality. Some critical staff are not available in the Municipality, even with those that are available, their capacities are not regularly built (FGD 3). Local governments are confronted with inadequate resources, unavailability of information, and inadequate accountability mechanisms (FGD 2).*

This implies that despite the gains of decentralization, it is confronted with challenges such as inadequate finances, central bureaucracy, excessive subservience of District Assemblies to the center, inadequate human resources, weak understanding of decentralization, huge costs, and practical difficulties in obtaining information from remote localities, unfavorable legal provisions and limited autonomy in the district development planning process. This corroborates the position of Fridy and Myers (2019), who categorically stated that decentralization in Ghana as well as across sub-Saharan Africa is confronted with several challenges due to the number of informal and formal actors involved. Also, Arthur (2016), stated that local government authorities' financial challenges will continue to persist as long as local governments are not able to mobilize enough internally generated funds. Similarly, Scott (2009) as cited in Mossberger & Crawford (2013), stated that local governments are constrained or challenged in terms of performance and accountability due to weak institutional capacity, limited resources, inadequate or limited accounting mechanisms, and limited information. Finally, Chireh (2011) as cited in Asante & Debrah (2019), indicated that the establishment of super-structure agencies (i.e., agencies that are centralized) are rather tacit means of ‘decentralization’.

## CONCLUSION

Although Ghana has entrenched decentralization in its 1992 constitution, in practice however, it has not fully realized its expectations of improved service delivery. Although Ghana’s

decentralization process began more than three decades ago, its performance is mixed due to District Assemblies limited authority, resources, and power. Additionally, most services of local governments are centralized in their provision and delivery. Decentralization is practiced at the local (District) level to a large extent. Power, resources, and authority have been delegated to the District Assemblies by the Central Government as well as from the District Assemblies to the Sub-District Structures (i.e., Unit Committees and Zonal, Town, and Area Councils) through established structures (i.e., General Assembly, Sub-Committees, Committees, and Departments).

Although Ghana has adopted several measures to increase women's participation, her march towards equal participation in the decentralization process has been agonizingly slow. Despite a modest uptick in numbers over the years, women still face discrimination and barriers, including societal and cultural norms as well as access to financial resources to fully participate in the decentralization process.

The creation of District Assemblies has not resulted in fiscal decentralization as most Assemblies depend heavily on funds from Central Government. Fiscal decentralization remains limited as the District Assemblies are unable to exercise genuine expenditure autonomy, as reflected in the Assemblies' heavy dependence on the District Assemblies Common Fund (DACF) and other central government transfers due to its inability to generate adequate internal resources or revenue. Devolution of power to local governments has not fully been achieved as a result of the Central Government's desire to retain political and administrative control over the entire country. There would be a feather in the cup of decentralization (i.e., some degree of local independence) if the election of the MMDCEs had come to reality. This to some extent would have resulted in results, competition, innovation, and downward accountability which are the foundation for District Assemblies' performance. Further analysis of the system shows that the decentralization program has a lot of challenges namely: inadequate finances, central bureaucracy, excessive subservience of District Assemblies to the center, inadequate human resources, unfavorable legal framework provisions, and limited autonomy in the district development planning process.

To conclude, the idea that decentralization would result in enhanced grass-roots citizens' participation as well as effective and efficient service delivery by sub-national governments has not been realized to a substantial level. Ghana has not achieved complete success in its decentralization policy implementation, as the experience has been mixed, bringing successes as well as failures. This is because the current administrative, legislative, and political

arrangements allow the center (i.e., Central Government) to usurp local authorities' powers. This supports the position by Oyugi (2000) that Africa's local government legal-political design tends to weaken local-level democratic culture cultivation and local authorities' abilities to take initiative in service delivery. Based on the above, the unitary system of governance and decentralization process or system implemented by Ghana is a mismatch, a federal system of governance is recommended.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are suggested: Firstly, there is the need to ensure that all responsibilities are sufficiently funded and must be consistent with revenue means (own revenues, shared taxes, and transfers) for each order of government to discharge its public service responsibilities consistent with its mandate. Secondly, there is the need to regularly build the capacities (i.e., empowerment, organization, competencies, resources, and skills) of staff of District Assemblies and Sub-District Structures to enable them to perform their mandatory functions effectively, efficiently, and sustainably, thus leading to economic and social development. Thirdly, there is the need for structural adjustments to accommodate more significant numbers of women in the decentralization process by supporting the next generation of women leaders in communities through tailored networking initiatives. Similarly, there is a need for inclusive women's representation in the decentralization processes through the introduction of quotas, partnership building, advocacy, and outreach as well as promoting women's economic empowerment. Fourthly, there is the need for citizens or the local population to elect MMDCEs to be held accountable to address most of the challenges confronting District Assemblies. Fifthly, there is the need to rehaul the whole decentralization system as it seems unfair to some players. Lastly, there is the need for a well-thought-out remuneration package for Unit Committee and Assembly Members which is hinged on their performance at their various Area/Town and Zonal Councils.

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