

## **DO ELECTIONS IN EVOLVING DEMOCRACIES NECESSARILY GUARANTEE ACCOUNTABILITY IN LOCAL GOVERNANCE? EVIDENCE FROM GHANA**

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### **ABSTRACT**

It is often asserted that popular election of local government political officeholders guarantees good governance practices since elections ensure effective participation of the citizenry in local governance processes as well as effective accountability of the officers to the electorate. The failure of decentralization in developing countries to achieve rapid desired results is therefore seen as a result of the failure of governments to fully democratize local governance through direct or popular elections of its political officeholders. It is against this background that in Ghana, the outcry for the election of District Chief Executives (equivalent of Mayors) and Assembly members (councillors) has gathered momentum over the past decade. Using three Metropolitan Assemblies as a case study, the extent to which popular elections of Assembly members guarantee accountability of such officers and the participation of the electorates in local governance is examined. The study established that popular elections of Assembly members per se are incapable of guaranteeing accountability in local governance as accountability of officers for effective governance is dependent on a gamut of factors of which elections may be considered as only one of them. Effective accountability will require well-informed and discerning electorate, strong accountable independent institutions and non-ethnically divisive and polarized society.

Keywords:

**Keywords:** Direct elections, Political accountability, District Assemblies, Evolving democracies, District Chief Executives.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **Introduction**

In recent decades, decentralization reforms are being undertaken across the developing world to improve local governance through the introduction of institutions and systems intended to increase transparency and accountability in governance. Many development experts have noted that by bringing government closer to the people, decentralization places more and better information in the hands of public officials, increases the voice and participation of citizens in the governance process and improves accountability of public servants to citizens and therefore produce desirable outcomes (Blair, 2000; Crawford, 2009; Heywood, 2007; Schaeffer and Yilmaz, 2008; Debrah, 2009). Essentially, this means there are two principal components of decentralization in its democratic political aspect: that of participation and accountability. Participation involves the increasing role of citizens in choosing their local leaders and telling them what to do, thus providing inputs into local governance while accountability explains the degree to which local governments have to justify what they have done or failed to do.

The argument has been that open, fair, free universal and competitive elections at lower levels of government will translate into responsiveness and accountability of public officeholders in their decision-making processes and therefore good governance. This is because elections are considered retrospective tools and primarily, mechanisms for democratic accountability; shaping politicians' behaviour and returning them to office for producing good outcomes and throwing them out of office for producing bad ones. Thus, with elections, voters can retain or reject their governors or mayors; hence the success of decentralization is narrowed down to whether local politicians are elected or appointed. Indeed, in the view of some scholars, elections are synonymous with democracy and there cannot be democracy without elections (Janda et al, 2008: 33-37).

This argument of direct election of political officeholders being the hallmark of and a *sine qua non* for accountability and good governance in local government has gained widespread currency in developing countries. Central to the argument in Ghana is that direct and popular election of all the key political actors of the decentralized District Assemblies –Assembly members (AMs) and the District Chief Executives (DCEs) - will lead to the responsiveness and accountability of such officers in the management of the affairs of the Assemblies and therefore responsible good governance. Some scholars and advocates have therefore been relentless in pressing for democratic elections of the political officeholders (see Ayee, 2000; Crawford, 2004, 2009; Debrah, 2009). They maintain that the only way downward accountability of local government could be strengthened and achieved is by first, removing the presidential powers of appointment at all levels and establishing fully elected representative bodies at district and sub-district levels, and second, introducing competitive party politics at the local level by removing the current anomaly of partisan national elections and non-partisan local elections.

The pressure against the appointment principle has been unyielding, coming from across the whole political/social spectrum. Civil society organizations, the media, independent 'think tanks' and non-governmental research and advocacy organizations such as the Centre for Democratic Development (CDD), Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA), IMANI Ghana and other anti-graft agencies all continue to pile pressure for multi-party elections of DCEs and AMs in order to ensure accountability and citizen participation at the local level.

However, some other scholars are skeptical about the relationship between elections and accountability, and assert that the arguments are only deeply rooted in theory without any empirical examination of the direct relationship between the variables (Campos and Hellman, 2005:237; Adams, 2012:107; Escobar-Lemmon and Ross, 2014:175). Escobar-Lemmon and Ross point out that most works linking political decentralization to accountability are without rigorous testing of the relationship. On his part, Treisman (2002) in his study of 154 countries found that economic outcomes were independent of whether mayors were elected or appointed. O'Donnell's work (1998) in new democracies discounts that voters alone can sanction political officeholders and refers to the role of civil society organisations, social movements and the power of the media in exposing wrongdoing by bringing public officials' misdeeds to light, as being critical to promoting transparency and accountability in local governance especially between elections.

The above background discourse of the inconclusiveness of direct elections and the accountability nexus sets the context and parameters of this paper. It examines the relationship between direct elections and accountability in local governance in a developing country. Seventy percent of the members of the Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies (MMDAs) of Ghana are directly elected but after two and half decades of decentralization, fundamental questions still being asked are, whether these elected representatives pursue the interests of their constituents and whether ordinary citizens are able to hold them accountable for their decisions and actions. The paper thus examines whether or not elected AMs are responsive and accountable to citizens for their work as councillors.

The paper is organized in seven sections; after the introduction is a review of the literature underpinning accountability and section three is on local governance in Ghana. Section four describes the research methodology adopted for the study, and section five deals with the presentation and analyses of the empirical data. Section six contains the remarks on the policy direction as to the way forward with respect to political decentralization in Ghana and the conclusion on the political responsiveness and accountability of the main actors is in the last section.

### **Accountability in Governance**

Accountability means answerability: a duty to explain one's conduct and be open to criticism by another. Accountability requires that the duties, powers and functions of bodies be defined in such a way that performance can be easily monitored and evaluated (Heywood, 2007:418). In this sense, accountability implies some form of external control and can operate only in a context of constitutionalism and respect for rules. Thus this has led to the argument that popular elections are the means to improve accountability and responsiveness of local governments.

The term "accountability" comes from Latin; *acomptare* (to account), a prefixed form of *computare* (to calculate), which in turn is derived from *putare* (to reckon) (Wikipedia.com, 2013a). The business dictionary defines it as the obligation of the individual or organization to account for its activities, accept responsibility for them and to disclose the results in a transparent manner (businessdictionary.com). Moncrieffe distinguishes between *ex-ante* and *ex-post facto* forms of accountability (Debrah, 2009:280). The former is based on the concept of representation. It works on the principle that in order to act effectively in the citizens' interest, public officeholders must know what the interest of the people is and act to satisfy that interest. This can be done by engaging the electorate to ascertain what programs and decisions are important to citizens. For its part, the *ex-post* accountability refers to holding elected officials to account through the law, other monitoring and sanctioning mechanisms and ultimately through elections (*ibid*). This occurs in representative democracies where citizens hold judgment over their representatives through periodic elections where an unsatisfactory conduct or performance of an elected official is rejected and replaced with favourable alternatives.

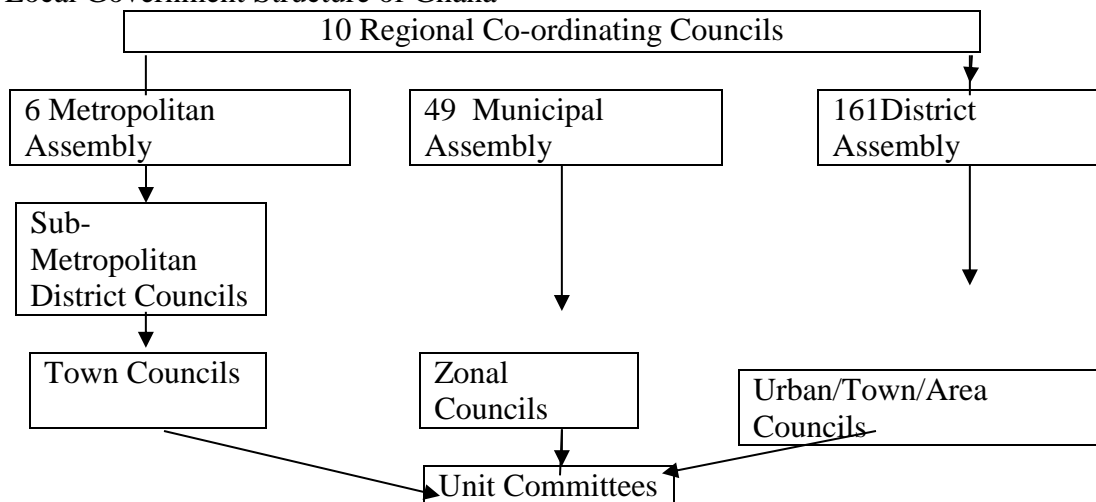
Escobar-Lemmon and Ross (2014) refer to these *ex-ante* and *ex-post* forms as answerability and enforceability forms of accountability. They consider answerability as the obligation of public officials to inform and to explain what they are doing, while enforcement is the capacity of

accounting agencies to impose sanctions on power holders who have violated their public duties; subjecting power to the threat of sanctions and obliging it to be exercised in transparent ways.

### Ghana's Local Governance Structure

Local governance in Ghana has had a chequered history dating back to the colonial times with the Native Authorities System, but the reforms of 1988 were the great watershed of the current democratic local governance system. Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies (MMDAs)<sup>1</sup> were created as basic units of local governance and primarily responsible for the implementation of development policies and programs. The reforms were designed to devolve authority to the district level and to promote popular grassroots or citizen participation in the administration from the stand points of planning, implementation, monitoring and the efficient delivery of services to the people (MLGRD, 1996; Ahwoi, 2000).

Fig.1 Local Government Structure of Ghana



Source: Adapted from MLGRD: 1996

The 216 Assemblies are the highest political and administrative authorities in the districts with deliberative, legislative and executive powers<sup>2</sup>, designed to promote not only democracy, but more importantly as agents of development. At the grassroots level of the sub-structures are the Unit Committees which form the base structure of the local government system and are comprised of small settlements or groups of settlements (See Fig 1).

Ghana practices the mayor-council system of local governance which is based on a separation of powers between an appointed DCE (mayor) wielding executive power and an elected/appointed

<sup>1</sup>A District Assembly is the generic term for the basic units of local administration; they are styled variously as Metropolitan, Municipal or District Assemblies in reflection to population and development status. A Metropolitan Assembly should have a minimum population of 250,000, Municipal; 95,000 and a District Assembly; 75,000.

<sup>2</sup> Article 241 (3) of the 1992 Constitution

Assembly (council) with legislative and budget approving powers. The composition of an Assembly is therefore made up of the DCE, the two categories of AMs<sup>3</sup> and member/s of Parliament from the constituencies within the district who are non-voting members. The first category of 70 per cent is elected from each local government electoral area within the district by universal adult suffrage. The other 30% which is meant to create access to skills and expertise and ensure representation of certain local interest groups are appointed by the President (Thomi, 2000).

Elections to the DAs and corresponding sub-district institutions are organized by an independent Electoral Commission on the basis of a non-partisan ballot. The elections are based on the first-past-the-post or the plurality system and the AMs are elected as individuals and not representatives of political parties<sup>4</sup> for a four-year-term and may stand for re-election for any number of terms. The founding elections were held in 1989 and the last elections were held in March 2011. The next elections which were scheduled for March 2015 had to be cancelled by the Supreme Court until the Constitutional Instrument regulating the elections was properly passed by Parliament. After an election the DA elects a Presiding Member from amongst its members (both elected and appointed) and he convenes and presides over the meetings of the Assembly.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This study investigates citizens participation and political accountability in local governance; the ex-ante responsiveness and ex-post accountability of the elected AMs to the constituents and citizenry for the actions and policy decisions that they take in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution and the Local Government Act, 1993 (Act 462). The field study was undertaken in three out of the six Metropolitan Assemblies in the country representing the northern, middle and southern sectors of the country. The Tamale Metropolis (TMA) with a population of 371,351 and the Kumasi Metropolitan Assembly (KMA) with a population of 1,848,614 were purposely chosen because they are the only metropolitan assemblies in the northern and middle belts of the country respectively. The Sekondi-Takoradi Metropolitan (STMA) Assembly with a population of 559,548<sup>5</sup> was however randomly selected from four others to represent the southern belt.

The data was drawn from interviews with the electorates, AMs and local government officials. The survey for the KMA and STMA was conducted between February and April 2011 while that of TMA was between March and April 2014. The KMA has a total of 97 AMs, made up of 60 elected, 27 appointed and 10 Members of Parliament (MPs).<sup>6</sup> The STMA has 76 members (49 elected, 23 appointed and four MPs) while the TMA has 59 members (39 elected, 18 appointed and two MPs). Using semi-structured questionnaires, empirical data were collected from key local government stakeholders' and randomly selected electorate interviewees in the selected

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<sup>3</sup>Article 242 and Section 5(1) of the Constitution and Act 462 respectively provide for the composition of the MMDAs

<sup>4</sup>Article 248 and Section 7 of the Constitution and Local Government Act, 1993 (Act 462) respectively

<sup>5</sup>The figures are from the 2010 Population Census and were obtained from the Ghana Statistical Service (GSS)

<sup>6</sup>MPs are ex-officio members of the District Assembly under which their constituencies fall. They have no vote but are expected to attend meetings and take part in debate.

assemblies through key informant interviews. The electorate, AMs and key officers of the Assemblies constituted the main survey participants and stakeholders.

A total of 771 stakeholders (electorates and AMs) were randomly selected from the three assemblies and interviewed through questionnaire. They included 690 voters (constituents or electorate) and 81 AMs (60 elected and 21 appointed). Of these, 300 constituents, 28 elected and nine (9) appointed AMs were selected from KMA, 210 constituents, 17 elected and six (6) appointed AMs selected from the STMA and 180 constituents, 15 elected and six (6) appointed AMs were selected from the TMA. In addition, discussions were held with the Metropolitan Chief Executives<sup>7</sup>, Presiding Members and Coordinating Directors<sup>8</sup> of the assemblies.

A combination of closed and open-ended questionnaire was administered to the voter-respondents who were given sometime to fill them for later collection. Those who could not fill them were assisted to do so. The areas covered by the questionnaire to the electorates covered whether or not AMs consult them for their views and concerns on local matters and issues pending before the assembly as the law requires, whether or not AMs brief them on the outcomes of the Assembly's deliberations on community and national issues, voters ability to discipline non-performing AMs and factors considered in electing or re-electing them. A different set of questionnaire was administered to the AMs based also on their accountability to their constituents.

## ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

### Citizen Participation and ex-ante accountability in the district assemblies

The Local Government Act, 1993 (Act 462) provide for citizen participation and ex-ante accountability of AMs in Section 16 (1). The relevant paragraphs provide: A member of a DA shall-

- (a) *maintain close contact with his electoral area, consult his people on issues to be discussed in the District Assembly and collate their views, opinions and proposals;*
- (b) *present the views, opinions and proposals to the District Assembly;*
- (d) *meet his electorate before each meeting of the Assembly;*
- (e) *report to his electorate the general decisions of the Assembly and its Executive Committee and the actions he has taken to solve problems raised by residents in his electoral area.*

This mandatory requirement is pivoted on participatory democracy. The regular meetings, interactions, discussions and reportage enable the electorate to demand accountability from the AM as to how well he represents their interests in the Assembly. Hence, the research sought views from both the electorate and the elected AMs themselves on whether or not the 70% elected representatives perform these duties and responsibilities in a participatory manner.

Evidence from the research shows that citizens are not engaged in the decision-making processes as provided for by law. On whether for the past two years the electorate had met with their elected AMs for their concerns/views to be collated, 79% (237 out of 300) of the 'electorate

<sup>7</sup> They are the Chief Executives (Mayors) of the Metropolitan Assemblies

<sup>8</sup> These are administrators and secretaries to the Assemblies

respondents' from the KMA answered in the negative. Only 10% had attended such a meeting with their elected AMs to discuss local matters and concerns. The same trend is recorded in the two other Assemblies. 76.2% and 65.1% of the electorate respondents from STMA and TMA respectively had never met their AMs at consultative meetings to discuss communities' problems to be presented to the Assemblies. From table 5.1a below, only a minority 18.1% of voters from STMA and 27.2% from TMA have attended such consultative meetings. 11%, 5.7% and 7.8% of voters from KMA, STM and TMA respectively cannot recall if such formal consultative meetings had ever taken place but nevertheless claim their views on certain matters had been sought at individual and personal levels.<sup>9</sup>

**Table 3.1a Has your AM since the last two years ever convened a meeting to discuss and solicit your views on community problems?**

	YES		NO		NO IDEA	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
KMA (N=300)	30	10	237	79	33	11
STMA (N=210)	38	18.1	160	76.2	12	5.7
TMA (N=180)	49	27.2	117	65.1	14	7.8
<b>Total (690)</b>	<b>117</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>514</b>	<b>74.5</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>8.6</b>

Source: Field study

From the statistics, 514 or 74.5% of the 690 respondents from the three Assemblies had never been called to any consultative meeting by their elected AMs to discuss community issues, only 17% did. It is thus obvious that citizens' participation in determining their preferences is being denied by their own elected AMs; participation thus starts and ends at the polls.

The electorates' views have been corroborated and confirmed by the elected AMs themselves. From Table 5.1b, of the 28 elected AMs interviewed from the KMA, 21 (75%) confirmed they had not been able to organize a meeting for the past two years. 71% of the STMA respondents and 60% of those from TMA also confirm their inability to do so. They attributed this ineptitude or failure to lack of funds, citing the absence of logistics and resources to meet demands when such meetings are called.

**Table 3.1b Have you since the past two years ever called a meeting of your constituents to discuss community's problems and to solicit their views?**

	YES		NO		NO IDEA	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
KMA (N=28)	6	21.4	21	75	1	3.6%
STMA (N=17)	5	29.4	12	70.6	0	0
TMA (N=15)	6	40	9	60	0	0
<b>Total (60)</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>28.3</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1.7</b>

Source: Field study

Overall, 70% (42 out of the 60 AMs) were yet to hold consultative meetings since the past two years. Only 28% had organized such meetings to engage their constituents in participatory

<sup>9</sup> This class of respondents was found to be highly educated and very influential in society.

discussions as required by law. The common excuses amongst them are complaints of lack of resources, logistics and funds, making it difficult for them to hold such meetings. Juxtaposing this with the fact that AMs are not paid salaries, then, it would seem, not much can be expected from them.

### Views of respondents on whether or not elected AMs continuously brief them on outcomes of Assemblies deliberations

An elected AM is by law also required to report to his electorate the general decisions of the assembly and its Executive Committee and the actions he/she has taken to *solve problems raised by residents in his/her electoral area*. This seeks to enforce compliance of the duties of the AM to the electorate as part of the answerability accountability. Section 16 (1)(e) of the Local Government Act, 1993 (Act 462) provides that an elected member of the Assembly *shall report to his electorate the general decisions of the Assembly and its Executive Committee and the actions he has taken to solve problems raised by residence in his electoral area*. This demands of the AMs electoral responsibilities, not only as messengers but a duty to ensure that the problems of the communities are solved. The survey (Table 3.2a) however showed even worst results than recorded in the consultative processes.

Overwhelming, 91% (273 out of 300), 88.6% (186/210) and 74.4% (134/180) of the electorates interviewed in the KMA, STMA and TMA respectively were emphatic there had never been any such *briefing meeting* with their elected AMs. This means for the past two years, community members have not been called to any meeting organized by the AMs to be briefed on the proceedings and outcomes of the Assemblies' meetings. On average 593 or 85.9% of the 690 respondents do not know of any such *briefing meetings*. Only 11.7% of the respondents claim there has been such meetings, while 2.3% have no idea whether such meetings have been called.

**Table 3.2a: Has your AM since the last two years convened a meeting to explain/brief you on decisions taken by the Assembly on the community's problems?**

	YES		NO		NO IDEA	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
KMA (N=300)	16	5.3	273	91	11	3.7
STMA (N=210)	21	10	186	88.6	3	1.4
TMA (N=180)	44	24.4	134	74.4	2	1.1
<b>Total (690)</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>11.7</b>	<b>583</b>	<b>85.9</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>2.3</b>

Source: Field study

The assertions of the electorate were corroborated by the AMs themselves as can be gleaned from Table 3.2b below. When asked whether for the past two years they had convened meetings to inform constituents the outcomes of assemblies' deliberations, 70% of the 60 AMs from the three Assemblies said they had not done so, but that they disseminated such information to citizens unofficially at various social forums such as at festivals and funerals. Therefore, reading tables 3.1a and b together with tables 3.2a, and b, there is no doubt that there has been a failure of the elected AMs to perform their statutorily provided ex-ante or answerability accountability towards the electorate. This failure means taking decisions and expending resources without inputs from those affected by those decisions, nor accounting for same.



**Table 3.2b: Have you since the past two years ever called a meeting of your constituents to discuss with them decisions of the Assembly?**

	YES		NO	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
KMA (N=28)	8	28.6	20	71.4
STMA (N=17)	5	29.4	12	70.6
TMA (N=15)	5	33.3	10	66.6
<b>Total (60)</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>70</b>

Source: Field study

### Ex-post Accountability of Elected Assembly members

Political officeholders must at all times answer for their stewardship to the electorate or those they serve, and periodically renew their mandates. Ex-post accountability is therefore the type of accountability leaders owe to their followers, public officials to taxpayers, and political officeholders to the electorates. Political accountability is secured or anchored on a system of elections that enable officials to hold officers accountable at the pleasure of voters (Debrah, 2009). In-between-elections also, the Act has provided two possible ways of holding incumbent AMs to account. Non-performing elected officials can be recalled through a complaint system and through referenda.

### Bringing complaints against an Elected Assembly member

A most remarkable feature of the local government system is the power of the electorate to discipline AMs while they are in office and to revoke the mandate of a representative before the end of his tenure of office. The framework for so holding AMs answerable is grounded in the Local Government Act, 1993 (Act 462). It provides in section 8(1) that a complaint could be lodged at the Assembly against an AM for his mandate to be revoked on the following grounds:

- (i) *if it is discovered that he/she is not a qualified candidate under the law; or*
- (ii) *if he has put himself in a conflict of interest situation by failing to disclose any financial interest he may have in a contract brought before the Assembly for consideration; or*
- (iii) *if he has absented himself from more than three consecutive ordinary meetings of the Assembly without a written permission of the Presiding Member (PM) of the Assembly.*<sup>10</sup>

Such a complaint will have to be investigated by an ad-hoc committee of the Assembly and any adverse findings shall then be subjected to debate and decided by a resolution of the Assembly as to quilt or otherwise. Many respondents interviewed from the three Assemblies had no knowledge of this provision on bringing AMs to account and could not have taken advantage of it if even they had concerns about the conduct of some AMs. Even the elite respondents who had

<sup>10</sup>Section 8 (c)- (f) of the Local Government Act, 1993 (Act 462)

knowledge argue that the final authority vested in the Assembly makes it most unlikely that any such complaint would succeed.

**Table 3.3: Are you aware that you can lodge a complaint against your AM for his possible removal?**

	YES		NO	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
KMA (N=300)	147	49	153	51
STMA (N=210)	123	58.6	87	41.4
TMA (N=180)	157	87.2	23	12.8
<b>Total (690)</b>	<b>427</b>	<b>61.9</b>	<b>263</b>	<b>38.1</b>

Source: Field study

From Table 3.3, 38.1% out of the 690 electorate interviewed are not even aware of the provision and over 47% of the 61.9% who know of the right to complain do not know of the procedure thereafter. The result is that the mechanism has never been used in any of the three study areas before, neither has the AMs themselves who are aware of this provision taken advantage to bring complaints against erring members.

### Recall of an Elected Assembly member through a referendum

Another mechanism for bringing elected AMs to account is by recall through referenda. Section 9 (1) of Act 462 provides:

- (i) For purpose of revoking the mandate of an elected member of a DA, 25% or more of registered voters in the electoral area may petition the Electoral Commission (EC) for the member's recall from the Assembly;
- (ii) On receipt of the petition, the EC would proceed to organize a referendum to decide the issue whether or not such member must be recalled;
- (iii) The issue of the referendum is decided by at least forty per cent of the registered voters in the electoral area voting, and sixty percent of the valid votes cast are required to effect the member's recall.

From Table 3.4, 42.3% out of the 690 electorates interviewed are not even aware of the provision and over 30% of those who know of the right to recall do not know of the procedure. The result is that no single electoral area has been able to commence proceedings for the revocation of the mandate of an AM for non-performance or mis-behaviour. Respondents who have knowledge of the procedure complained that the cumbersome legal procedure one has to go through to remove a non-performing AM has rendered the right to recall moot.

**Table 3.4: Are you aware that you can petition the Electoral Commission to remove your AM?**

	YES		NO	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
KMA (N=300)	153	51	147	49
STMA (N=210)	125	59.5	85	40.5
TMA (N=180)	120	66.7	60	33.3
<b>Total (690)</b>	<b>398</b>	<b>57.7</b>	<b>292</b>	<b>42.3</b>

Source: Field study

Admittedly, the procedure for disciplining non-performing leaders is so cumbersome and requirements so high and unrealistic that no foreseeable complaint is likely to succeed. Recall which otherwise should be an effective tool in disciplining erring AMs is in this case, an ineffective tool and non-performing AMs remain in office for the full term before being possibly removed at the general local elections.

### “Judgment Day Elections”: Replacing and re-electing Assembly members

The final ex-post accountability is located in] seeking the renewal of a mandate through re-election after the end of one’s tenure of office. However, due to the “negative Ghanaian style politics”; extreme ethnocentrism, vitriolic campaigns and tribal based politicking (the type Berman refers to as politics of uncivilized nationalism)<sup>11</sup>, have been stumbling blocks to effective account taking. In particular, the Ashanti and Ewe ethnic voting are such that objectivity and discernment in relections are completely lost in disciplining AMs who identify with the tribe and its preferred political party.

In interviews with the respondents for clarifications, it became apparent that majority of them select their preferred candidates base on ethnic and party affiliation, even though responses on the structured questionnaire showed otherwise. Respondents were asked to rank three criteria on how they elect their AMs from the given set below:

X1=I vote base on the tribe of the candidate, i.e., tribal/ethnic identification

X2= I vote base on family membership, i. e. family identification

X3=I vote for candidates who are humble and respectful

X4= I vote for one who gives me gifts

X5=I vote base on the competence of the candidate

X6= I vote for candidates who support my Political Party, i.e. party loyalty or identification

From Table 3.5a, 78% of the 300 respondents from Kumasi said they vote base on competence, 67% vote for candidates who are humble and respectful and 38% on party affiliation. From STMA, 89% of the 210 respondents vote base on competence, 61.4% vote for candidates who are humble and respectful and 21% vote on party affiliation. The table also shows that 81.1% of the 180 Tamale electorate vote for competence, 78.3% for humble and respectful candidates and 71.1% on party affiliation. Thus respondents were unanimous in their rankings. The electorate ranked competence first (82.2%), followed by ‘humble and respectful’ consideration (68.3%) and the third factor of influence being party affiliation of the candidate (41.5%). The tribe, family or benefits received were not considered as prerequisite factors influencing voter behaviour.

**Table 3.5a: On what basis do you vote to select your AM for the area?**

	X1		X2		X3		X4		X5		X6	
	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%
KMA	39	13	21	7	201	67	3	1	234	78	114	38

<sup>11</sup> Berman, B.J. (1998) Ethnicity, Patronage and the African State: the Politics of Uncivil Nationalism: In *Oxford Journals of Social Sciences*, African Affairs, Vol.97, Issue 388.

N=300 STMA	12	5.7	23	10.9	129	61.4	2	0.9	187	89	44	21
N=210 TMA	10	5.6	32	17.8	141	78.3	77	42.7	146	81.1	128	71.1
N=180 <b>Total 690</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>8.4</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>471</b>	<b>68.3</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>11.9</b>	<b>567</b>	<b>82.2</b>	<b>286</b>	<b>41.5</b>

Source: Field study

*Prima facie*, the statistics suggest a mark of objectivity demonstrated by well-informed, discerning and unbiased voters. Regrettably however, there is more to the figures than they appear. Further probing showed that the responses were a ‘fluke’, a façade. Voters were being untruthfulness, disingenuous, hypocritical and economical with the truth as the results in Table 3.5b show. In the opinion of this writer, Table 3.5b below reflects and represents the true position as to how the electorates in the three districts vote to elect their AMs. The table shows responses when they were asked to rank only three criteria which they perceive other people vote for their candidates.

X1= People vote base on the tribe of the candidate, i.e., tribal/ethnic identification

X2= People vote base on family membership, i. e. family identification

X3=People vote for candidates who are humble and respectful

X4= People vote for one who gives them gifts

X5=People vote base on the competence of the candidate

X6= People vote on basis of party loyalty or identification

The responses in all study areas clearly exposed the untruthfulness of respondents in their earlier responses. 65.7% and 51.7% of respondents from Kumasi believe people vote along political and tribal/family lines respectively. Only 7.0% thought people vote on competence. The Table further shows that 58.1% and 68.9% from STMA and TMA respectively believe people vote base on the political factor. The tribal/family factors also came up strongly. In total, 443 (64.2%) out of the 690 respondents believe voting proceeds along political lines, and 321 (46.5%) believe voting at local elections are tribal/family based. Only 11% of the respondents believe people are discerning and vote for competence.

**Table 3.5b: On what basis do you think other people vote to select their AMs?**

	X1		X2		X3		X4		X5		X6	
	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%
KMA N=300	95	31.7	60	20.0	9	3.0	31	10.0	21	7.0	197	65.7
STMA N=210	45	21.4	28	13.3	8	3.8	24	16.5	10	4.8	122	58.1
TMA N=180	72	40.0	21	11.7	45	25.0	1	0.6	45	25.0	124	68.9
<b>Total 690</b>	<b>212</b>	<b>30.7</b>	<b>109</b>	<b>15.8</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>8.12</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>443</b>	<b>64.2</b>

Source: Field study

A close examination of the two sets of responses in Tables 3.5 (a) and (b) above evokes serious questions deserving close scrutiny. Why would one base his/her voting decisions on competence and good character, but believes that others do not do same, but rather base their decisions on political and tribal factors? To this author, it is clear and obvious that the responses with respect to how others vote, actually mirror and reflect how the respondents themselves vote. It leaves no doubt that elections at the local level are driven by ethnic/tribal considerations as well as politics which are based on tribal lines anyway. This is because it is easier for the respondents to hide the truth of tribal politicking of themselves (because of its non-objectivity and therefore negativity) but could easily ascribe it to others.

The ethnic and party affiliation factors were confirmed when the election of the incumbent AMs was examined. A total 26 of the 28(92.1%) elected AMs interviewed from Kumasi are indigenes and known members or supporters of the New Patriotic Party, the Party in opposition and which has Kumasi as its support base. On the other hand, 11 out of the 15 (73.3%) elected AMs interviewed from Tamale, a strong hold of the National Democratic Congress are known members of the party and are also indigenes.

### **Do Elections in local governance necessarily lead to citizens' participation, downward accountability of officeholders and pro-poor development?**

Elections are seen as the first stage in democratization, influencing the development of parties, and linking citizens to their leaders. They are expected to foster political accountability and responsiveness which should then trigger off efficient service delivery and pro-poor development. Ghana embarked on decentralisation based on the elective principle of 'councillors' since 1998 but is yet to experience the long taunted participation and accountability theories. There is very little participation and involvement of citizens in the Assemblies affairs as seen from tables 5.1a and 5.1b. Both electorate and the elected councillors agree that there have not been effective consultations, and per tables 5.2a and 5.2b, both categories of respondents agree that elected AMs do not brief citizens on decisions arrived at by the Assemblies. This is very significant and rebuts the argument (at least in emerging democracies) that elections automatically ensure citizens' participation and officers' responsiveness in decentralization processes.

On accountability, it has been shown that elected AMs are not accountable and citizens have not been able to hold them to account. They can neither discipline elected AMs through the complaints system nor through recall elections. Even so-called 'judgment day elections' are unable to effectively hold the councillors to account as voters largely proceed on tribal and negative partisan basis.

### **ACHIEVING DECENTRALIZED ACCOUNTABILITY AND DEVELOPMENT: THE WAY FORWARD IN EVOLVING DEMOCRACIES**

Citizen participation in local political and governance processes is without doubt an effective mechanism for local development; what is doubtful is whether merely electing principal officeholders especially the DCEs guarantees effective participation and accountability in the processes. The ability to promote democratic local governance in any particular country context

must have in mind the country's political history, economy and culture. Each country context is distinct and evolving democracies should particularly fashion and develop their own local democratic systems since political cultures vary greatly even though the broader goal remains the same. Political accountability should never be at the expense of nationalism, peace, growth and development. Therefore, a policy mix of elections and appointments is desirable. This paper is part of a larger effort to contribute to the discussion on democratization and local governance accountability in developing and emerging democracies.

In Schaeffer and Yilmaz's (2008) view, local governance is fundamentally an argument about improving the process of governance in terms of tax spending, service provision and local preferences. For Hague and Harrop (2004:242), it is to provide local public services such as refuse collection and to implement national welfare policies. This being so, communities will measure the success of local democracy by the local government's ability to improve their quality of lives by addressing perceived social needs and improving basic public services such as dealing with sanitation, primary health care, basic education, public security, public utilities, environmental protection and judicious and efficient, non-corrupt use of local resources. The following recommendations are therefore necessary for sustainable democracy and rural development.

#### **Assembly members should work full time: continue to elect the majority on non-partisan basis, and appoint a few to complement**

The current practice of assembly members working part-time on *pro bono* basis must give way for full time. Though it is expensive to engage the over 6,448 AMs nationwide on salaries, the assemblies should find the resources to be able to attract the right calibre of people. Also, the Ghanaian politics of uncivilized nationalism of tribalistic nature, often overly acrimonious at the national level, should never be allowed at the local level where national policies can be held 'hostage' when opposition political parties take control of their traditional territories as chief executives. The non-partisan local government system notwithstanding its difficulties provides opportunities to throw up skilled but maverick candidates whose priority is the people and the state and not political orientations.

As a developing nation with a young emerging democracy faced with high levels of illiteracy, poverty and ethnic divide, there is also the need for some appointments to ensure the injection of critical skills in the assemblies; technocrats, professionals, skilled and experienced people who often do not avail themselves for elections at the local level. Until the major institutional bottlenecks are removed to incentivize professionals into the Assemblies, popular elections merely for the sake of accountability will lead to retrogression of the system, since the lack of professionals could constitute a barrier to effective and efficient development management.

#### **DCEs should go through indirect elections by the Assemblies or by the people**

In decentralizing in emerging democracies and economies, a delicate balance ought to be struck between the central government control and local autonomy in the selection of the mayor. Ghana's local government is organized along the mayor-council system which is based on the separation of powers between an appointed mayor and an elected/appointed council. To satisfy

the quest for an elective mayor while ensuring the equilibrium or balance of power between the centre and the assemblies, it is the view of this author that two gateways are possible and either can be pursued.

First, DCEs could be indirectly elected by the Assemblies either from amongst themselves or from persons outside who are qualified. This system has been tested for ages and still exists in most parts of the advanced economies including Canada, Spain, Bulgaria and England (Wikipedia.com. 2013b). The vast majority of councils' mayors in England continue to be indirectly elected despite the 2000 reforms that allow councils to directly elect mayors if so desired (ibid). The view that direct elections hold the dangers of electing mayors whose popularity obscure their inadequacy in leading their communities or **electing demagogues who may make populist but problematic promises** in order to win elections seem to be the guiding principle governing these developed countries.

Alternatively, the President could recommend some preferred but qualified candidates for election through universal adult suffrage as an alternative method, since for now, direct election of mayors can encourage dangerous opportunistic behaviour by state and local officials, which opportunism can undermine macroeconomic stability. Devolution ought to be gradual rather than revolutionary.

### **Amendments of Act 462 are necessary to make accountability of officeholders real**

The relevant provisions of the law regarding accountability of public officers (both elected and appointed) need some amendments to make the procedures easier. The complaints procedures are very ineffective in their current form. The recall mechanism also needs amendment. A second look at the 40% voter turnout and 60% "Yes vote" requirements at referenda are critical. Finally, the law needs an amendment to provide for compulsory Town Hall Meetings as a way of engaging the people in discussions and approval of budgets and major projects undertaken by the Assemblies. Such meetings educate people on tax responsibilities, how monies are expended and major developments that are expected to be undertaken by the assemblies during the year. They also provide the platform to hold officeholders to account (see Adolwine, 2014).

### **CONCLUSION**

In response to the commonly held view that political officeholders could be held accountable for their decisions and actions if they are popularly elected by the electorate, as well as the international community's call for countries to democratize, the developing world have been pursuing decentralization reforms with greater dispersal of central powers to lower levels, and increasingly relying on elections as a solution to their governance and developmental problems. This paper has however demonstrated that direct local elections do not necessarily guarantee citizen participation and downward accountability of officeholders unless other equally important instruments exist. Elected assembly members do not engage the communities in a participatory manner and are not responsive to their needs. Neither are they answerable for the decisions they take, yet also, accountability cannot be enforced.

That the MMDAs must account to the people as custodians of resources is not in doubt. Neither is there any doubt about the importance of promoting elections, but to argue that elections of public officeholders is the panacea to good governance, local development and service provision, on the basis that it guarantees accountability of such officeholders for their actions, is tantamount to prescribing a simple solution to a complex problem. Transparency and downward accountability in operations of political actors must be complemented with horizontal and vertical accountability to be able to achieve the desired participation, responsiveness and growth. Through horizontal accountability, checks and balances offered through auditing and financial accounting, investigative commissions, pluralistic media, anti-graft or corruption agencies and the judicial system constitute essential fiscal mechanisms for ensuring transparency and accountability in local government. Thus, to be effective accountability must be comprehensive and must include mechanisms (formal and informal), that combine politics with competence to ensure democracy and development.

It is thus the view of this paper that good governance at the local level is achieved only when qualified and experienced people undertake the art of governance regulated by a well-crafted legal regime, and strong and well-resourced institutions are developed to supervise. Far-reaching political reforms at the local level are necessary before the introduction of full scale popular democracy at the local level. Until this is done, its introduction will exacerbate problems and become retrogressive rather than progressive. The developing world must heed the advice of Hoffman and Metzroth (2010) that incremental rather than transformational decentralization is what is required for democracy and development in evolving democracies such as Ghana's.

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