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THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TRADITIONAL AUTHORITIES AND DECENTRALIZED STRUCTURES IN GHANA: CONFLICTING ROLES OR A STRUGGLE FOR POWER AND LEGITIMACY

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This paper uses the Wenchi District as a case study to generate a nuanced understanding of the interactive process between decentralized government structures and traditional authority in the context of Ghana's highly touted democratic achievements within the African continent. Qualitative methods involving focus group discussions of 159 males and 98 females aged between 18 to 72 years in 8 communities were used to facilitate insightful discussions and reflections. The focus group discussions (FGDs) were complemented with key informant interviews ($n = 8$) and direct observations. Using grounded theory, the results reveal that the interaction between traditional authorities and government decentralized institutions within Ghana's emerging democracy are characterized by competition for power and legitimacy. This has led to mistrust and the inability to take advantage of the potentially synergistic effects between the two systems of local governance for accelerated development. Furthermore, the findings reveal that a predominant culture of fear of authority within different hierarchical levels, is stifling genuine participation, further reinforcing a lack of accountability by authorities from both sides. We conclude that if decentralization policies are to be effective in Ghana, it may be

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imperative for government to strive for more open governance processes that are capable of blending the traditional systems with the emerging democratic dispensation depending on the context.

Keywords: Decentralization; traditional authorities; culture; power; legitimacy; accountability.

1. Introduction

There is growing global interest in decentralization "because of its identification with such benefits like popular participation, accountability, responsiveness, effectiveness, equity and stability" (Ayee, 1994, 11). Yet, there is a growing recognition that decentralization takes place within a particular political and socio-cultural context, and therefore may evolve differently in each context (Bankauskaite and Saltman, 2007; Craft, 2003; Crook, 2003; Dauda, 2006). Unfortunately, such contextual issues and how they affect the functioning and outcomes of public institutions, particularly decentralization has not attracted sufficient research attention. Indeed, some scholars have noted that the political culture and public administration in many African countries, including Ghana, have relied greatly on Western models, in terms of both vocabulary and practice, without adapting such models to reflect the local culture and socio-economic context, thus making the practice of such 'contextless' administrative and political systems problematic (Bankauskaite and Saltman, 2007; Jain, 2007; Lauer, 2007; Umeh and Andranovich, 2005). According to Oyugi (2000) poor performance of decentralization in many Sub-Saharan African countries point to the poor design of decentralization programmes, particularly the imitative nature of decentralization initiatives, which fail to take into consideration the prevailing socio-cultural and political environment.

The discourse surrounding the poor functioning of the district assemblies such as those in Ghana, often overlooks the social processes that characterize the interactions among various actors in the decentralization process. Indeed, scholarly studies on implications of social interactions on decentralization outcomes are extremely rare. It is this grey area that this article seeks to make a contribution. This study therefore seeks to generate deeper understanding of the interactive processes between the government's decentralized structures and traditional authority in Wenchi district as a basis to explore the best arrangement for effective participation of chiefs in the decentralization process. Specifically, the study seeks to assess the nature and quality of linkages and interactions between the district assembly structures and traditional authority system in Wenchi district as well as the development implications of such interactive processes.

In the rest of the paper, we present the theoretical context of the study, followed by a description of the study methods. The results are then presented with some discussion followed by conclusions and recommendations.

1.1. *The concept of decentralization and its promise of good governance*

Decentralization remains a complex and nebulous concept, as different authors writing from different perspectives have attributed different meanings to the term (Visser, 2005; Saltman *et al.*, 2007). Nevertheless, decentralization is generally understood as the transfer of authority and power for public planning, management and administration, from central government to lower levels of government, or from national to sub-national levels (Ribot, 2002a; Crawford, 2004; Saltman *et al.*, 2007), or from central government to sub-ordinate or quasi-independent government organizations or the private sector (Rondinelli, 1981; Smith, 2001; Rondinelli, 2006). Depending on the nature of power transferred from central government to lower levels, various forms of decentralization may be identified. However, there is little agreement in the literature as to the different characteristics and forms of decentralization. Nevertheless, Rondinelli's model, of decentralization with four types, namely; deconcentration, devolution, delegation and privatization has been utilized extensively to conceptualize issues related to decentralization (Bankauskaite and Saltman, 2007; Kaufman, 1997; Tuner, 2005; UNDP, 1997).

Democratic decentralization is often associated with good governance (Katseli, 2005; Saito, 2008; Smith, 2003; World Bank, 2005). The link between decentralization and deepening of democracy is based on the assumption that decentralization will bring governance closer to the people at the local level and thus provide better opportunities for local residents to participate in decision-making and be able to hold their elected representatives accountable (Smith, 2003). Similarly, it is perceived that devolution of power to the local level can promote rural development and poverty reduction, since it allows the state apparatus to be more exposed to the local context and therefore more responsive to local needs, thereby improving efficiency of resource allocation (Ribot, 2002b; Robinson, 2007; Smith, 2003).

Nevertheless, the literature on decentralization points to weak correlation between democratic decentralization and the anticipated virtues of good governance and economic development. For example, despite great strides in decentralization in Columbia and Brazil in terms of devolving power to local democratically elected bodies, these countries have achieved relatively little in the way of poverty reduction or reducing regional disparities (Crook and Sverrisson, 2001). Manor's (1999) conclusions about experiences in Bolivia, India and Bangladesh are equally pessimistic. Similar negative conclusions on decentralization in Uganda are drawn by Francis and James (2003). Ada-molekun (1999, 58), who did extensive work on public administration in

Africa, reported that despite several years of implementing decentralization by some African Countries like Uganda, Kenya, Côte d'Ivoire, Nigeria, and Ghana, "there are no real success stories as far as improved development performance at the local level is concerned." Blunt and Tuner (2005) have emphasized how decentralization can be shaped, positively or negatively, by existing local institutions, as well as the prevailing social system, values and cultural traditions. Unfortunately, such contextual issues and how they affect the functioning and outcomes of decentralization have not attracted sufficient attention in scholarly studies. This paper uses a case study from the Wenchi District of Ghana to make a contribution to the burgeoning literature in this regard.

1.2. *Perspectives of decentralization in Ghana and the changing role of chiefs*

1.2.1. *The Pre-Colonial Era*

It is apparent from a historical perspective that major chieftaincy institutions have never functioned as a parallel system in isolation from the state structure. Rather, the way the systems have interacted has been crucial for the potential for inter-ethnic conflict. During pre-colonial times, the chieftaincy institution was the mechanism for maintaining social order and stability. Consequently, the functions of the chief in the pre-colonial era have been an amalgamation of different roles such as those of a military, religious, administrative, legislative, economic and cultural custodian (Abotchie, 2006; Ray, 2003). The pre-colonial indigenous administration had elements of decentralization as there was hierarchy of positions from the paramount chief to the village chief with considerable autonomy to take some decisions pertaining to their areas of jurisdiction (Abotchie, 2006; Gyekye, 1997).

Abotchie (2006) observed that the pre-colonial indigenous administration in cephalous societies in Ghana was bureaucratic, in that there were highly formalized systems or procedures within the hierarchy of chiefs. However, the traditional bureaucracy had elements of decentralization and participation of citizens which are not often present in industrial or modern bureaucracy. Furthermore, there was wide scope for adult participation in decision-making in the traditional bureaucracy, as issues like village projects and settlement of cases were often decided through open forum, debates, and consensus building (Abotchie, 2006; Ray, 2003). Consequently, the functions of the chief was an amalgamation of different roles such as those of a military, religious, administrative, legislative, economic and cultural custodian (Abotchie, 2006; Ray, 2003).

1.2.2. *The Colonial Period*

The colonial and post-colonial state has mediated the power of the chiefs, both challenging their authority and influence (Boafo-Arthur, 2006; Ray,

1996) and selectively strengthening their control. During the colonial era, the British introduced the policy of indirect rule which used chiefs to maintain law and order in their locality on behalf of the colonial government, as well as given powers to establish treasuries through taxes; appoint staff and perform local government functions like passing by-laws relating to local matters (Ayee, 1994; Nkrumah, 2000). Chiefs also used part of the taxes to undertake some local development projects like schools and health centres, thus making chiefs directly involved in local governance and rural development (Ayee, 1994; Nkrumah, 2000). Even though indirect rule granted a lot of power to chiefs in local governance and development, it also led to the gradual erosion of the respect and confidence among some of the citizens for their chiefs, who were seen as agents of the colonial authority and adopting unfamiliar practices, like the use of autocratic leadership style in the service of this colonial authority (Ninsin and Drah, 1987; Nkrumah, 2000; Tutu II, 2004).

In the cultural milieu that came to comprise the Gold Coast, chieftaincy had varied meanings; and those meanings changed over time. Some chiefs were largely ritual figures; others combined spiritual roles with extensive temporal powers. They provided an ideological justification of their power by an astute reification of 'custom' and especially 'customary law'. These they successfully presented as the only legitimate, 'natural' systems which governed the control of land, of marriage, succession and the 'constitutions' under which chiefs ruled. Chieftaincy as an institution became less easy to control and to regulate. While the new Local Government structure, which was ushered in from the end of 1951, was to be dominated by elected Local Councils, the nominees of Chiefs' councils were to enjoy 30% of the seats on those councils (Ayee, 1994; Rathbone, 2000b). Importantly, chiefs were to lose direct access to their old sources of revenue such as rents, concession royalties and local imposts. Local Councils were now charged with the collection of these rents and taxes and were required to make allocation for Chiefs and Chiefs' Councils by agreement. Ironically, "it was a government dominated by Africans which was now putting traditional rulers under the kind of control advocated by Lord Hailey in the late 1930s and which he had lamented that the colonial regimes had been too craven or weak to come up with" (Rathbone, 2000a, 130).

1.2.3. *Post-Colonial Era*

After independence in 1957, the Nkrumah regime adopted the single tier structure of local government, which took the form of city, municipal, urban or local councils. In the short term, President Nkrumah maintained the composition of the local councils as two-thirds elected and one-third nominated to represent the chiefs (Ayee, 1994). However, under the Local Government Act of 1961, he changed the one-tier local government structure to a four-tier one, comprising regional councils, district councils, municipal/urban

or local councils, as well as town/village development committees. Furthermore, chiefs were banned from participating in local government (Apter, 1970; Ayee, 1994). The participation of chiefs in local governance was, however, restored after the overthrow of Nkrumah in 1966, with one-third of local government units being nominated to represent the chief and two-thirds being made up of elected members.

This composition of local government was maintained by subsequent governments until the Rawlings coup d'etat of December 1981 and his government of the Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC) stopped formal representation of chiefs in the District Councils/Assemblies. This situation has prevailed until now (Ayee, 1994; Nkrumah, 2000; Crawford, 2004). Despite various attempts by past governments, particularly the Nkrumah and Rawlings' PNDC regimes, to weaken the chieftaincy institution, its ability to survive these political pressures is a reflection of the resilience of this institution which is a force that cannot be dismissed in contemporary local governance (Boafo-Arthur, 2006; Ray, 2003).

1.3. *Current local government structure in Ghana*

Even though traditional authority in Ghana finds expression in different forms like religious leadership, custodians of earth shrines (tindaana), lineage headship and chieftaincy, the chieftaincy institution is the dominant form of traditional authority (Assimeng, 1996; Ray, 2003) and will therefore be the focus of this article. We use 'chief' to refer to traditional authority in this article (Ray, 2003, 2). The current highest chieftaincy institution, the National House of Chiefs, was created by the 1971 Chieftaincy Act introduced under the broadly pro-chief Busia government and reaffirmed by the 1992 Constitution. The 1992 Constitution sought to insulate the institution from the state in order to ensure the political neutrality and hence survival and prestige of chieftaincy. It forbade the state appointment of chiefs (Article 270, Paragraph 2a) and the active participation of chiefs in party politics (276, 1) and conferred on the National House of Chiefs the right of recognition of any chief which had previously rested with the state (270, 3b) (Constitution of the Republic of Ghana, 1992). The legal framework that guides Ghana's recent decentralization process is rooted in Chapter 20 of the 1992 Constitution of Ghana. Other legal provisions that guide Ghana's decentralization process include the Local Government Act of 1993 and the subsequent Local Government Establishment Instrument of 1994. These legal provisions seek to promote popular participation in the decision-making process, good governance and development at local level. Consequently, a four-tier structure of decentralization was adopted, starting at the grassroots with a Unit Committee for every community or settlement with a population of about 500 to

1000 in rural areas, and of 1,500 people for urban areas. The other sub-district structure, depending on the population size, is the Urban Council, where the population is over 15,000 people or the Zonal/Town/Area Council where the population is between 5,000 and 15,000. Central to Ghana's decentralization programme is the Metropolitan/Municipal/District Assembly. Above the District Assemblies is the Regional Coordinating Council (RCC) which is to co-ordinate and harmonize the programmes of the District Assemblies within their jurisdiction.

Crucial to the impact of the institutions of chieftaincy and of chiefs is the way that traditional authority is currently being conceptualised. Both Ghanaian academic writing on the future of chieftaincy (Boafo-Arthur, 2006) and its modern institution-holders emphasise the role of 'progressive' chiefs in community development projects. Similarly, their oft-cited role as guardians of tradition is envisioned as decidedly instrumental, weeding out traditions considered impractical and immoral and preserving those considered morally uplifting and culturally appealing to outsiders as well as group members, what Lentz has called 'a kind of local 'folklore'' (1998, 420). Chiefs are seen as a mediating link between state and people, representing their people symbolically, as their 'grandfather' or 'Nana', rather than democratically — the image of the family bond an important element in how this representation may easily become ethnicised.

The sphere of chieftaincy is popularly understood as de-politicised, a view in keeping with the colonial conception of chieftaincy as closely parallel to European monarchic systems, which historically 'evolved' to be neutral. Since chiefs are perceived as standing for the unity of their communities they must not be 'partisan' (Lentz, 1998) yet they are expected to lobby the government for state development projects, which brings them into close relationship with political actors. The development of such links means that one party is often identified as being more supportive of the interests of the group that the chief represents, whether this is an ethnic community or an intra-ethnic subgroup such as a royal family or gate, leading to the interpretation of political events in terms of salient conflict narratives. Such tendencies are reinforced by Ghana's multi-party system of government and opposition (Lentz, 2002).

The current district assembly structure in Ghana has no link with traditional authorities like chiefs, despite the influential position of chiefs, particularly in rural areas. The closest chiefs come to being included is through the nomination of one-third of assembly members by the President in consultation with chiefs. Where the quality of consultation is poor, then traditional authorities are effectively eliminated from the decentralization process. Yet, article 270 of the 1992 Constitution of Ghana recognizes the position of the chieftaincy institution and guarantees the existence of traditional councils according to customary law. This has created a kind of

parallel governance system at the district level; namely, the District Assemblies and the traditional authorities both vying for power, resource control and recognition. In the process, the loyalties of community members are torn between the District Assembly and the traditional authorities. Indeed, Ray (2003) reports of the divided sovereignty of many Ghanaians as they are both citizens of the state and subjects of their chiefs.

2. Methodology

2.1. *Study area*

Wenchi district is located in the Western part of the Brong Ahafo region of Ghana. It lies within latitudes 7° 30′ and 8° 05′ North and longitudes 2° 15′ West and 1° 55' East. The estimated population of the District is about 68, 400 (Ghana Districts, 2011). Wenchi district was chosen for this research because it is one of the oldest local government units in Ghana and therefore has well established district structures and traditional authority systems. Also, Wenchi district has both urban and rural characteristics, which allowed the study to benefit from an enriched understanding of the interactive processes between decentralized structures and traditional authorities in both urban and rural settings.

2.2. *Data collection*

Since this paper seeks to explore the development implications of the complex socio-cultural context that underpins the interplay of decentralized structures and the traditional authority system, it was found appropriate to employ qualitative research methods. This helped to generate deeper insights on the perceptions and expectations the various actors have about one another as well as their values and thinking processes which influence their behavior towards one another. Consequently, the interpretative methodological approach (Cohen and Crabtree, 2006; Burgoyne, 2009) was adopted as it is more effective in eliciting the complex multiple realities, which are socially constructed, by different people based on the prevailing social context (Pottier, 2003; Briggs, 2005; Holland and Campbell, 2006). Data collection took place from March 1, 2008 to May 31, 2008. Community entry in each of the eight selected villages was initiated by consulting the paramount chief and his elders. This was followed by focus group discussions with the divisional and village chiefs and their elders as well as Unit Committee members (elected officials) and a cross section of community members in eight villages, namely; Awisa, Nchira, Agubie, Ayigbe, Wurumpo, Buoko, Nkonsia, and Koase.

Four data collection instruments were used in this study: focus group discussions (FGDs), in-depth interviews (IDIs) with key informants, matrix

development and linkage maps. The use of the aforementioned instruments was iterative rather than linear. For instance, although matrix development and drawing of linkage maps took place after FDGs and IDIs, the researchers and participants had to refer to keys ideas and concepts that emerged in FGDs in a back and forth manner during the linkage map sessions.

The use of FGDs was to ensure that the findings were subjected to debates and dialogue towards consensus among the group members, particularly those with conflicting views and interpretations of some of the sensitive issues under investigation. This is based on the ontological position that the outer world is objectively given but subjectively represented in the human mind. Social reality is hence viewed and interpreted differently by different people based on their world view and life experiences, and there is a need for negotiated knowledge production and contextualization of such knowledge (Pottier, 2003; Briggs, 2005; Holland and Campbell, 2006). Besides, the FGDs promoted cross fertilization of ideas through the debates and encouraged participation thereby generating more insightful information (Lund, Livingstone and Parshall, 1996; Kid, 2000). Additionally, Kitzinger (1995) argues that focus groups are particularly appropriate for facilitating the discussion of taboo topics because the less inhibited members of the group often break the ice for shy participants. Participants for the FGDs were recruited through a snowball sampling strategy with initial contacts being established through the village chiefs and community opinion leaders.

A total of 159 males and 98 females aged between 18 to 72 years were involved in the fully tape recorded FGDs with an average of seven people in each group. Such a mixed sample allowed for diverse opinions and perspectives to be captured during the study. The FGDs for the district assembly officials comprised six groups for unit committee members, two groups for area committee members, one group for assembly members, and one group for staff of the District Planning and Co-ordinating Unit. The FGDs for the traditional authority system comprised the paramount chief and his elders, two groups of divisional chiefs and their elders, six groups of village chiefs and their elders, as well as sixteen groups of a cross-section of community members, one group male and one group female, in each of the eight villages sampled. A checklist of topics was developed to guide the focus group discussions, allowing for new questions to be added during the data collection process. All FGDs were digitally audio-recorded with permission from participants and transcribed from Akan to English language.

The FGDs were complemented with key informant interviews of eight people representing the District Office, Religious Organizations, Elected Officials, Traditional Institutions and Education (the identities of these people have not been revealed in the presentation of the findings) the District Chief Executive (DCE), the Presiding Member (PM) of the Assembly, the District

Co-ordinating Director (DCD), and the Parish Priest of Wenchi Catholic Church. The IDIs were used to further explore themes and views that emerged from the discussions. All IDIs were also audio-recorded digitally with permission from participants and transcribed from Akan to English language.

The linkage maps and matrix were jointly developed by the participants and researchers and are important for nuanced understanding of the roles and responsibilities of the different groups relating to local governance. They raise questions such as how and why are these roles salient; what are the relationships amongst the groups; how roles are changing over time; who controls access to community resources for local government; who makes decisions about them and why; what are the power dynamics; how do power and roles influence the decision making of the group regarding resources, and ultimately policy outcomes; and what options exist for increasing equitable access to decision-making and local governance benefits, especially for marginalized stakeholders such as women?

2.3. *Data analysis*

Data analysis were interpretive, with a view to exploring the connections between various issues, as well as consolidating lessons that could inform possible policy review to make decentralization more effective (Strauss and Corbin, 1990; Leedy and Omrod, 2005). Thematic coding techniques were used to summarize and analyze themes and constructs related to the study (Lang *et al.*, 1999; Houghton and Roche, 2001). Initial analyses of the data were made jointly with the respondents in the field, so as to eliminate personal biases in interpretation. The data analysis was supported by field notes which were taken throughout the data collection period. By combining field notes and observations of community meetings, the data analysis was able to establish connections and consistencies that provided greater understanding of issues. The data were reduced by developing themes, coding the emerging themes, comparing these themes among participants, and developing ideas and concepts that explain the themes. Participants were given the option to provide their feedback on the analysis of their discussion. To ensure a more rigorous analysis, one in three group discussions were randomly selected and coded by an independent and experienced qualitative researcher. Differences in coding were discussed, and changes made by mutual agreement. Data management was assisted by NVivo version 9.0 software (QSR, 2011). This software has the capacity to analyze interviews, field notes, textual sources, and other types of qualitative or text based data. The actor linkage matrix and linkage diagram (Biggs and Matsaert, 2004) were used after the FGDs to visualize the interactive processes between the traditional governance system

and District Assembly structures. Such visualization facilitated the capacity of the study to capture the realities constructed in the minds of the various actors in the form of relaxed and frank discussions, thereby enhancing the validity of the findings.

3. Results

Broadly four major themes emerged from the study: chiefs' versus elected officials: a struggle for power and legitimacy; emerging conflicting relationship between traditional authorities and elected officials; local residents' fear of intimidation; and dysfunctional institutional collaboration between traditional and local government authorities. The results are presented based on these themes. The first, second, and third themes embody the findings obtained from FGDS and IDIs whereas the last theme covers the findings obtained during the development of the matrix and linkage maps. The matrix and linkage map helps put into perspective the findings from the FGDs and IDIs.

3.1. *Chieftaincy versus elected government officials: A struggle for power and legitimacy?*

The results indicate that currently, the image of chieftaincy in Wenchi is an ambivalent one, reflecting the general debate in Ghana regarding the usefulness of this institution. Historically, chieftaincy as an institution was viewed as a guarantor of stability of socio-political systems and respect for customary values within the African State, but as indicated in the comment below, this institution is undergoing various processes of social and political changes.

> "…today we seem to have abandoned age-long traditions regarding respect for chieftaincy institutions. We must return to such cherished norms. It is only then that these government appointees will accord us due respect." (Chief, FGD)

Another chief remarked that

> "Government appointees will come and go but chieftaincy remains an enduring institution… We are here for our people. Elected officials seem to think they are more important. However, without the cooperation of chiefs there can be no development or progress in this area." (FGD)

While chiefs obviously defended the usefulness of their institution, some participants perceived it as an outdated institution, with one participant describing the chieftaincy institution as "a vestige of the past which can hardly be reconciled with the basic content of the democratization discourse"

in Ghana. In line with this thinking, and in particular, FGDs with the Assembly and Unit Committee Members revealed that elected officials conceived themselves to be legitimate representatives of the people since they were elected to their positions through the dispensation of democracy in the country; unlike chiefs who basically ascend their thrones. Elected officials argued that the state authority which they represented, was sovereign and superseding the traditional authority. Consequently, they felt that there was no need for them to consult the traditional authorities before taking certain decisions or actions they feel will be in the interest of their electorate.

One Assembly member opined

> "Our mandate derives from universal adult suffrage unlike chiefs. On this basis alone, which of the two groups is more legitimate…? Whereas we were voted into power to facilitate the development of the area, chiefs on the contrary, inherit their stools, with some [chiefs] not always the right leaders for the people." (FGDs)

To underscore the point that elected officials do not seem to respect chiefs and their elders, some chiefs and elders cited instances when the Assembly or Unit Committee Members would call for a community meeting or communal work without prior consultation with the local chief. The chiefs considered these unannounced meetings to be a threat to their power, as it has long been the preserve of chiefs to call their subjects for a meeting or any communal action by beating the *gong gong* (a traditional instrument).

One chief indicated that

> "Legitimate power gives the individual holder a right to demand compliance or obedience from the subordinates. Chieftaincy as a mechanism for leadership is heavily based on position power. This is because the compliance and obedience of our subjects to this institution is based on the right of the chief or king to demand compliance, and the control they exert over punishment and their ability to reward. Therefore the erosion of our position is inextricably linked to diminishing our power and influence." (IDI)

This view, like many others, then becomes the source of debate and conflict between chiefs and elected officials at the local level.

3.2. *Emerging conflicting relationship between traditional and elected government officials*

While chiefs act as intermediaries between their own way of dispute settling and the administration of the state justice, the results indicate that chieftaincy

currently is forced into the arenas of conflicting arguments with government officials.

According to one chief

> "We (my sub-chiefs and I) are often caught between different and competing logics of our milieu, bureaucratic rationale and democratic aspirations. We must choose between our own economic interests, our ambitions of power and the interests of the people we are supposed to represent. Like all intermediaries, chiefs are looking for equilibrium between these two different worlds…" (FGDs)

This balance has recently become illusive as chiefs struggle to work with or against government officials.

A chief intimated thus

> "We are confronted with the adverse effects of social and political transformations particularly the so-called decentralization. I think decentralization as a socio-political process and force has weakened rather than reinforced our power and authority. Ghana's democracy is entirely supported by our institution, yet the same democracy seems to be used as a tool to question the relevance of our institution… In no time in our history has the relevance of chieftaincy come under the microscope and scrutiny that is driven by so-called elected officials" (FGDs)

A chief commented on how the emerging disagreements and confrontations are resulting in some chiefs getting involved in politics as a way to ward off the lingering conflicts.

> "People are surprised that fellow chiefs end up getting involved in party politics. Is there not a cause? When our authority has been usurped by politicians the only way left is for us to join the political bandwagon. Can you find a neutral chief in Ghana in this era? " (FGDs)

Yet the involvement of chiefs in politics did not appeal to all. For instance, one chief worried that:

> "The involvement of some chiefs in politics is resulting in the erosion of our traditional legitimacy, to such an extent that the meaning of our institution is now frequently questioned." (FGDs)

While the relationship between chiefs and elected government officials dominated the related FGDs and IDIs, several concerns were expressed by

the local residents regarding their fears of potential intimidation and harassment from either traditional rulers or elected government officials, depending on whose line they are considered to have crossed.

3.3. *Local residents' fear of intimidation and potential harassment*

Several of the FGD participants indicated that in the presence of their chiefs, they cannot make an opposing view known as this will be considered as arguing with the chiefs, and such a situation potentially inhibits their voices from being heard. In this context, shared custom trumps political differences and denotes a level of deference to and fear of the older *Chieftaincy institution*.

To cross-validate this argument, the study sought opportunities to observe community meetings where the chiefs were present. Three of these community meetings were observed and it was noted that, in all cases, community members were first given a chance to have their say concerning the issues on the table and then the chief took the final decision which was not subject to further challenge or argument. After the community meetings, the study randomly interviewed some of the participants to ascertain whether they were satisfied with the final decisions by the chiefs and whether such decisions reflected consensus. 37 individuals (63%) indicated they were satisfied whereas 21 (37%) were unsatisfied.

Even though majority of the community members were satisfied with the outcome of their meeting with their village chiefs, quite a sizeable number (37%) expressed that dissatisfaction with the way the proceedings were handled.

For instance, a community member said:

> "Some of us were afraid to voice our opinions in the presence of the chief and therefore our views were not captured. You see, what he said was final… we are not expected to give opposing views at all. In some way, this defeats the purpose of the democracy Ghana has been struggling to achieve" (FGDs)

Another community member said:

> "Even though some of us did not agree with the conclusions of the chief, we could not engage him in a public debate as this would be considered as being uncultured or indiscipline." (FGDs)

Others agreed that the meeting was dominated by the chief and a few people and therefore ended up reflecting the views of the few vocal ones. These accounts are not uncommon given questioning authorities may be misconstrued as disrespect.

In particular, the fear of being implicated under traditional and customary legalities was also cited as being on the reasons some of the elected officials try to avoid engaging with chiefs in discussions that may result in potential differences of views that could get them summoned to the chief's court. One assembly member commented:

> "Sometimes you are better off not to inform the chief of what you are doing. Once you go and tell them, you have to hope that they agree with you, otherwise, you can get yourselves entangled in this narrow-minded argument that you have to respect whatever the stool has to offer." (IDI)

Consequently, assembly and unit committee members were persuasive in their explanation that the local culture does not permit people to argue with the chief in public. There is always the danger that chiefs could impose their ideas on the decentralization process, even if such ideas were not in the public interest, since people will not have the courage to put forward counter arguments to the chief. The assembly and unit committee members argued that, in such a cultural context, it was better to keep the chief out of those public decisions where there was a need to debate diverse perspectives.

It is reasonable, therefore, to assume that in a society where there is a predominant culture of 'respect' of authority (within government elected officials as well), public involvement in the development process largely depends on the good will of the leaders or authorities they look up to. Participants agreed that there was "declining mutual trust for authorities who are frequently focused on serving their own self-interest." Some community members expressed dissatisfaction with both chiefs and elected officials by indicating that "these leaders are corrupt and not always working in the interest of the people." It is within this context that the two groups become cut up in the struggle for power and legitimacy. The overall dissatisfaction of the local people with both chiefs and elected government officials signals the general state of dysfunctional cooperation between these institutions in Ghana.

3.4. *Dysfunctional institutional collaboration between traditional and local authorities*

In the context of the findings discussed above, we examined the nature and quality of links and interactions between traditional authorities and decentralized government structures within the Wenchi District. The participants with guidance from the researchers, constructed a matrix of what they perceived to be the degree of collaboration between the various local governing actors, in the area. The degree of interaction between groups was listed vertically and horizontally in the matrix, with each cell representing the degree interaction between groups (see Table 1). To facilitate active participation,

Table 1. Average ranking to show quality of interaction among various actors in Wenchi district.

ACTORS	District assembly	Assembly members	Area council	Unit committee	Community members	Paramount chief & elders	Divisional chief & elders	Village chief & elders
District assembly	X	4	2	1	1	2	2	2
Assembly members	4	X	3	2	2	2	2	3
Area council	2	3	X	3	2	2	2	3
Unit committee	1	2	3	X	3	2	2	3
Community members	1	2	2	3	X	2	2	4
Paramount chief & elders	2	2	2	2	2	X	4	4
Divisional chief & elders	2	2	2	2	2	4	X	4
Village chief & elders	2	3	3	3	4	4	4	X

this matrix was initially drawn on the floor with various locally available symbols used to represent the various actors. To gauge the degree of inter-action, each group was asked to score each linkage cell from 1 to 5, with 1 indicating very weak linkage and poor quality of interaction and 5 indicating very strong linkage and a high quality of interaction. In order not to bias their thinking, each group was asked to discuss and agree on the criteria they would use to score the quality of interaction. This brought to the fore issues of importance to each group with regard to what their expectations were in relation to good quality interaction. Interestingly, all of the groups raised some common indicators expected of good interaction among actors. These included the following: frequency of meetings; frankness and openness of discussions; level of trust; mutual benefits emanating from interactions; and level of convergence of ideas and world views.

The ensuing discussions among group members as to what score to give to each linkage cell, based on the criteria established, was quite revealing, as they debated with each other with examples as to why a certain score should be given. This tool was therefore found to be very effective in generating deeper insights on the engagement process with the different actors. The average rankings, depicting the quality of interaction among the various actors, as computed from the various FGDs are presented in Table 1.

After calculating the average score of the quality of interaction among the various actors as expressed by the various focus groups, a linkage matrix map was constructed to visually present their perceptions of the quality of inter-action among the various actors. This linkage map was presented to the groups for further discussions and validation. The quality of interaction or linkage between two actors was depicted by means of lines of different thicknesses, with a thicker line depicting a stronger linkage or higher quality of interaction (see Figure 1).

The linkage map above indicates that the interaction between the various operatives of the District Assembly and the traditional authority system is generally weak, except in a few situations where there is good interaction and strong linkage between the unit committees and their village chiefs. To gen-erate a better understanding of what accounts for either strong or poor interaction among the actors within the decentralized structures and those of the traditional authority system, each linkage line was taken one after the other, and FGDs centered on the factors that strengthen or weaken the relationship or linkage between the various actors of the local governance system.

The linkage map points to a strong link and influence between traditional authorities and community members. Since chiefs, particularly those in the villages, live with their community members and identify with their everyday struggles, they enjoy stronger trust and loyalty from these community
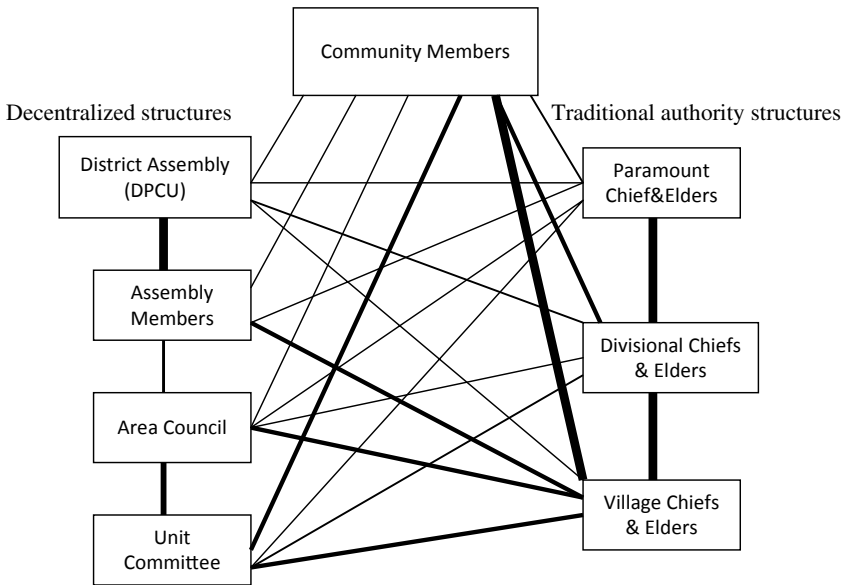
Figure 1. Linkage map of various operatives of the decentralized structure and traditional authorities.

members. Indeed, the community members contended that they were closer to their chiefs than their elected representatives in the decentralized structures. The implication here is that these chiefs have great potential to be used as rallying points or platforms to mobilize community members and other actors towards more effective participation in local governance and self-help projects.

Probing during the FGDs revealed that relationships and synergy between traditional authority and district assembly operatives could be strengthened if there was a clearly defined role for chiefs in the decentralization process, so that they may have a sense of recognition of their authority and being part of the decentralization process. Some suggestions that came up include whether chiefs could be asked to select one or two representatives to the unit committees or district assembly, and whether a right to occasionally address the district assembly meeting could be offered.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The findings point to the chieftaincy institution being deep rooted within the socio-cultural realities of the people in Wenchi district, and indeed throughout Ghana. The chiefs, exert a strong influence on their subjects and therefore offer an effective mechanism for rallying community members to actively participate in the decentralization process and to promote democratic

accountability. Yet, the interactive processes between traditional authorities and decentralized structures are characterized mostly by competition for power and legitimacy which often leads to mistrust and an inability of the decentralization process to tap into the potential of traditional authorities to help accelerate development.

The traditional authorities felt they were not given the respect due to them from the District Assembly operatives, as the latter considered themselves as elected officials who wields the 'power of the people' and can therefore initiate decisions without getting consent from chiefs. It is in this regard that some elected official opined that the social organizations that the chiefs led for years, have given way to the emergence of new social organizations based on democratic dispensation and governance. According to some, it is this potential shift that has largely threatened the relevance of the chieftaincy institution in contemporary times; yet most chiefs seem to be in denial and reluctant to adjust to new realities.

Furthermore, the assumption that the elected representatives to the district assembly structures are superior to the traditional authorities is misconceived, since the two sets of actors derive their authority and legitimacy from different sources. Traditional authorities derive theirs from the sacred and political order that existed before the imposition of the colonial state, whilst the post-colonial state, Ghana, derives its legitimacy from democracy and constitutional legality. The latter is mainly secular, as opposed to the sacred legitimacy of traditional authority (Ray, 1996). Since chiefs and state agencies like the district assembly operatives draw upon mutually exclusive bases of legitimacy, the question should not be who is superior, but rather how the two sets of actors (state agents and traditional authorities) can use their various sources of legitimacy in a complementary manner to enhance local governance and development. The nearly bipolarized linkage map virtually sums up the relationships between these two groups which constantly reinforce a lack of trust and hence the continuous struggle for legitimacy.

The emergence of new socio-economic classes in Ghana is generally attributed to current processes of political change, due to the liberalization of the economy and democratization, which feeds into conflict between chiefs and political authorities. These issues need to be put in relation to the question of representation. Who does the chief claim to represent and at what level? This question is important in view of the rivalry between chiefs and elected government officials as they try to gain political space in a new political landscape.

Interestingly, the new social organization alluded to by the Assemblymen is also based on a similar premise: the position power. This means that local subjects can be expected to express compliance and obedience to the leaders of the traditional societies (e.g., chiefs) and at the same time to leaders of modern society (e.g., the District Chief Executives). However, the traditional

societies are under the constitution of the modern society and the constitution wields more power than the rules and taboos of the traditional societies. Whenever there is a conflict between the traditions and customs and the provisions in the constitution, the former is expected to be changed. It is a complex issue and one that presents a dilemma especially if the DCE who is appointed by the president is also a subject of the Chief in that particular traditional society. Invariably, the obvious struggle for legitimacy and power inherently negates the fundamental principles of decentralization which hinges on broad-based participation in public decision-making and on facilitating local people so that they can attend to their own needs.

Based on the views of the local people and assembly members, one is inclined to ask whether it is not time for the traditional institution of chieftaincy to acknowledge that it may be necessary to change some of its outmoded customs in order to thrive in the emerging democratic dispensation. For instance, in seeking audience with chiefs, one is required to remove all footwear before access is granted. Most of the local people and assembly members were born during the postcolonial era and do not fully appreciate the usefulness of such outmoded practices.

Institutions in all cultures evolve over time as a result of lessons garnered from experience, and occasionally through lessons learned as a result of interactions with other cultures (Gyekye, 1997, 127; Orrnert, 2006). Therefore, it is not surprising that this study found chieftaincy as an evolving institution. Questioning the legitimacy and authority of chiefs is akin to critical re-examination of the usefulness and relevance of the institution in modern society. This finding is supported by Gyekye (1997, 222). To improve the relationship and collaboration between the decentralized structures and traditional authorities, it is desirable to have a clearly defined role for traditional authorities in Ghana's decentralization process that can give them a sense of recognition and being part of the decentralization process.

In defining the role for traditional authorities in the decentralization process, care must be taken not to directly absorb chiefs into the assembly structures, but rather to have them remain as a countervailing body to check abuse of power by operatives within the district assembly system. In this regard, the Traditional Council, which is a forum for all chiefs in the district, should be strengthened and encouraged to occasionally invite key actors from the District Assembly to provide information on relevant issues of public interest and account for their actions and inactions. This is particularly important in view of the weak capacity of community members to demand accountability from the decentralized authorities.

On the other hand, the problem for the Ghana government and for that matter, post-colonial African governments seeking to attain legitimacy, is twofold. One, the institutions they are basing their authority on are foreign.

Two, since there were, and is, a multitude of traditional institutions with legitimacy and authority among the different ethnic communities in any given nation, it is neither efficient nor desirable to have one uniform, blanket administrative approach in all regions. This argument necessarily leads to a federal arrangement that allows local government units flexibility in their political and administrative arrangements. The importance of traditional institutions in facilitating modernization lies in the need for an adaptation mechanism, or a translator of new ideas through reference and contrast to pre-existing ones.

Furthermore, there is a predominant culture of deference to authority within various hierarchical levels, as was found in Wenchi district. The implication of this culture of fear is that participation of people from different hierarchical levels and holding people in authority accountable may be more symbolic than real. It is reasonable, therefore, to assume that in a society where there is a predominant culture of fear of authority, the development or progress of the people largely depends on the benevolence of the leader or authority they look up to, in terms of being selfless and sensitive to the collective good in all his/her decisions and action. In the past, many African societies could evoke such selfless and benevolent leadership by promoting the spiritual and making leaders conscious of the fact that there is a superior Being to whom all persons will have to account one day. Additionally, leaders were guided by positive traditional values like collectivism and the mantra that the good of all equals the good of the individual. Unfortunately, such positive African traditional philosophies and values are being eroded by modernization values of individualism, competition, and relentless pursuit of wealth and corruption.

Given the fact that many public institutions in Africa are still evolving and therefore weak in terms of holding people in authority accountable, it may be desirable to promote the spiritual and other positive traditional values among leaders at all levels such that their decisions and actions are guided by truth and love for the common good. This may be accomplished through social engineering that can create the desired values and institutional practices, by strategically using the various channels of our socialization process such as the schools, mass media and churches. For example, the educational curricular and media discussions could be reviewed to include topics related to positive traditional values like harmonious relationships and common good, since the good of all is the good of the individual.

The findings of this study highlight the reality that the nature of the relationship between the administrative system on one hand, and the economic, political and social context on the other, differs from one country to the other, which should be taken into consideration in the design of political and administrative systems. If Ghana's decentralization process is to be effective

and deliver the expected results, it should operate as an open system and be sensitive to the prevailing socio-cultural context, including the local people's values, beliefs, and institutions. Of critical importance is the need for a feedback mechanism that allows for regular interaction among the various actors within the decentralization process, to jointly determine the kind of society they want to establish and how this can be done.

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