Ghana Journal of Development Studies Volume 2, Number 2, December 2005

INSTITUTIONAL REFORMS, DEMOCRATIC PARTICIPATION AND DECENTRALIZED DEVELOPMENT IN GHANA: THE SISSALA DISTRICT AS A CASE STUDY

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ABSTRACT

The failures of centralized planning and development governance in Africa have provided the basis for arguments for institutional reforms, decentralisation, democratic participation and the spread of development benefits. This paper explores two interrelated questions with regard to Ghana's ongoing decentralization efforts, namely: (i) whether institutions have been sufficiently reformed to allow for democratic participation of all interest groups in the development process and (ii) whether democratic participation, per se, guarantees a decentralized approach to development planning and management and a trend towards socially and spatially equitable development. Based on the lessons drawn from the Sissala District of the Upper West Region of Ghana as a case, the study concludes that institutional reforms that aim at authentic decentralisation may not necessarily result in democratic participation or decentralised development that addresses issues of social and spatial equity. A central recommendation is that government needs to enforce the bottom-up planning process and conscientise local people to participate effectively in the district development process.

KEY WORDS: Decentralization, Democratic participation, Institutional reforms, Development planning, Spatial development

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Since the 1970s, there has been a growing optimism that the paradigm shift from a centralized to a decentralized approach to development planning and governance in developing countries will allow for a more democratic participation of the beneficiaries of development, leading to decentralized development (Rondinelli, 1989; Kothari, 1988; Friedmann, 1987). Kothari (1988, cited in Narayan, 2005: 11) argues that

"power when it is used by many through active participation, deliberations, decision making and implementation tends to be used or at least attempted to be used, for the advantage of the many." In line with this argument, many governments in developing economies have made conscious efforts to reform their development planning and governance institutions to allow for democratic participation to bring about decentralized development that will improve the conditions of their citizens (Agrawal, 1999; Narayan, 2005).

While the theoretical linkages between institutional reforms, democratic participation and the spread of development in a truly decentralized fashion have been well articulated and vigorously argued, the growing empirical literature on these linkages reveal mixed results (Friedmann, 1987; Hadiz, 2003). This disjuncture between the theoretical ideals and the emerging empirical evidence from countries that are experimenting with decentralization have raised questions as to whether : (i) institutions have been sufficiently reformed to allow for democratic participation of all interest groups in the development process and (ii) democratic participation, per se, guarantees a decentralized approach to development planning and management and a trend towards socially and spatially equitable development. In exploring these pertinent questions, we first of all, review the conceptual linkages in the existing literature. We then take a critical look at the institutional reforms in Ghana for decentralisation on the basis of which we evaluate efforts at implementing decentralised development in terms of the involvement of the people and the social and spatial spread of development, using the Sissala District in the Upper West Region of Ghana as a case study.

2.0 THEORETICAL OVERVIEW

In this section, we define the three key concepts used: institutional reform, democratic participation and decentralized development and then review the ongoing debate on their theoretical linkages. An institution in the context of this paper, means all socially agreed upon norms, values, rules, conventions, legal and administrative arrangements, that provide the mode of operations by the group for the benefits of all the members of the group in a given context (Ostrom, Schroeder and Wynne, 1993; Pejovich, 1995). Institutions as human creations are subject to changes as circumstances change with time. The necessary changes or modifications made to given sets of institutions to enable them meet their requirements at a given time are what are referred to here as reforms. The authentic devolution of political power to autonomous units (Agrawal, 1999; Friedmann, 1987) to facilitate grassroots participation is what is termed here as democratic participation. Decentralized development is used here to convey the sense of equity in the distribution of development benefits among social groups and geographic spaces. The theoretical relationships between the three conceptual categories are discussed in the ensuing section.

It has been argued that development planning and governance, as political processes, are determined by the prevailing institutional framework in any given country setting (Friedmann, 1987; Ostrom, Feeney and Harmat, 1993). Ostrom, et al. (1993: 5) argue

that the "institutional structure is important because of its role in expanding human choice, which is a fundamental goal of economic development." The manner in which public goods and services are produced and distributed hinge on the type of development planning and governance system instituted by the government of the day. Similarly, the mode and extent of citizen's participation is determined by the institutional framework in place (Friedmann, 1987: Kothari 1988, Ostrom et al. 1993, Nelson and Wright, 1995). For example, in Africa before the structural adjustment programmes in the 1980s, the state was seen as the appropriate agent that would provide development for its citizens. Critics of this over centralised state control argue that "the existing institutional context has neither the broad based participation ---- nor an institutional environment in which resources are allocated in socially efficient ways that facilitate development" (Ostrom et al, 1993: 5).

Under the centralized planning system, one of the major concerns of governments revolved around the question of how to reach out to the sub-national levels to ensure that the business of public administration and the distribution of public goods and services proceed. The planning and governance structures set up to address this problem were essentially extensions of central government bureaucracies, known as deconcentration, which merely played the role of "partners in the delivery of public goods and services" (Wunsch and Olowu, 1990: 4). Deconcentration merely involved "the shifting of work load from overburdened central government ministries head quarters to staff located in offices outside of the national capital" (Rondinelli, 1989: 76). Deconcentration has been heavily criticized on grounds that, the spread of central government bureaucratic functions does not necessarily lead to democratic involvement of the local people in the setting of their development priorities. The failures of centralised planning to incorporate local concerns have led to arguments for "a more extensive form of decentralization" (Samoff, 1990: 528) that will allow for an inclusive democratic participation of citizens in the development process. A key emphasis of decentralization is, therefore, in the area of institutional reform (Korten; 1995; Watson, 2000; Narayan, 2005).

The main institutional reform advocated involves the transfer of power from the centre to the local levels, referred to here as devolution (Wunsch and Olowu; 1990, Agrawal, 1999; Watson, 2002; Narayan, 2005). The merits of devolution have been strongly argued by several commentators. It has been argued that devolution of authority can bring about allocative efficiency and better chances of accountabilities since local authorities are better informed than central governments about local realities (Kothari, 1988; Wunsch and Olowu, 1990; Kokor and Kročs, 2000). Local government structures, by virtue of their closeness to the people are more responsive to the needs of the people than central agencies that are far removed from the people (Ghana, 1991; Mander and Goldsmith, 1996; Agrawal, 1999). It has also been argued that participatory decision-making will lead to a spread of development and poverty reduction, especially among vulnerable groups (Watson, 2002; Narayan, 2005). While devolution has been lauded as a desirable institutional reform that elicits sound democratic participation, other critics are quick also to point out the risk. Watson

(2002) observed that the main risks include elite capture, corruption, resource constraints, and weak administrative and management systems.

3.0 INSTITUTIONALIZED REFORMS FOR DECENTRALIZATION IN GHANA

Ghana is one of the countries in Africa that has been lauded for its far-reaching decentralization programme. Although, the notion and practice of the central-local planning and governance is not new in Ghana, the official transfer of authority to local level structures was initiated only in 1988 (Ghana, 1988, 1992 and 1993). Before 1988, the centre-local relations were limited to mere spatial spread of highly centralized planning and administration, despite the recognition of the need for local government structures quite distinct from the central government (Ghana, 1951, 1961 and 1971)

During the colonial period[2], the policy of indirect rule provided the overall policy framework for the organization of local governance around traditional chiefs, known as native authorities (Bourret, 1949; Apter, 1963, Der, 1975, Bacho, 2001). A three tier colonial governance structure was established comprising the colonial headquarters, provinces[3] and native authority areas. The seat of the governor represented the apex. Provincial levels were managed by provincial commissioners, while the native authorities, which constituted the local governance units, were managed by the respective traditional chiefs. The chiefs were in principle, mandated by various native authorities' ordinances, establishing them to administer their respective traditional areas of jurisdiction according to the new dictates of the colonial power. The native authorities were also to administer justice especially regarding minor offences and to mobilize financial resources and their people for the development of their areas (Bourret, 1949, Bening, 1999; Bacho, 2001). Although the native authorities were able to mobilize their people to undertake development such as the building of schools, clinics and feeder roads, among others (Bening, 1999), they have been criticised for several shortcomings. Many critics of the colonial enterprise in general and the native authorities governance system in particular, have observed that native authorities were mere puppets who were used to ensure effective control of disparaged and hostile ethnic groups (Kimble, 1963; Der, 1975; Berry, 1993; Bening, 1999).

[2] Local government was introduced in the colony by merchants along the coast who had responsibility then for the welfare within their operational influence. Town councils were introduced in 1859. After Britain established its rule formerly in 1874, the Native Authorities were established in the three polities of the then Gold Coast Colony - the Colony, Asante and Northern Territories - between 1927 and 1936.

[3] The term district and province became at different times the lower levels depending the spatial organization preferred by the governor of the time.

[4] The native authority ordinances for the colony, Asante and the Northern territories were passed in 1927, 1932 and 1936 respectively.

Although, outwardly the traditional leaders appeared to be in control, they were in reality, merely implementing pre-determined decisions handed down to them. The people in each native authority area were merely mobilized to accomplish set tasks. The undemocratic and unaccountable nature of the native authorities made them not truly decentralized development institutions suitable for the promotion of democratic participation as there was minimal participation by the broad masses of the people.

Another criticism is the weak financial base of the native authorities. Although the Native Authority Bills of 1932 and 1936 empowered native authorities to collect taxes and levies to develop their local areas most of them could not mobilise enough financial resources through this means. The colonial central government was also not prepared to invest in the Northern Territories since their overall goal was not the development of the people (Der, 1975; Bening, 1999).

After independence, the expediency of forging a strong and unitary nation to achieve rapid socio-economic transformation necessitated a highly centralized political and bureaucratic control. Central planning was deemed the most effective mode of accomplishing development. The centre-local relationship assumed the form of deconcentration of government bureaucracies to facilitate central government control and the distribution of public goods and services. Although there were several attempts after independence to institute an appropriate form of decentralization (Ghana 1961, 1971 and 1974) it was not until 1988 when Ghana embarked on far reaching institutional reforms, which to a large measure permitted the devolution of power to the district assemblies (Ghana, 1991, 1992, 1993 and 1996).

As part of the World Bank/IMF structural adjustment programme, Ghana embarked on significant policy reforms, beginning from 1983, covering three broad areas - economic, public administration and decentralization. These economic reforms centred on the restructuring of the economy to minimise government's role. This new economic policy led to the divestiture of public enterprises, the promotion of private commercial enterprises and self-help initiatives. Public administration was not only decentralized, but "has been gradually reoriented to make it undertake developmental planning and management in support of both the private sector and decentralization at all levels" (Kokor and Kroes, 2000: 7). Perhaps, the most far-reaching of the three key areas of the policy reforms is decentralizing development planning and management, dubbed the "the new local government system" (Ghana, 1992, 1996).

Prior to 1988, the existing policy framework provided for central planning which placed the responsibility of producing public goods and services for distribution to citizens by the government, although local government structures existed in principle. The promulgation of the Local Government Law, 1988, (PNDCL. 207) provided the institutional basis for decentralized planning aimed at "--- creating a forum at the district (local) level where the representatives of the people and other agencies will agree on the development problems of the district or area" (Ghana, 1992: 6). Under this new policy, the district became the focal point for development planning and

management (Ghana, 1988, 1992; 1994). District Assembly (DA) structures were created and given the necessary legal backing by Act of Parliament (Act 462, 1993) and the Constitution (Ghana, 1992) to operate as autonomous units with regard to local level development planning.

Institutional and structural reforms were undertaken to ensure that district assemblies perform their mandatory functions (Ghana, 1988, 1993). In terms of structure, the new DA system comprised a three-tier structure (four tiers for the few Metropolitan Assemblies) right from the community to the district levels, thus creating room for a bottom-up planning process. Government departments at the district level were placed under the district assembly. The new policy reform also gave district assemblies the power to mobilize and utilize local revenue.

The overall goal of these institutional reforms was to provide a congenial platform for the democratic participation that will lead to both social and spatial equity. While this goal is clearly laudable, the pertinent questions are: whether DAs have been able to achieve democratic participation of their citizens and the spread of development?

4.0 METHODOLOGY

The study employed a case study approach to allow for a more detailed investigation of the guiding questions. Sissala District was selected based on the different sources of data collected over the years by the team. The data used in this study is derived from both secondary and primary sources. The secondary sources include: community level data collected from 1997 to 2000 by the Faculty of Integrated Development Studies of the University for Development Studies; the baseline survey report of the District Assembly conducted in 1996 and updated in 2004; archival records; service statistics from the decentralized departments of the assembly, regional offices of the Upper West Region and the Ministry of Local Government. A district level workshop, involving key stakeholders in the district development process was also organised to: verify the data collected from the secondary sources; collect more information to fill data gaps; and also to engage participants in a critical analysis of their district development. An in-depth study of four communities selected from four zones (see Figure 1.2) provided the primary source of data. Scalogram and accessibility analysis were done to determine the spatial spread of infrastructure development and access to critical services.

5.0 LESSONS ON DEMOCRATIC PARTICIPATION AND DECENTRALIZED DEVELOPMENT FROM THE SISSALA DISTRICT

5.1 Context

Historically, what is now the Sissala District Assembly was created under the colonial indirect rule policy as the Tumu Native Authority. Three native authorities were

[5] Now Local Government Act, (Act 462).

created in the then Northwestern Province. These were Wa, Lawra and Tumu, representing the Wala, Dagaaba and Issala [6] ethnic groups. In 1951, under the reformed government law, Tumu Native Authority, like all others, became the Tumu District and remained so throughout the 1961, 1971 and 1974 local government reforms until 1988 when the nomenclature changed to Sissala District Assembly. In 2004 the District for the first time was split into two - Sissala West and Sissala East District Assemblies, with their capitals in Gwollu and Tumu respectively. In this study, the scope will be limited to the area formerly referred to as the Sissala District Assembly and the time period from 1988 to 2004, when the concept of decentralized planning was vigorously pursued.

The Sissala District Assembly covers an area of 7,781km² and an estimated population 114,403, thus giving a crude density of about 14.7/persons/km. ² Beside the low density, the district is basically rural with about 87.8 percent of the population living in settlements with populations less than 5,000. The economic base of the district revolves around subsistent farming and agro-based processing, especially shea butter, which engages 84 percent of the labour force engaged in small scale off-farm economic activities. Most people are engaged in more than one of these subsistence economic activities.

There is one predominant ethnic group, the Sissala, and one traditional authority - the Koro, based in Tumu. In the Fielmuo area, however, the Dagaaba dominate. In the district capital, Tumu, civil servants, teachers, other development workers and traders form a significant portion of the non indigineous population. Moslems constitute about 72.9 percent of the population while traditionalists and Christians constitute 13.4 and 12.9 percent of the population respectively. This relative homogeneity of the population is a potential asset for social mobilization.

Despite the potentials of the district, a number of constraints need to be mentioned. These include: poor transport and communication linkages between the district and other parts of the country; endemic environmental hazards such as seasonal bush fires and diseases and high illiteracy, as only 1.29 percent and 11.2 percent of the adult population are educated up to the tertiary and basic levels respectively.

5.2 Experiences with Democratic Participation in the Planning Process

In this section, we examine the popular contention that democratic participation of citizens in the development process will be enhanced when the necessary institutional structures are put in place and legitimized. As indicated earlier, the Sissala District Assembly was established as the "Planning Authority for its area of authority" (Act

[6] The Issala are known and referred to variously as Sisala or Sissala. Here Sissala is adopted through out the context.

462, section 46). This means that the district assembly is responsible for managing the bottom-up planning processes from the unit committees' level through the area/ town councils up to the district levels. Similarly, feedback will also need to go through the same mechanism. Evidence from the process of planning the two district level medium term plans covering the periods 1996-2000 and 2000-2004 show that this stipulated bottom-up process was not followed. In preparing the 1996-2000 medium term plan, a technical team constituted by the Regional Planning Co-ordinating Unit facilitated a district level planning workshop session to produce the plan. The planning team at the district workshop comprised: Heads of Decentralized Departments; Assemblypersons; and core district assembly staff i.e., District Chief Executive, Coordinating Director, District Planning Officer and Budgeting Officer.

Information from the community fora organised in four sample communities show that the communities did not take part in the planning. They were not even aware of the plans and/or what they sought to achieve. The reason for this lapse is that the assembly members did not organise planning sessions with their constituents to elicit their views prior to attending the district planning sessions. After the planning sessions at the district level, the necessary feedback was also not given to them. The evidence emanating from the Sissala District Assembly is that the democratic process of involving communities from the unit level, through the area/town council up to the district is yet to be achieved. A number of factors were found to be responsible for these lapses. These include: the poor staffing situation in the district; inadequate finances and logistics especially at the unit committees, area/town councils levels; low level of awareness of citizens rights among the rural illiterate population, and the high degree of paternalism from the regional coordinating unit.

On the whole, while there has been an elaborate institutional reform to support democratic participation, the Sissala District Assembly is yet to achieve this.

5.3 Social and Spatial Development Patterns in the District

This section examines the social and spatial dimensions of the decentralised development efforts of the District. Tumu, with a population of 10,878 stands out predominantly among the other settlements. Beside Tumu town, no other settlement has a population up to 4,000 people. The next three larger settlements, Gwollu, Sakai and Fielmuo have populations of 3,782, 3,104 and 2,473 respectively (Ghana, 2000). Using a four-index primacy ratio, it was found that the settlement system of the district depicts a high degree of primacy. The primacy ratio for Tumu, the district capital, defined here as a ratio of the population of the largest settlement to the combined populations of the next three larger settlements, is 1.16. Besides Gwollu, Fielmuo and Sakai, all other settlements have populations less than 2,400. The high degree of

primacy is clear empirical evidence that the spatial development of the district is tending towards concentration. This will be further examined in terms of the spatial distribution of basic social and economic infrastructure and services and access to these services, using tools such as the scalogram and accessibility analysis. Figure 1.1 shows the distribution of essential social, economic and technical infrastructure. From Figure 1.1 only the district capital, Tumu, has all the essential infrastructural services identified by the district as priority development needs in both the 1996 - 2000 and 2000 - 2004 plans. Tumu is thus classified as a first hierarchy settlement. Gwollu, although with a much lower population comes closely after Tumu, apart from a few services such as Senior Secondary School, Training College, and Post service.

It is classified as a second hierarchy settlement. Gwollu's importance in the settlement derives from its historic role and the fact that it is also the home of the President of the Third Republic. Wellembelle, Sakai and Fielmuo rank third in the functional hierarchy of settlements. All the other 24 settlements, with populations ranging from 698 to 2,222 fall within the same category. This implies that the district has an unarticulated settlement system. The pattern is one of polarization of services in which only the few urban and peri-urban areas have access to facilities listed on the scalogram, while majority of rural settlements lack essential services. The spatially concentrated pattern of development stem from two facts. The first is the cumulative effect of the tendency of concentrating on the district capitals to the neglect of other settlements. The second is the preponderance of subsistence farming which favours a dispersed rural settlement system.

This general pattern notwithstanding, there are three key sectors where services are being decentralized fairly since 1996 to 2004. These are the agricultural extension services, basic education (i.e., JSS and primary) and potable water. In the case of potable water nearly all settlements with populations 300 and above have at least a borehole, thus giving 87 percent coverage of the population (DWATSAN, 2004 Report). From the scalogram, 27 of the major settlements in the district have primary and JSS schools. Other critical services that will need to be decentralized are the health facilities and higher level educational facilities like senior secondary schools.

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[7] The Primacy Ratio is computed as follows: PR = P1 ÷ (P2 + P3 + P4), where PR = Primacy Ratio, P1 = Population of the largest settlement, while P2, P3, P4 = populations of next three larger settlement

[8] The Issala are known and referred to variously as Sisala or Sissala. Here Sissala is adopted through out the context.

Figure 1.1: Scalogram

Facilities	Education						Health			Water	
Settlements and Population as at 2000	TTC	SSS	TTC	JSS	VOC/TEC	Primary	hospital	Health Centre	Clinic	Pipe-borne water	
	weight	5	4	2	3	1	3	2	1	2	1
Tumu	10,878	X	X	X	x	x	x	x		x	X
Gwollu	3,782			X		X		X		x	X
Wellembelle	3,414			X		X		X			X
Sakai	3,104			X		X			X		X
Fielmuo	2,473			X		X		X			X
Jeffersi	2,222			X		X		X			X
Challu	1,948			X		X					X
Bugbelle	1,876			X		X					X
Buo	1,794			X		X					X
Kunchogu	1741			X		X		X			X
Sorbelle	1,660			X		X					X
Pulima	1586			X		X					X
Liklime	1507			X		X					X
Nwaduana	1416			X		X					X
Jawia	1408			X		X					X
Nabullo	1404					X		X			X
Nabugbelle	1365			X		X		X			X
Pieng	1263			X		X					X
Kong	1224			X		X					X
Vamboi	1212										X
Nyimate	1164					X					X
Bullu	1068			X		X					X
Kusali	1060			X		X					X
Zini	1049			X		x		X			X
Liero	1047			X		X					X
Dasima	1030			X		X					X
Kulfuo	1007			X		X		X			X
Tasor	1001										X
Bujan	698			X		X		X			X
No. of Settlements		1	1	27	1	28	1	11	1	2	30
Centrality Index		100	100	100	100	100	100	109	100	100	100
WC Score		100	100	3.7	100	3.5	100	9	50	3.3	100

Source: Field Survey

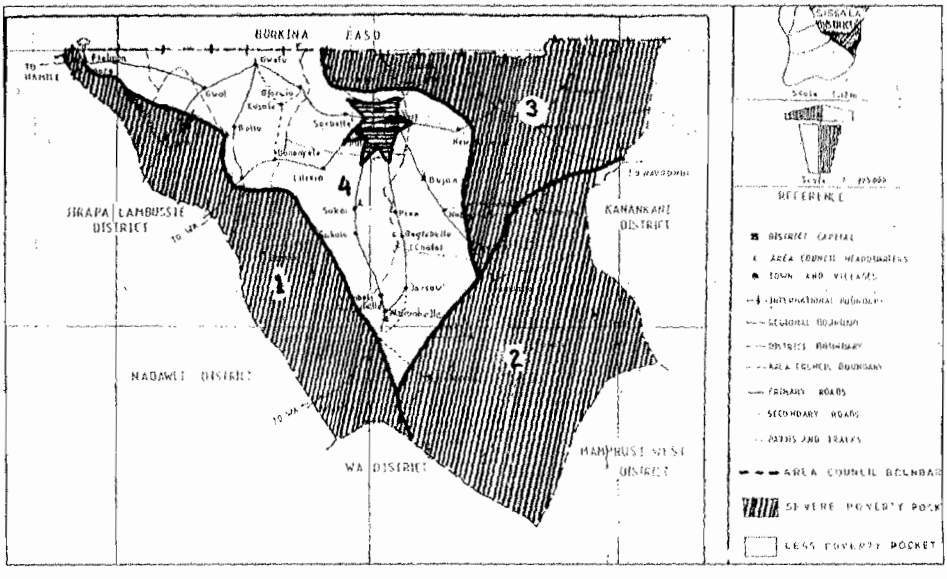
Agric		P & T		Security			Finance/ Infrastructure					
Ext. Agent	Dam/dugout	Post office	Telephone	Court	Police station	Police Post	Bank	Electricity	Markets	Total Functions	Total Cost Score	Hierarchy of Settle-ments
1	2	2	3	1	2	1	2	3	2		1075	1st
X	x	x	X	x	X	.	x	X	x	45	168	2nd
X						X		X	X	15	85	3rd
X						x			X	10	133	
X	X								X	16	142	
X	X	x					x		X	16	31	4th
X	X									9	18	
X	X									6	24	
									X	7	26	
X									X	7	24	
X										7	22	
X	X									7	22	
X	X									7	22	
X	X									5	15	
X									X	7	26	
X								X		9	54	
X	X									9	31	
X	X								x	9	35	
X										7	22	
	X									6	18	
	X									1	3	
										2	7	
X										7	22	
	X									4	11	
X										7	24	
X										5	15	
X										5	15	
										6	20	
X	X									4	14	
X										2	24	
24	14	1	2	1	1	2	2	3	9			
100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100			
4	7	100	50	100	100	50	50	33	11			

A further analysis, using accessibility mapping techniques to show the social and spatial patterns of development in terms of access to critical social, economic and technical infrastructure services by the district population (see Figure 1.2). Figure 1.2 shows a combined accessibility map of key social, economic and technical services, i.e., education, health, potable water, electricity, markets, banking services, among others. The results show three distinct access zones, categorized here as low, moderate and high.

The high optimum access zone is limited to around Tumu, the district capital. Even within this high access zone, some pockets, such as in the zongo communities and outlying suburbs of Tumu, lack access to services. The moderate optimum access zone stretches from Fielmuo in the north through Gwollu and Bugbelle to Wellembelle in the south. This zone has bigger settlements and is better linked to the rest of the Upper West Region by trunk roads and all year round motorable feeder roads. It, therefore, has more infrastructure facilities than the remaining portions of the district classified as low access zones.

The low optimum accessibility areas comprise three zones labelled 1 to 3 in Figure 1.2. Zone 1 is a narrow strip, stretching from Gabaare to Wahabu in the south-western part of the district. It is a major food producing area where peasant farming is the major livelihood activity. The Vegetative cover of grass and woodland together with the relatively sparse population and large span of arable land clearly offer opportunities for food crops, poultry and livestock production. However, problems of soil infertility stemming from the sandy nature of the soils and gully erosion, threaten the sustainability of peasant crop farming. Despite these development opportunities, the poor state of infrastructure serves as a serious disincentive for investments and diversification of the economy. As a border location, the potential for cross border trade exists although increased economic production will depend on improved infrastructure such as markets, roads and electricity.

Figure 1.2: Optimum Accessibility Map



Source: Authors' Construct

Similarly, the Sumboro-Santijang-Bawisibelle Zone (Zone 2 in Figure 1.2) is a low access zone. This zone covers the whole of Nabulo Area Council, and the southern parts of the Wellembelle and Bujang Area Councils. The poor state of the social, economic and technical infrastructure services has limited its advantage as a border location, although the potential also exists.

The third low access zone is the Wuru-kunchogo-Kasana in the northeastern part of the district. The large markets in the Upper East Region and neighbouring Burkina Faso offer great potentials for the farmers in this part of the district. But like the two other low access zones, the poor road infrastructure has also constrained this belt. Basic school infrastructure, health facilities, markets and road infrastructure, potable water provision and extension of electricity will need to be planned for in this zone to improve access to essential services. Fortunately, in the area of health and education services, NGOs in the district such as PLAN Ghana and Action Aid Ghana are providing infrastructure.

The accessibility analyses show that the over concentration on a few settlements has led to a situation where only about 12.2 percent of the population have high access to all the existing services in the district, while 35.6 percent have moderate access and the majority, 52.2 percent in the three low access zones are severely deprived of basic

services. In terms of social groups, the analyses show that the peasant farmers living in small settlements away from the district capital are most affected.

5.0 CONCLUSION

The failures of centralized planning and development governance in Africa underpin the mainstream arguments for a more extensive form of decentralization. While the theoretical linkages between institutional reforms, decentralisation, democratic participation and the spread of development benefits among different socio-economic groups and territorial spaces have been convincingly argued, the reality on the ground often show otherwise.

In reviewing Ghana's decentralisation experience, it was found that the institutional reforms initiated in 1988 have given enough policy and legal backing to the devolution of power to the decentralised local government authorities in terms of a bottom-up planning process and power to mobilize and utilize local revenue. These institutional reforms should ideally provide a congenial platform for the democratic participation of citizens in each district resulting in socially and spatially equitable development. The evidence emanating from the Sissala District Assembly is that the democratic process of involving communities from the unit level, through the area/ town council level up to the district is yet to be achieved. The result is the continuing spatially concentrated pattern of development. In terms of social groups, the analyses show that the peasant farmers living in small settlements away from the district capitals are most affected. It become clear that if Ghana's decentralisation will achieve the cardinal objectives of democratic participation, and social and spatial equity, then conscious attempts should be made to:

- Conscientise citizens to take up the challenge of participating in the local development process.
- Train technical staff such as qualified planners, budget officers, development managers who will be capable of analyzing the development trends in the district and managing the planning and development processes to bring about social and spatial equity.
- The commitment of adequate resources to the districts should go beyond the meagre five percent Common Fund allocation to district assemblies.

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