

# Decentralized Development Planning and Fragmentation of Metropolitan Regions: The Case of the Greater Accra Metropolitan Area, Ghana

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## Abstract

*Ghana implemented a decentralized development planning system in 1988. This has resulted in the proliferation of 'independent' and 'autonomous' local government areas. However, the practice of constantly creating new local government areas of jurisdiction has resulted in a fragmentation of large metropolitan areas. More importantly, while the existing Local Government Act calls for adjoining local government areas to work hand-in-hand, there is no enabling legislation to foster such cooperation among municipal and metropolitan authorities. Using the Greater Accra Metropolitan Area (GAMA) as a case study, this paper argues that the proliferation of autonomous local government areas within the context of urban sprawl and other challenges have inhibited metropolitan-wide development planning.*

**Keywords:** Decentralization; local government; urban growth; Accra

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## **Introduction**

The subject of decentralization and fragmentation of regional development has been an issue of intense research and debate, especially in the developed world (Lewis, 1996, 1998; Carruthers, 2003; Byun, 2005). In many parts of the developing world, especially Sub-Saharan Africa, there has been a renewed interest in decentralization and local government reforms since the late 1980s, with the view to addressing a number of development challenges including promoting equitable development and reducing poverty (Børhaug, 1994; Crook & Manor, 1998; Owusu, 2008). Indeed, decentralization has been conceived to a large extent as a logical extension of the neo-liberalization agenda, which has swept much of developing countries since the 1980s (Razin & Obirih-Opareh, 2000). Consequently, at the core of decentralization are the notions of minimalist government and privatization (both entailing the withdrawal of the state) – key tenets of neoliberalism. Again, it needs to be stressed that the implementation of decentralization and proliferation of local governments in Sub-Saharan Africa have occurred within the context of rapid urbanization and urban growth. As such, many studies have predicted the emergence, in the next few decades, of larger metropolitan areas and urban conurbations on the continent than anywhere else in the world (Satterthwaite, 1996; Potter & Lloyd-Evans, 1998; Angel et al., 2011).

Some research findings suggest that decentralization, which is broadly defined as the transfer of central government power to lower units of government, is associated with fragmented regional development and urban sprawl (Firman, 2009). The fragmentation of regional development occurs due to the perceived ‘independence’ of local government units. According to Mertes (2010), local government fragmentation does not only compound the social, economic, and environmental consequences of decentralized development, it also restricts comprehensive solutions through inhibiting the necessary cooperation within metropolitan regions. Therefore, it has been suggested that the problems of sprawl and income redistribution are less severe when local governments are consolidated (Dreier et al., 2001; Carruthers & Ulfarsson, 2002; Carruthers, 2003; Firman, 2009). In other words, fragmented local governments are less successful at addressing issues associated with urban sprawl such as housing, environmental and transportation problems and governance on a regional scale is necessary to counteract the negative effects of metropolitan growth (Dreier et al., 2001; Orfield & Gumus-Dawes, 2009).

Like many countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, Ghana has embarked on decentralization and local government reforms since the late 1980s. This has resulted in the proliferation of ‘independent’ and ‘autonomous’ local governments within the context of rapid urbanization and urban growth. Consequently, the practice of constantly creating new local government areas of jurisdiction has resulted in a fragmentation of metropolitan areas. Though there is extensive research work on decentralization in Sub-Saharan Africa, it has largely focused on examining fiscal regimes, participatory governance, local politics, institutional structures and local autonomy, with limited attention given to regional development fragmentation as a result of the proliferation of local government areas.

## *Decentralized Development Planning and Fragmentation of Metropolitan Regions: The Case of the Greater Accra Metro-politan Area, Ghana*

In his edited book titled *Redrawing Local Government Boundaries: An International Study of Politics, Procedures, and Decisions*, Meligrana (2005) demonstrated with case studies how the global trend toward urbanization has severe implications for local governments and their territories due to economic, environmental, social, and regional demands. Based on the case studies from eight developed and emerging countries (the United States, Canada, Spain, Germany, Israel, Korea, China and South Africa), Meligrana (2005) notes that restructuring of local government areas in these countries has broadly focused on the enlargement of the scope and reduction in the number of local governments within each of these countries. This is, however, contrary to the Ghanaian case, where restructuring of local governments within the context of urbanization and globalization has largely involved the fragmentation and creation of new districts in metropolitan regions like the Greater Accra Metropolitan Area (GAMA).

Using the GAMA as a case study, this paper examines the proliferation of autonomous local government areas in Ghana within the context of uncontrolled urban growth and the challenges of metropolitan region- wide development planning and development. It needs to be stressed that GAMA is used in this study, as in other earlier studies, not as an existing politico-administrative region but as a reference to the functional city-region of Accra-Tema and surrounding municipalities (see Benneh et al., 1993; Songsore et al., 1998, 2005; Grant, 2009). Indeed, recent conceptualization of the GAMA region by Yeboah et al. (2013) notes that the functional region extends into the Central Region and that there is difficulty in determining the boundary of this region due to the constant movement of this boundary. While this is acknowledged as the case, the focus of this present study is on the Accra-Tema region and surrounding municipalities within the Greater Accra political administrative region.

This article is structured into five sections. Section 1 deals with the theoretical perspectives of decentralization and regional development, followed by Section 2 which looks at decentralization reforms and local government proliferation in Ghana. Section 3 discusses urbanization and urban growth of the Greater Accra Metropolitan Accra (GAMA) and the fragmentation of this region. The challenges of fragmentation of GAMA in terms of planning and development are discussed in Section 4, and the article ends with conclusions and policy implications in Section 5. It needs to be stressed that due to the absence of empirical data on spatial fragmentation, this study is exploratory in nature and draws on secondary data sources.

### **Decentralization and Regional Development**

Decentralization has been strongly advocated as one of the strategies to achieve regional development under the neo-liberalization regime. The theoretical proposition here is that 'centralization' which is the opposite of decentralization is built on the notion of top-down development planning and administration, and tends to produce or exacerbate regional or spatial inequalities (Cheema & Rondinelli, 1983; Rondinelli, 1990; Owusu, 2008). In the developing world, where spatial inequalities in development have remained a pressing challenge for governments, policy-makers, planners and other development workers, the theoretical connection

between decentralization and the promotion of balanced regional development is one that cannot be simply ignored.

It is also significant to note that decentralization is not aspatial. In other words, promoting decentralization does not only entail transferring responsibilities for planning and democratization but also enhancing the process of spatial decentralization. According to Firman (2009), spatial decentralization refers to a process of redistribution and diffusing of economic activities spatially to prevent over-concentration in a few cities and regions in order to create a more balanced regional development.

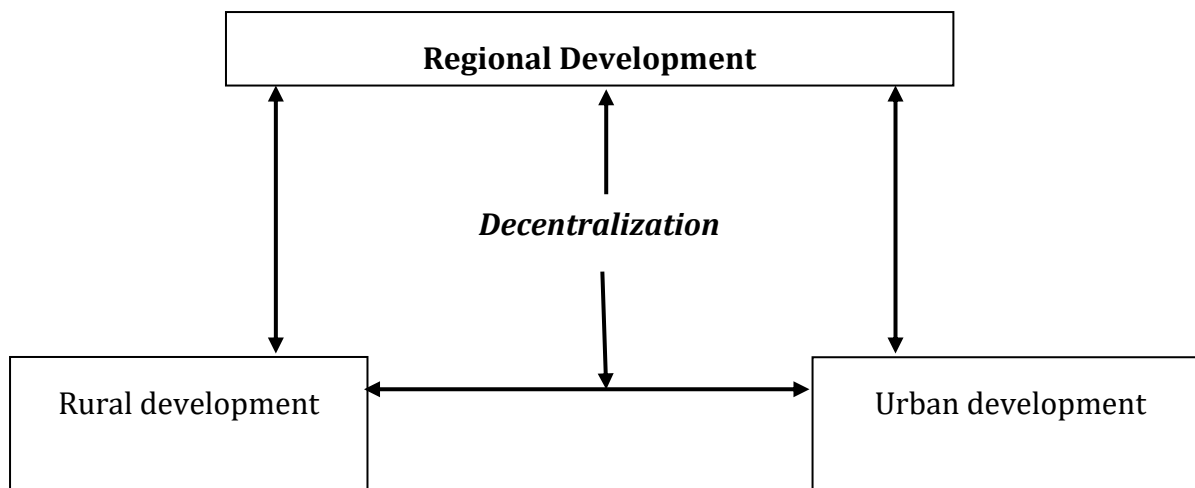
Consequently, the implementation of decentralization is expected to lead to a spatial restructuring of a country or region by reconfiguring the notions of **'centre-periphery'**, **'rural-urban divide'** and other lines of inequalities in spatial development, particularly on the basis of the degree to which activities and services of major concern could be developed between these spatial units. As already noted, centralized planning and development strategies have been viewed as leading to concentration and accumulation of resources, especially in urban areas, while decentralization is expected to lead to what Chambers (1994) refers to as 'spatial reversals', that is, redirecting resources to previous or existing disadvantaged localities or regions in order to reduce development inequalities. In essence, spatial reversals are achieved by the emergence of new forms of spatial dynamics. According to Ingham and Kalam (1992), decentralization is the key to spatial reversals as certain forces tend to centralise activities including national, urban, and class interests; political and administrative influences; market facilities; and communication. They add that these processes are not unalterable and can be reversed by central government providing more resources and giving more local discretion through empowerment of the advantaged under decentralization.

According to Owusu (2008), the transfer of power and authority from central to local levels under decentralization is expected to create different types of centre-periphery interactions over space. As illustrated in Fig. 1, decentralization acts as a vehicle to promote rural and urban development, thus enhancing the process of regional development. The process of spatial reversal triggered by decentralization of resources and development administration is consistent with the idea or the strategy of development from below which requires changes in the concept of development, in the criteria for factor allocation and in the level and direction of decision making. Spatial reversals imply improved levels of living for the population of the hitherto disadvantaged region and strengthening of households of these regions to enable them to articulate their economic and political views more strongly. This is the beginning of the process of equitable development involving both rural and urban areas, and consequently overall regional socio-economic development as illustrated in Fig. 1.

However, the notion of decentralization implies the dispersion of centralized power to multiple and lower units of government, leading to the fragmentation of government in a polity. In many parts of the developed world, especially in the United States, where the subject of local government fragmentation has received serious attention in research, the key issue is the extent to which fragmentation impacts on regional economic growth and development (Dreier et al., 2001; Orfield & Gumus-Dawes, 2009). Researchers are, however, divided on the sub-

ject, resulting in three competing theories or perspectives, namely, the polycentric, centric and regionalist perspectives.

Fig. 1: Linking Decentralization and Regional Development



The polycentric perspective which is also referred to as the ‘public choice model’ holds the view that fragmented local governments serving the same region provide greater choice for public services for the citizenry through competition, and improved political representation and citizens’ participation in governance at the local level. In the view of the proponents or supporters of this model, economic growth and development is achieved through the process of local governments’ competition in services provision and improved citizens’ participation in governance (Nelson & Foster, 1999). In support of the polycentric model, Eberts and Gronberg (1990), analysing the relationship between the number of local governments in a jurisdiction and their efficiency and size, as measured through public expenditures, concluded that multiple or fragmented local governments resulted in a decrease in the relative cost of government, and consequently made communities more attractive to households and investors.

Opposite to the polycentric model is the centric model. According to the centric model, fragmented local governments are inefficient and ineffective in dealing with challenges of urban sprawl and other regional-wide issues. Therefore, centrists advocate for governmental consolidation since in their view few large, multi-purpose governments serving metropolitan regions are efficient in administration and production and are able to address regional problems and prevent costly duplication of services (Nelson and Foster, 1999; Hamilton et al., 2004). According to Nelson and Forster (1999), consolidated systems as advocated by centrists have in relative terms access to a larger pool of resources and, therefore, can offer a wider variety of desirable services to residents and businesses than a fragmented system comprising of small municipalities. Nelson and Forster (1999) add that fragmented local governments may discourage investments as investors are likely to be deterred by the multiple layers of gov-

ernments, both horizontal and vertical, that they have to deal with. Writing on the horizontal and vertical dimensions of the governing of metropolitan regions, Hamilton et al. (2004) argued that the worst combination for metropolitan competitiveness is decentralization within regions such as Ghana where there is a centralized state government.

The third perspective, the regionalist model ignores the significance of fragmented local government but rather focuses on the economic and social advantages offered by the existence of region-wide mechanisms for collaborative decision-making. In other words, the view of the regionalists is that the number, size, or arrangements of local governments are not of critical importance when dealing with regional issues (Nunn & Rosentraub, 1997). As Nelson and Foster (1999) simply put it, the primary concern of regionalists is the role of metropolitan governance structures in making decisions on issues of regional significance. A closer observation of the proportions of regionalists suggests they are not very different from the centrists as they are also much concerned about the extent to which regional governance structures deal with the issues of regional competitiveness, economic efficiency and equity. Indeed, regionalists are of the view that the 'key to metropolitan reform is to create metropolitan governance systems with the powers and the tools to coordinate land use, transportation, housing and environmental policy on a metropolitan scale' (Orfield & Gumus-Dawes, 2009, p. 18; Orfield & Luce, 2009) to deal with metropolitan-wide development and growth challenges.

To what extent do the decentralized metropolitan and municipal governments in GAMA demonstrate the polycentric or centric and regionalist perspectives, and how does fragmentation of local government areas impact on regional economic growth and development? The next section and subsequent sections of this article will address this and other related questions.

## **Decentralization Reform and Local Government Proliferation in Ghana**

Decentralization and local government are not new in Ghana; they date back to the colonial era of indirect rule (Dickson, 1971; Bening, 1999; Yankson, 2000). However, the decentralization programme, which was introduced in 1988 and which has been running to date, has been described as the most comprehensive, boldest and far-reaching initiative in the country's history (Naustdalslid, 1992). Indeed, many have described Ghana's decentralization as a logical extension of the country's neo-liberal economic policies vigorously pursued since the mid-1980s under the World Bank/IMF-sponsored Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs)/Economic Recovery Programme (ERP) initiatives (Ayee, 1997; Razin & Obirih-Opareh, 2000; Thomi et al., 2000). Because it has taken on the different characteristics of political, administrative and territorial/spatial forms of decentralization, Ghana's current decentralization framework is described as a mixed or fused system (Naustdalslid, 1992; Crook & Manor, 1998). However, local governments in Ghana are not independent of central government, and in practice are subject to the dictates of central government.

A local government in Ghana could be a Metropolitan Assembly, Municipal Assembly or a District Assembly. Metropolitan Assemblies are established for large towns with populations

*Decentralized Development Planning and Fragmentation of Metropolitan Regions: The Case of the Greater Accra Metro-politan Area, Ghana*

of 250,000 or more; Municipal Assemblies for urban localities with population sizes of not less than 95,000 but not more than 250,000; and District Assemblies are predominantly for rural areas with small towns, and possibly serve the district capitals or administrative centres (MLG&D, 1996). These spatial definitions give territorial meaning to decentralization as districts demarcated as local government units can be described as a geographically expressed form of government (Owusu, 2009). Owusu (2009) adds that the decentralized districts are based on the notion of spatial differences or a sense of locality – the belief that a district demarcated is different from other surrounding areas.

Formulated and implemented under a military regime, the Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC), the current decentralization programme was given legal backing by PNDC Law 207 and resulted in the creation of 110 Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies (MMDAs) in Ghana. These 110 MMDAs replaced the 65 District Councils (local governments) which had been in existence since the 1970s (Crook and Manor, 1998). PNDC Law 207 was subsequently replaced by the Local Government Act, 1993, Act 462, when the country returned to constitutional democratic rule in that year. Under Act 462, MMDAs have overall responsibility for the development of their areas of jurisdiction. In addition, they have executive, legislative and deliberative powers, as well as administrative and technical support, to articulate the views and aspirations of the people within districts for effective development at the local level. In essence, Ghana's decentralized development process requires that the MMDAs assume the overall territorial authority of districts.

The past three decades have witnessed a phenomenal growth or increase in the number of MMDAs as presented in Table 1. From just 110 MMDAs for the period 1988-2003, the number rose to 138 in 2004; 170 in 2008 and; 216 in 2012. Thus, in less than a decade, the number of local government areas has more than doubled – an addition of 106 MMDAs for the period 2004-2012. Table 1 clearly indicates that there has been a proliferation of local governments in Ghana from the mid-2000s. While the period from 1988 through the 1990s and early 2000s did not witness any increase in the number of MMDAs, the situation has been different since 2004, with an average of over 13 MMDAs established per year.

**Table 1: Proliferation of Local Governments**

Year	Number of Local Governments			Total	Increase
	Metropolitan	Municipal	District		
1988	3	-	107	110	-
2004	4	10	124	138	+28
2008	6	40	124	170	+32
2012	6	49	161	216	+46

The legal basis for the creation of districts or the alteration of district boundaries is provided in Ghana's 1992 Constitution and the Local Government Act (Act 462), 1993. Article 241(2) of the national Constitution stipulates that 'Parliament may by law make provision for the re-

drawing of the boundaries of districts or for reconstituting districts without specifying the legal procedures to be followed (Bening, 2012). However, the specific procedures to be followed and the required criteria for the creation of districts are provided in the Local Government Act, 1993 (Act 462). Act 462 empowers the President of Ghana to play the dominant role in the creation of districts based on the recommendations of the independent Electoral Commission (Ayee, 2008). In the creation of districts by the President, Act 462 stipulates the consideration of three principal criteria, namely:

- A minimum population threshold – 75,000 in the case of District Assembly; 95,000 for Municipal Assembly characterised by a single compact settlement; and 250,000 for Metropolitan Assembly or large town/city;
- Geographical congruity, in terms of both space and socio-cultural harmony; and
- Economic viability of the area, which is defined in Act 462 as the ability of an area to provide the basic infrastructural and other developmental needs from the monetary and other resources generated in the area (Bening, 2012: 3).

The key question to ask is whether in the creation of MMDAs, these criteria are seriously taken into account. Evidence suggests that beyond the population criterion, the others, especially economic viability, are hardly given serious consideration. Even the population criterion, the easiest criterion to meet is not strictly applied. This is because a number of MMDAs have been established with populations far below the minimum threshold as stipulated in Act 462 (see Table 2). Table 2 reveals that as of 2010, 31 MMDAs (1 Metropolitan, 6 Municipal and 24 District Assemblies), that is, over 14% of the 216 MMDAs did not meet the minimum population set in the law for the creation of districts. For many of these MMDAs, such as Cape Coast Metropolitan Assembly which was established in 2008, but which by 2010 had a total population of only 169,894, they are unlikely to reach the legally required minimum population anytime soon.

The wanton creation of districts has gone hand in hand with increases in the number of established electoral constituencies in Ghana (see Table 3). While the Constitution grants sweeping powers to the President in the creation of districts, the creation of electoral constituencies is the sole preserve of Ghana's independent Electoral Commission (EC). Among other functions, Article 47(5) of the Constitution mandates the EC to 'review the division of Ghana into constituencies at intervals of not less than seven years, or within twelve months after the publication of the enumeration figures after the holding of a census of the population of Ghana, whichever is earlier, and may, as a result alter the constituencies' (Republic of Ghana, 1996: 45).

While the Constitution gives a time frame for the revision of electoral constituencies, no time frame is provided in the case of the creation of districts by the President. Also, Act 462 stipulates that a Member of Parliament (MP) whose constituency falls within the area of a District Assembly is an ex-officio member of the Assembly. It, however, adds that a person (interpreted to include an MP) shall not at any one time be a member of more than one District As-



*Decentralized Development Planning and Fragmentation of Metropolitan Regions: The Case of the Greater Accra Metro-politan Area, Ghana*

sembly. By implication, the alteration of the boundaries of districts necessitates the establishment of new constituencies to prevent an MP's constituency straddling two or more district boundaries. In other words, the desire to create constituencies for political gain requires the establishment of new districts which per the Constitution and Act 462 can be done at any time. It is within this context that several MMDAs have been created in Ghana in the last decade.

**Table 2: MMDAs with Population Size below Legal Minimum Threshold by Region**

Region	Metropolitan Assembly (minimum pop. 250,000)		Municipal Assembly (minimum pop. 95,000)		District Assembly (minimum pop. 75,000)	
	Name	Pop	Name	Pop	Name	Pop
Western			1. Tarkwa-Nsuaem	90,477	1. Nzema East	60,828
Central	1. Cape Coast	169,894	2. Efutu 3. Upper Denkyira East	68,597 72,810	2. Upper Denkyira West	60,054
Greater Accra			4. Adenta	78,215		
Volta					3. Adaklu Anyigbe 4. South Dayi 5. Biakoye 6. Jasikan 7. Kadjebi 8. Nkwanta North	64,404 46,661 65,901 59,181 59,303 64,553
Eastern					9. Upper Manya Krobo 10. Kwahu South	72,092 69,757
Ashanti			5. Mampong 6. Offinso	88,051 76,895	11. Bosome Freho 12. Sekyere East 13. Sekyere Central 14. Offinso North	60,397 62,172 71,232 56,881
Brong-Ahafo					15. Dormaa East 16. Nkoranza North	50,871 65,895
Northern					17. Bole 18. Saboba 19. Chereponi	61,593 65,706 53,394
Upper East					20. Kasena Nankana West	70,667
Upper West					21. Wa East 22. Sissala East 23. Sissala West 24. Lambussie Karni	72,074 56,528 49,573 51,654
<b>Total</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>-</b>

Source: Derived from 2010 Population and Housing Census Report (GSS, 2012: 95-105)

It needs to be noted that the period of proliferation of local governments in Ghana has coincided with an era of intense political party activism and the struggle for power especially between the two dominant political parties, the National Democratic Congress (NDC) and the New Patriotic Party (NPP). While the NPP which ruled the country from 2001-2008 was quick to justify the increase in MMDAs in 2004 and 2008, the NDC strongly opposed the move. Similarly, in 2012, the decision by the NDC (which won back power in December 2008, and assumed control of the country in 2009) to create an additional 46 MMDAs was met with strong opposition and stiff protestation by the NPP.

**Table 3: Number of Electoral Constituencies and MMDAs, 1993-2012**

Period	No. of Constituencies	No. of MMDAs
1993-2000	200	110
2001-2003	230	110
2004-2007	230	138
2008-2011	230	170
2012-date	275	216

Increasingly, the creation of districts is seen as enhancing the ruling party's political advantage, and there have been accusations of gerrymandering. Perhaps this explains the higher number of MMDAs in the Volta and Ashanti Regions (the electoral strongholds of the NDC and NPP respectively) with populations below the required legal minimum, as shown in Table 2. In fact, almost 40% of MMDAs with populations lower than the legally-required minimum threshold can be found in the two regions. Again, the creation of districts is used as a means of creating job opportunities for political cronies after winning political power, especially the position of District Chief Executive (DCE), the political head of the district, who is appointed by the national President. It is therefore not surprising that despite intense agitations for the position of the DCE to be elected through universal adult suffrage, the position has continued to be filled through appointment.

Within this context, the criteria of population, geographical congruity and economic viability set up clearly in Act 462 are of little relevance and to a large extent ignored. While political expediency seems to have taken the better part of the argument for district creation, the implications in terms of fragmentation of regional development have received little attention. In the next section, we analyze the implications of the proliferation of local governments and fragmentation of regional development within the context of rapid urbanization and urban growth using Ghana's largest metropolitan area, the Greater Accra Metropolitan Area (GAMA) as a case study.

## **Urban Growth and Fragmentation of GAMA**

The relocation of the national capital of Ghana (then Gold Coast) by the colonial British authorities from Cape Coast to Accra in 1877 is one of the significant factors of the growth of Accra (Grant & Yankson, 2003). This relocation unleashed a rapid process of development to convert the small coastal settlement, Accra, into an economic, political and administrative hub of Ghana, and it has attracted significant public and private investments towards its infra-structural and service development over the years. As result, GAMA is the ‘most developed’ region in Ghana.

As the national socio-economic hub with more well developed infrastructure and services than any locality in Ghana, Accra naturally has attracted migrants from other regions of the country and beyond (Grant & Yankson, 2003; Yeboah, 2000, 2003; Yeboah et al., 2013; Grant, 2009; Owusu, 2013). Consequently, the process of urbanization and urban growth has been stronger in this region than any part of Ghana. According to GSS (2012), the Greater Accra Region is the most densely populated and most urbanized region with a density of approximately 1,236 persons per square kilometre compared to a national average of 103 persons. The high concentration of population in the national capital, Accra, has resulted in a spillover of its population to the surrounding districts and the rapid conversion of several once rural settlements into one big urban concentration (Yeboah, 2000, 2003; Yeboah et al., 2013), referred to as the Greater Accra Metropolitan Area (GAMA).

Table 4 shows the population of GAMA from 1970-2010. The population of the metropolitan area grew from over 827,983 in 1970 to over 1.3 million in 1984 and over 2.5 million in 2000, reaching over 3.6 million in 2010. Thus, between 1970 and 2010, a period of 40 years, the population of GAMA more than quadrupled. A critical review of Table 4 reveals that much of the population growth in GAMA is not in the Accra Metropolis but rather the surrounding municipalities which until quite recently were to a large extent rural in character (Yeboah, 2000, 2003; Yeboah et al., 2013). These areas which lay to the west and east of the Accra Metropolis have experienced phenomenal growth with annual growth rates of over 30% recorded in some peri-urban communities (Owusu, 2013). In all, the growth rates of the surrounding municipalities classified in Table 4 as ‘Other municipalities’ were far higher than that of the Accra metropolis.

**Table 4: Population of GAMA, 1970-2010**

District	1970	1984		2000		2010	
	Pop.	Growth Rate	Pop.	Growth Rate	Pop.	Growth Rate	Pop.
Accra Metropolis	636,667	3.0	969,195	3.3	1,658,937	1.1	1,848,614
Tema Metropolis	102,431	4.4	190,917	2.8	298,432	3.0	402,637
Other Municipalities	88,885	5.2	183,704	8.4	700,780	6.9	1,405,172
<b>Total</b>	<b>827,983</b>	<b>3.5</b>	<b>1,343,816</b>	<b>3.9</b>	<b>2,501,196</b>	<b>3.8</b>	<b>3,656,423</b>

Source: Derived from Population Census reports (1970, 1984, 2000 and 2010).

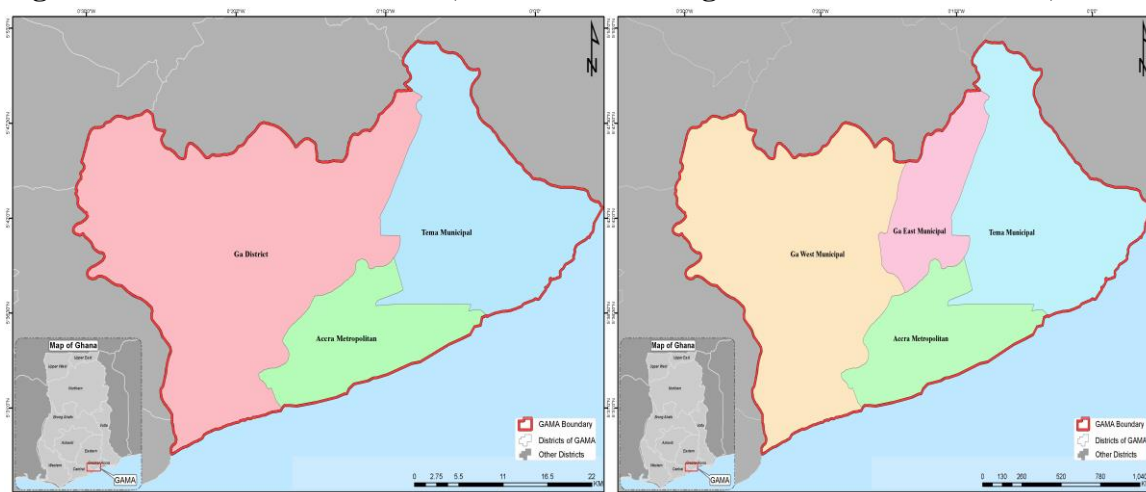
Although the growth of GAMA dates back several decades, the rate of urban expansion and sprawl of the region seems to have picked up in the last three decades. This era coincides with liberal economic and political regimes in Ghana (Grant & Nijman, 2002; Grant & Yankson, 2003; Otiso & Owusu, 2008; Yeboah, 2000, 2003; Yeboah et al., 2013). In essence, this period marks the incorporation of Ghana and more specifically Accra into the global economy, and consequently the attraction of global capital and its actors (Grant & Nijman, 2002; Yeboah, 2000, 2003; Yeboah et al., 2013). As Owusu (2013) notes, the impact of the influx of globalization is the pressure it has brought on land, due to the influx, not only of rural-urban migrants but also international migrants, multinational companies and international NGOs – all seeking a foothold in Accra in order to exploit the opportunities offered by the metropolitan region.

Within the challenges of weak urban planning, poor management of land and general poor urban governance, the sprawl of GAMA seems to be out of control. In particular, there is a strong disconnection between physical planning and programming of investments due to the absence of a strategic forward planning vision for the metropolitan region (GoG/MLG&RD, 2012; Doan & Oduro, 2012). Consequently, planning lags far behind development, resulting in a haphazard development process which manifests itself as slums and poor neighbourhoods within the inner core of GAMA, and the continuous extensive sprawl associated with poorly sited and serviced communities on its margins.

A key response to the challenges of the growth and sprawl of GAMA has been the continuous fragmentation of the metropolitan area into smaller local government areas within the context of Ghana's decentralization programme. From just three MMDAs at the start of the current decentralization programme between 1988 and 2003, the number of local government areas increased to four in 2004 following the creation of new districts in the country, and as part of that exercise the Ga District was split into Ga East and Ga West Municipalities (see Fig. 1a and Fig. 1b).

**Fig. 1a: MMDA Areas in GAMA, 1988-2003**

**Fig. 1b: MMDAs in GAMA, 2004-2007**



*Decentralized Development Planning and Fragmentation of Metropolitan Regions: The Case of the Greater Accra Metro-politan Area, Ghana*

The number of local government areas in GAMA doubled in 2008 following the further fragmentation of the existing Metropolitan and Municipal Assemblies (MMAs) within the metropolitan region as part of the government’s proposal to create 32 new districts within the whole country. In specific terms, the Ledzokuku-Krowor and Ashaiman Municipalities were carved out of the Accra and Tema Metropolitan Assemblies respectively. In addition, the Ga South Municipality was created out of the Ga West Municipality while the Adenta Municipality was created out of the Tema Metropolitan and Ga East Municipal Assemblies. Fig. 2 shows local government areas in GAMA for the period 2008-2011.

In 2012, the number of local government areas in GAMA was further increased from 8 to 12 following the creation of 46 districts in the country. The new local government areas in GAMA were Ga Central, Kpone Katamanso, La Dade-Kotopon and La-Nkwantanang-Madina Municipal Assemblies. The Ga Central, La-Nkwantanang-Madina and Kpone Katamanso Municipalities were carved out of the Ga South Municipal, Ga East Municipal and Tema Metropolitan Assemblies respectively. The land size of the AMA was further reduced following the creation of the La Dade-Kotopon Municipal Assembly. Fig. 3 illustrates the present fragmentation of GAMA in terms of local government areas.

Fig. 2: Local Government Areas in GAMA, 2008-2011

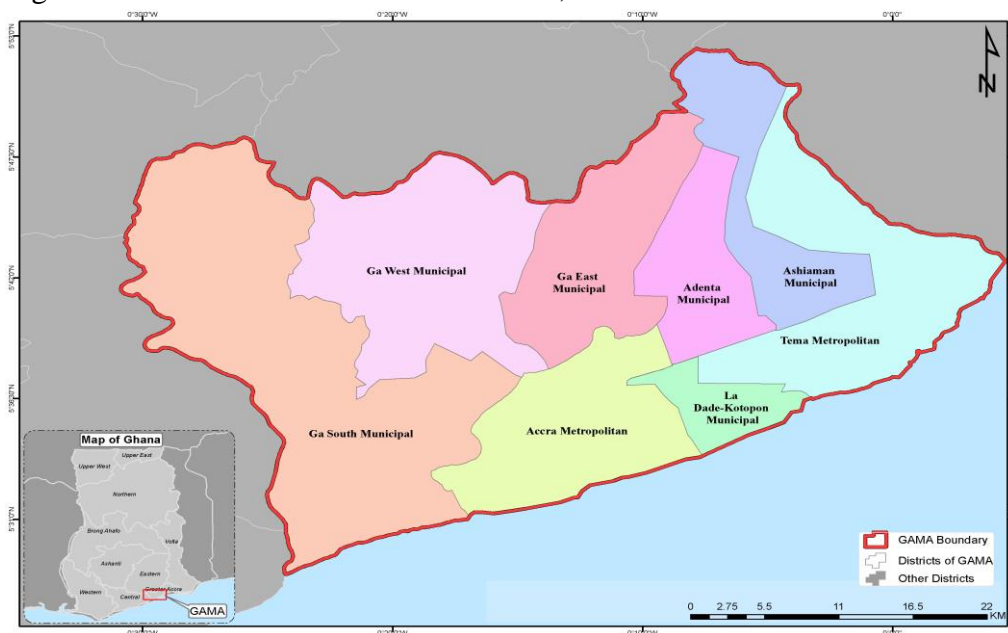
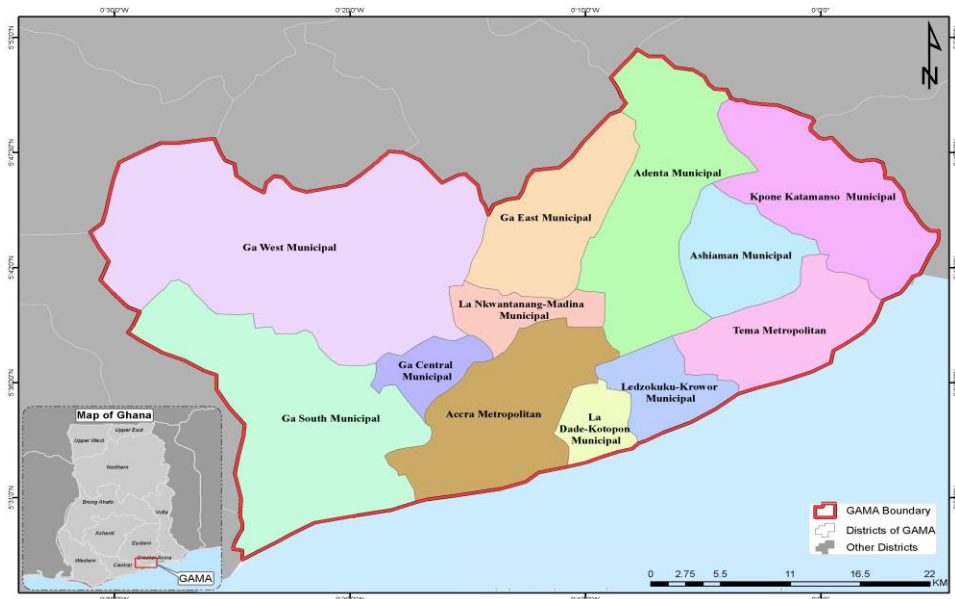


Fig. 3: Map of Local Government Areas in GAMA, 2012\*



\*Boundaries of MMAs on this map do not represent the yet to be gazetted boundaries in GAMA

As earlier noted, the fragmentation of local government areas in Ghana is associated with the creation of electoral constituencies. Consequently, the continuous creation of new districts in GAMA is accompanied by the creation of new electoral constituencies as well. The number of electoral constituencies in GAMA increased from 20 in 2000 to 23 for the 2004 and 2008 elections. However, the number of electoral constituencies increased from 23 in 2008 to 30 in 2012. Though the increase in the number of electoral constituencies for the last decade has not been as dramatic as the number of local government areas within GAMA, the addition of 10 more constituencies between 2000 and 2012 represents an increase of over 33%.

## Planning and Development Administration Challenges of Fragmented GAMA

As indicated earlier, nowhere else in Ghana has the fragmentation of local government areas and the creation of new districts occurred with such speed as in the GAMA region. However, in the absence of an effective regional development policy framework for GAMA and for the rest of the regions and districts of Ghana, the continuous fragmentation of the metropolitan region raises a number of planning and development administration challenges. In the following section the key challenges of planning and development administration in fragmented GAMA are discussed.

### Administrative boundary disputes

A key challenge associated with the fragmentation of local government areas is the increasing incidence of and widespread boundary disputes among the MMAs in GAMA. Reports from

*Decentralized Development Planning and Fragmentation of Metropolitan Regions: The Case of the Greater Accra Metro-politan Area, Ghana*

the Assemblies, media and government sources indicate that almost all the MMAs in GAMA are contesting their boundary demarcations. The background information on the AMA and other related official websites of the Assembly note that:

New Districts had been created out of our Metropolis [AMA] and within the Greater Accra Region. With the creation of these new districts, the exact boundary demarcations with some of these new districts are becoming increasingly problematic generating disputes between us and those on the periphery.

Similar to the case of the AMA, the other Metropolitan Assembly in GAMA, the Tema Metropolitan Assembly (TMA), is also involved in several boundary disputes with its adjoining Municipal Assemblies, namely Ledzekuku-Krowor, Ashaiman, Kpone-Katamanso and Adenta. The Ghanaian media is therefore replete with headlines indicating the intense agitations and open hostilities between the TMA and these Assemblies. It needs to be stressed that disputes over district boundaries in GAMA do not involve only the AMA and the TMA and their adjoining Municipalities, but also the other districts within GAMA. A case in point is the reported boundary dispute between the Adenta and the Ga East Municipal Assemblies; Ledzekuku-Krowor and La Dadekotopon Municipal Assemblies; and Ledzekuku-Krowor and Ashaiman Municipal Assemblies.

The problems posed by these boundary disputes to the development of the GAMA region is a matter of concern to the public, planners and politicians. These boundary disputes generate controversy and confusion regarding where developers and residents should go for building permits and other permits provided by the Assemblies. For instance, it was reported that the boundary disputes between Adenta Municipal Assembly and Ga East Municipal Assembly created a situation which left many building projects uncompleted in the two districts due to the fact that many developers had to put their projects on hold because they were not granted building permits. Again, the report noted that the boundary dispute led to a situation whereby traders and business operators were confused regarding where to pay taxes and other levies, as each Assembly impressed upon them to pay their taxes at its office.

These administrative boundary disputes among the MMAs in GAMA which are largely centred on sources of revenue generation have in some instances resulted in open hostilities among personnel of the contesting Assemblies. For instance, the TMA, on the one hand, and the Ashaiman and Kpone-Katamanso Municipal Assemblies, on the other hand, are involved in a dispute over parts of the Tema industrial area. To affirm its stance to defend its administrative boundaries, the TMA recently dispatched its taskforce and city guards to forcefully evict all persons who have encroached on their administrative boundaries. This action followed physical attacks on some of its revenue staff and other personnel who vehemently prevented the Ashaiman Municipal Assembly from trespassing on its alleged boundaries by either collecting revenue from persons whose businesses were sited on TMA's administrative lands or allocating the lands without TMA's authorization.

Though boundary disputes are not peculiar to the GAMA region, as Owusu (2009) noted they tend to proliferate as local government areas become smaller. More importantly, in a metropolitan region like GAMA largely made up of contiguous built-up areas where natural or physical boundaries are almost absent, the challenge of defining local government areas becomes even greater. Against the background of non-cooperation among adjoining districts, this situation weakens development controls as it is likely to create areas of 'no control' or 'no man's land', contributing to the excessive sprawl of the metropolitan region.

### **Non-cooperation of adjoining local government areas**

The disputes over boundaries have compounded the challenge of weak regional planning in Ghana. For GAMA, this situation is exacerbated by the non-cooperation of adjoining MMDAs. Even though the Local Government Act, 1993 (Act 462) provides a framework to facilitate the coordination and harmonization of development planning and programmes in adjoining separate and independent local government areas, there are no subsidiary legislative instruments to activate certain provisions of the law (GoG/MLG&RD, 2012). Due to the absence of these legislative frameworks, each MMDA has its own individual plan, budget and institutional framework for plan implementation. For the GAMA region, the issue of non-cooperation of adjoining MMAs within the region is critical given the spillover population of the AMA as well as the high demands from the other MMAs.

Consequently, a number of policy interventions instituted by the AMA have failed abysmally partly due to the non-involvement of the other MMAs within GAMA. An example is the failure of AMA to develop landfill sites in Kwabenya and Oblogo partly due to the non-cooperation of the MMAs which host these communities. Another example is the policy of decongestion pursued for the last decade within AMA with the key objective of reducing congestion within the metropolis, which had very little success. The AMA attracts a daily day time population far larger than its resident population – mainly as a result of people coming from the adjoining MMAs to the AMA daily for work, market and other economic activities as well as access to services not present in their local government areas. This situation is demonstrated by the intense traffic entering and leaving the AMA during the morning and evening rush hours respectively. Yet AMA has pursued decongestion with little or no active involvement of the surrounding municipalities.

It must, however, be noted that fragmentation of GAMA is heavily skewed against AMA. This is because the adjoining local government areas are relatively underdeveloped in terms of infrastructure and services. Consequently, employment opportunities are limited and therefore the residents of these municipalities are overwhelmingly dependent on the AMA. Although apart from TMA, one can observe increasing growth of economic activities in the other municipalities, many of these municipalities remain economically weak and to some extent can be described as dormitory centres providing housing for the population who work in the AMA.



## **Challenges of land management**

It can be argued that the fragmentation of the GAMA has exacerbated the challenges of land management in the region. As is the practice in West Africa and other African countries, in Ghana, land is largely owned by traditional authorities (chiefs/queenmothers, and family/clan heads) and other customary institutions, whose areas of jurisdiction are not co-terminous with local government boundaries. The existing constitutional and planning and building regulations provide that while traditional institutions are the custodians and owners of land, land use planning and zoning are the functions of local governments. However, Owusu (2009) has argued that land use planning and zoning by local governments become excessively problematic where land resources within a district fall under the jurisdiction of chiefs and other traditional authorities who may not be living in the district or whose allegiance may lie elsewhere.

The weak land management and development control account for the massive sprawl of GAMA (Gough & Yankson, 2000; Doan & Oduro, 2012). This situation has been further exacerbated by the fragmentation of the local governments in GAMA and the absence of any meaningful cooperation among the 12 MMAs with regards to land management and development control. Again, the lack of cooperation in land management has contributed to the loss of contiguous green belts and other ecological-sensitive areas much emphasized in the Strategic Plan for the Greater Accra Metropolitan Area Volumes 1&2 and Summary Report (MLG/DTCP, 1993a, 1993b, 1993c) developed for the region in the early 1990s with the support of UNDP and the UN-Habitat. This 10-year strategic plan, 1995-2005 envisaged among other considerations the following:

- consolidate development within the existing built-up area;
- promote orderly growth expansion;
- upgrade poor inner city areas;
- establish greenbelts to constrain long-term expansion into the hills to the northwest of Accra to give structure and definition to GAMA; and
- ensure conservation of important environmental and wetland areas.

However, as Owusu (2013) noted, these objectives failed to materialize at the end of the plan period, 1995-2005, partly due to weak land management and development control.

## **Rapid metropolitan growth and traffic congestion**

The proposition here is that in the absence of a coordinated regional transportation policy which provides for a comprehensive planning for the entire 12 MMAs of the GAMA region, the patchwork pattern of decentralized, fragmented government in the metropolitan area may be self-perpetuating, with important implications for future efforts to plan and coordinate

metropolitan area development (see Dyble, 2012). This is seen in the inadequate and uncoordinated transportation facilities largely centred on the informal operations of the Ghana Private Road Transport Union (GPRTU) and other private associations. As a result of the excessive fragmentation, there are several of these associations in each of the 12 MMAs within GAMA and they operate in an uncoordinated fashion. In the absence of a coordinated regional transport policy and a formalized transport sector, movement within GAMA is impeded by heavy traffic congestions and high costs (time and fuel consumption).

The challenges of transportation in GAMA have been further compounded by uncoordinated central government investments in road corridors and virtual limitless outward movement of the metropolitan fringes – facilitating the development of cheaper and abundant lands. It needs to be stressed that across the world, it has been noted that fragmented local governments are less successful at addressing issues associated with urban sprawl such as transportation problems. The situation of GAMA is not different from this broad observation.

### **Increased overheads cost**

The extent to which fragmentation of local government areas contributes to efficient and effective utilization of resources, especially public funds, is a matter of debate (Meligrana, 2005; Mertes, 2010). However, as Meligrana (2005) notes, across the developed and emerging economies the restructuring of local government has largely involved the enlargement of the scope and a reduction in the numbers of local government areas. Clearly, this view suggests that attainment of efficiency among local governments does not lie in increasing their numbers beyond a threshold.

A number of studies on financing of local government indicate that efficiency and effectiveness in the use of public funds have not come with the fragmentation of local governments, especially in the GAMA region. At best, these studies indicate rising levels of recurrent expenditure as increasing numbers of MMAs share the same pot of funds from the state. This is because an increase in local government areas results in the creation of several administrative set ups which must be funded through recurrent expenditure. Consequently, several MMAs created in recent years, such as the Ga South Municipal Assembly, continue to be housed in poor and temporary structures largely due to limited funds to develop new and adequate office space for the many offices of the Assemblies.

A related view is that fragmentation also has the effect of turning adjoining local government areas into competitors, thereby inhibiting their coordination and producing inefficiencies on a regional scale (see Mertes, 2010; Lay & Cram, 2005; Meligrana and Razin, 2005). The competition among adjoining local governments can result in the duplication of infrastructure, services, and amenities as each struggles to develop. This is exemplified by the widespread abandoning of projects such as roads and drainage construction, and basic services (schools, landfills, etc.) throughout the MMAs in GAMA due to the over-duplication of amenities and wasteful competition stemming from fragmentation. Mertes (2010) argues that these patterns of duplication and underutilization are more pervasive in the form of public investments in

roads, water and sewerage infrastructure, schools, and other basic urban services which increasingly burden taxpayers across fragmented metropolitan regions.

## **Conclusion and Policy Implications**

The capacity to shape policies at the regional level in order to address economic, social, and environmental problems remains critical for sound metropolitan area development and competitiveness (Dyble, 2012). However, local governments are not likely to voluntarily compromise their autonomy or to acquiesce to an authoritative regional government. It is for this reason that the continuous fragmentation of GAMA and other large metropolitan regions of Ghana represents a structural obstacle towards achieving metropolitan regional goals. Against the backdrop of uncontrolled urban sprawl, increasing slums and inner-city development challenges, local governments in GAMA can be described as bearing all the negative tendencies (or criticisms) of polycentric governments as expressed by centrists. These challenges are further compounded by the absence of metropolitan governance systems with the powers and the tools to coordinate land use and planning on a metropolitan scale, as strongly emphasized by regionalists.

Clearly, this study calls for a rethinking of the present approach whereby governments hide under unclear constitutional regulations and are motivated by political considerations to create local government areas within metropolitan areas. Even though ideological and intellectual changes since the 1990s have resulted in growing support for decentralization and market-based governance (Dyble, 2012), the growing pressures from urbanization and urban sprawl as well as globalization require regional coordination and planning as a critical response to the challenges of metropolitan governance and development. However, decentralized governmental structures represent a formidable obstacle to reform, especially in the wake of wanton creation or fragmentation of metropolitan Ghana largely for political expediency. In a country like Ghana with relatively weak governance structures and the capture of political power by local and national elites, the attempt to create a regional governance approach has remained quite a formidable task.

Within the context of limited funding for local governments in GAMA and generally across the rest of Ghana as demonstrated by several studies, the continuous fragmentation or wanton creation of districts within the region is likely to compound the challenge of financing. This fact needs to be related to the growing developmental needs of the region, especially the need for basic infrastructure and services such as roads, water supply, energy, communication, transportation, etc. required for metropolitan competitiveness in a globalizing world. Clearly, the procedures for the creation of local government areas in Ghana within the existing decentralization policy framework need to be reformed. In particular, the grey areas in the law which allow the President to create districts without serious attention to the economic viability of such districts in metropolitan areas like GAMA call for critical re-evaluation. There are enough incentives for the political leadership to promote reforms in the law and procedures for the creation of districts in Ghana. This is because the wanton creation of districts has

caused enough political discontent and the whole process has not helped to achieve the broad objectives of the decentralization policy. Though local government demarcation is embedded in a political context, serious consideration must be given to efficiency, effectiveness and equity in the provision of services and infrastructure, as well as to planning and development of MMDAs.

Indeed, the radical experience of South Africa provides a case study for local government demarcation reforms in Ghana. At the end of apartheid in the early 1990s, South Africa introduced a series of radical reforms which culminated in the establishment of an independent Municipal Demarcation Board under Act 27 of 1998, with a strong emphasis on the economic viability of local government areas. Guided by the principle of cooperative governance, which regards the three spheres of governments (national, provincial and local) as distinctive, interdependent and interrelated, the Board's work resulted in the dramatic reduction or rationalization of local government areas from 843 to 284 with great implications for political and managerial jobs (Cameron, 2005). According to Cameron (2005, p. 210), the independent and impartial Municipal Demarcation Board performing its functions without fear, favour and prejudice, is rare on the international scene and represents a novelty in many respects, for it is unthinkable for politicians to grant decision-making powers of this sort to appointed boards. These are the kinds of powers and principles required of offices and institutions in any local government demarcation reforms in Ghana.

To conclude, a rethinking along the arguments of the centric and regionalist perspectives is required to address metropolitan-wide development in GAMA and other metropolitan areas of Ghana. More specifically, there is the need for a metropolitan governance structure which promotes effective collaboration and cooperation among the 12 MMAs of GAMA. Perhaps it is about time the Regional Coordinating Council (RCC) and its technical wing the Regional Planning Coordinating Unit (RPCU), an agency established at the regional level to serve as an intermediate co-ordinating and monitoring link between central government and MMDAs, were better resourced to facilitate the needed coordination and collaboration among Assemblies in GAMA and other metropolitan areas of Ghana.

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