

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF DECENTRALIZATION POLICY AS A TOOL FOR
POVERTY ERADICATION IN THE EAST GONJA DISTRICT OF GHANA

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...To those who deserve much appreciation...

To my supervisor Professor Dr. Ibrahim Bin Ngah, thanks so much. You did not see me as your student only but as a friend, brother and a colleague, I dedicate this work

to you and

Associate Professor Dr. M. Rafee Majid my co supervisor

My beloved wife,

Ayisha Mahama Jeduah

My children,

Ismael E. Mohammed

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ABSTRACT

Decentralization has been a global phenomenon since the 1980s. It has been advocated as a major administrative reform package by donors and development agencies, and an important strategy for improving local governance, thereby promoting poverty reduction at grass-roots level. Since the implementation of the decentralization policy in Ghana, few studies have been carried out to establish its purported relationship to poverty reduction. This thesis examined the impact of decentralization on poverty reduction in the East Gonja District in Northern Ghana. The indicators of poverty used in this study are income, access to social services and community participation. Data for the study were gathered from mixed-methods approach based on three set of survey questionnaires, focus group discussions and interviews. The respondents for the surveys were household heads (n=310), elected members of the District Assembly (n=10), and Assembly's staff (n=10), from which, selected respondents participated in six organized focused group discussions and three in-depth interviews. Quantitative data was analysed using SPSS statistical package. The regression analysis between poverty reduction and decentralization was 0.642, indicating that this correlation is not significant. This result shows that poverty levels do not depend on decentralization. The data analysis further revealed that all the household heads interviewed were deprived of the set of indicators for measuring poverty, and are therefore considered to be living in absolute poverty. The study recommends measures to improve and increase productivity in agriculture through the provision of irrigation dams, access to extension services and a more functional sub-structure of the district assembly.

ABSTRAK

Desentralisasi telah menjadi fenomena global sejak 1980-an. Desentralisasi telah diperjuangkan sebagai pakej utama reformasi pentadbiran oleh penyumbang dan agensi pembangunan dan menjadi strategi penting untuk meningkatkan tadbir urus tempatan yang dengannya menggalakkan pengurangan kemiskinan di peringkat akar umbi. Sejak pelaksanaan polisi desentralisasi di Ghana beberapa kajian telah dijalankan untuk menentukan hubungan yang mengatakan desentralisasi dapat mengurangkan kadar kemiskinan. Tesis ini mengkaji impaks desentralisasi kepada pengurangan kemiskinan di daerah Timur Gonja di Ghana Utara. Petunjuk kemiskinan yang digunakan dalam kajian ini ialah pendapatan, akses kepada perkhidmatan masyarakat dan penyertaan komuniti. Data untuk kajian ini dikumpulkan daripada pendekatan kaedah campuran berdasarkan tiga set kajian soal selidik dan perbincangan serta wawancara kumpulan sasaran. Responden kepada kajian ini terdiri daripada ketua keluarga (n=310), ahli terpilih Perhimpunan Daerah (n=10) dan pegawai Perhimpunan Daerah (n=10). Responden yang terpilih telah menyertai enam perbincangan kumpulan sasaran dan tiga temu bual mendalam yang dianjurkan. Data kuantitatif dianalisis menggunakan pakej statistic SPSS. Hasil analisis regresi antara pengurangan kemiskinan dengan desentralisasi adalah 0.642 yang menunjukkan korelasi yang tidak signifikan. Keputusan ini menunjukkan bahawa tahap kemiskinan tidak bergantung kepada desentralisasi. Analisis data yang selanjutnya menunjukkan bahawa semua ketua keluarga yang diwawancara telah menafikan set petunjuk untuk mengukur kemiskinan dan kerana itu dianggap hidup dalam kemiskinan tegar. Kajian ini menyarankan langkah-langkah untuk memperbaiki dan meningkatkan produktiviti sektor pertanian menerusi penyediaan empangan pengairan dan akses kepada perpanjangan perkhidmatan serta penambahan fungsi substruktur Perhimpunan Daerah.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

CBRDP	-	Community-Based Rural Development Project
CPI	-	Consumer price index
DACF	-	District Assemblies' Common Fund
DA	-	District Assemblies
DIC	-	District Implementation Committee
DLG	-	Democratic Local Governance
DPWG	-	Development Partners Working Group on Local Governance and Decentralization
EGDA	-	East Gonja District Assembly
EGD	-	East Gonja District
EGDMTDP	-	East Gonja District Medium Term Development Plan
FGD	-	Focus Group Discussion
GDP	-	Gross Domestic Product
GOG	-	Government of Ghana
GPRS	-	Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategy
GSFP	-	Ghana School Feeding Program
GSS	-	Ghana Statistical Service
HDI	-	Human Development Index
HIPC	-	Highly Indebted Poor Country
HIS	-	Household income survey
IFAD	-	Fund for Agricultural Development
IMF	-	International Monetary Fund
LDCs	-	Least Developed Countries
LG	-	Local Government
LGIs	-	Local Government Institutions
MDGs	-	Millennium Development Goals
MMDAs	-	Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies

MPI	- Multidimensional Poverty Index
MP	- Malaysia Plan
MR	- Malaysia Ringgit
MTDP	- Medium Term Development Plan
NEPAD	- New Partnership for African Development
NGO	- Non Governmental Organization
NORPPREP	- Northern Regional Poverty Reduction Programme
OECD	- Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
P.N.D.C.	- Provisional National Defence Council
PLI	- Poverty line income
PPP	- Purchasing Power Parity
RCC	- Regional Coordinating Council
SFP	- School Feeding Program
SIC	- School Implementation Committee
THR _s	- Take Home Rations
UNDP	- United Nations Development Programmes
UNICEF	- United Nations Children's Fund
UN	- United Nations
VIP	- Village Infrastructure Project
WB	- World Bank

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This thesis examined the effectiveness of the decentralization policy as a tool for poverty eradication in the East Gonja District in rural Northern Region of Ghana. The thesis examined the day to day living experiences of the rural people and the manner in which the implementation of the decentralization policy has brought them into the decision-making processes involved in alleviating their poverty.

In Ghana's decentralization program, local authorities (Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies) subsequently referred to as MMDAs are the final destinations of decentralized functions. Ghana's decentralization program seeks to transfer functions and powers as a component of political decentralization to MMDAs. The component of administrative decentralization on the other hand seeks to transfer skills, competences and decentralized planning, whilst the fiscal decentralization component seeks to transfer means and resources to the MMDAs (Ahwoi, 2010).

In many parts of the world in recent time, there has been a profound affection for the decentralization concept as a preferred development strategy in many of the developing countries, examples of these countries are Nigeria, Uganda, India, Brazil etc and since the early 1980s the implementation of decentralization have occurred in many continents the world over, especially in the developing countries. The reason for this growing interest in decentralization throughout the world is because of its perceived link to poverty reduction and its propensity to raised the standard of living of the rural poor (Baskaran, 2010).

By the late 1980s there was a remarkably paradigm shift and emphasis was placed on people's participation' in the day to day planning and administration of their own affairs. The primary goal and purpose was to actively involve the people in the decision making process and decentralization was seen as the key approach for actively involving the people in the development process. Since then, the world community begun to consider people's participation through decentralization as a new strategy and reform package for sustainable development. In this new ideology, decentralization is regarded as the way to achieve people's participation in the decision making process. Consequently, "decentralization soon emerged as a new ideological reform concept and people's participation through decentralization came to be regarded as one of its fundamental goals (Ahmad, 1997; Litvack et. al, 1998; Schragger, 2010).

Although decentralization started before independence in Ghana, the Provisional National Defence Council (P.N.D.C.) Law 207 established the current Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies (MMDAs) all of which add up to two hundred and sixteen. The law that established the MMDAs started with 110 districts in 1988. In 2006, an additional twenty eight MMDAs were added to the previous MMDAs, this was done by dividing some of the original 110, bringing their number to 138. In February 2008, more district assemblies were added and some of the old district lifted to municipal status, this brought the number to 170 MMDAs in 2008. On 28 June 2012, 46 more MMDAs were established and this brought the total number of MMDAs to 216. This study focuses on the East Gonja District in the Northern Region of Ghana.

1.2 Research problem

Decentralization and people's participation are two perceived basic strategies for achieving accelerated development in contemporary time. In order to implement government policies successfully, the people who are considered as the genuine beneficiaries of government policies, programs and projects are to be involved at every stage of the decision making process. The concept "decentralization" and "participation" are considered as two sides of the same coin. Whilst "participation" is considered as one of the key objectives of sustainable development, "decentralization" is considered as the way to achieve it. As a policy option, decentralization provides the opportunity for the grass-root people to work together with government institutions at the local level, by so doing, they will have a say in the governance process.

People's participation in development programs and projects has since 1988 gained impetus and momentum as the new strategy for Ghana's development agenda. Many advocates of decentralization (Work, 2011; UNCDF, 2010; UNDP, 2010; Crook and Sverrisson, 2010) are of the opinion that it is more responsive when it comes to poverty alleviation policies than central government because of quality of information and increased participation of the local people in the decision making process and governance. Local information makes identification of problems and implementation of programs and projects more effective and increases government awareness of local need. Local day to day oversight responsibility and monitoring also ensures that officials perform their duty assiduously (Egbenya, 2010).

The World Bank, IMF and Multi-lateral agencies have become worried and concerned by the dawdling pace of advancement being made towards reducing poverty in developing countries, especially among sub-Saharan Africa countries and have recommended a new strategy of strengthening the poverty focus of their policies and programs, hence decentralization. However, since the implementation of the decentralization policy for a considerable period of time in many developing countries, no comprehensive studies have been carried out at the grassroots level to establish its purported relationship to poverty reduction (Work, 2011).

A look at some studies (Ahwoi, 2010; Thomi *et al*, 2000; Rondinelli, 2002; UNDP, 2010) on decentralization in Ghana will reveal a disassociation from local influences; most fall short to adequately examine its impact on the more vulnerable rural people. Most of the studies often focuses on the state machinery, power relations and the stage of decentralization to the neglect of its impact on the local people who are the supposed beneficiaries of the program. The impact of the decentralization program needs to be judged specifically in terms of its real effects on the people. Since the avowed aim of decentralization is local development, any analysis should assess its impact on the local communities involved and should listen to local views.

That is the main reason why in this study participatory research approaches are employed to explore the local people's own perceptions of poverty reduction and the extent to which the District Assemblies are effective in reducing their poverty and delivering services to maximize their well-being in their communities. The views of the governed regarding participation in the development process and poverty alleviation are essential in the evaluation of the impact and effects of decentralization on poverty reduction. In Ghana there are two measurement of consumption poverty with an upper poverty line of GH¢90 and a lower poverty line of GH¢70. According to the Ghana living standard survey, there was a broadly favourable trend in the poverty reduction in the 1990's. The percentage of Ghanaian population defined as poor fell from about 52% in the period 1991-1992 to 40% in the period 1998-1999 and 29% in 2005-2006. The upper poverty line in Ghana refers to income levels of up to Gh¢ 90.00 a year or Gh¢ 7.50 per month. The extreme poor are people with incomes below Gh¢ 70.00 a year or Gh¢ 5.80 a month which is equivalent to US\$ 45 a year and US\$ 35 a year respectively (GSS, 2010).

1.3 Research aim

The aim of the study is to examine the extent to which decentralization contributes to poverty reduction. Generally, the study intends to analyze the performance of the decentralization policy in terms of its effectiveness in poverty reduction through participation and delivery of services.

It examines whether the implementation of the decentralization policy has achieved its intended goals and how this leads to poverty reduction in the East Gonja District.

1.4 Research questions

This thesis seeks to answer the following questions:

1. Has the implementation of the decentralization policy in the East Gonja District sufficiently reduced poverty among the people?
2. Do programs implemented under decentralization sufficiently address the root causes of poverty?
3. What is the perception of the local people, elected officials and district administration officials on the effectiveness of the decentralization policy in poverty reduction?
4. To what extent are the local people participating in poverty eradication programs?

1.5 Research objectives

The general purpose of this thesis is to examine the effectiveness of the decentralization policy as a strategy for poverty eradication in the East Gonja District.

The specific objectives are;

1. To identify the root causes of poverty in the East Gonja District.
2. To examine the legal and institutional framework of decentralization and its implementation in the East Gonja District.
3. To analyze the extent to which the root causes of poverty are addressed under decentralized system of governance in the East Gonja District.
4. To examine the extent to which the local people participate in poverty reduction programs under the decentralization concept.
5. To make recommendations to improve on poverty reduction efforts in the East Gonja District.

Based on the above objectives the following assumptions are made;

1. There is a mismatch between programs implemented by the East Gonja District Assembly and the root causes of poverty in the District.
2. The decentralization policy has not sufficiently reduce the poverty levels in the East Gonja District
3. Local participation is important in understanding the root causes of poverty, and in the effective planning and implementation of programs and projects.
4. The various stake holders are not committed to reducing poverty in the District
5. The climate and geographical features contribute to the incidence of poverty in the East Gonja District.

1.6 Scope of the study

The research is targeted at rural communities in northern region, specifically the East Gonja District. It is based on investigating the implementation of the decentralization program and its effect on poverty reduction in the district. It is concerned with the lived experiences of the rural poor, and the extent to which the strategy of popular participation through decentralization has brought them into the decision-making processes involved in alleviating poverty.

Since decentralization is a broad and ambiguous term that can take different forms and mean different things to different people encompassing several dimensions, in this thesis we will focus mainly on an integrated kind of decentralization represented by the devolution of political decision-making power to locally elected institutions and bodies with a territorially restricted mandate and boundary. This thesis does not examine fiscal decentralization which refers to the devolution of authority for public finances relating to the responsibility for (i) expenditure decisions; (ii) taxing and revenue-raising powers; (iii) sub-national borrowings; and (iv) inter-governmental fiscal transfers. These aspects are regarded as beyond the scope of this study.

1.7 Structure of the thesis

This thesis contains eight chapters which is outlined below:

- i. **Chapter 1** begins with a general introduction to the thesis and background to the study. It outlines the statement of the research problem, research questions, the aim and objectives of the study, research assumptions and finally the research scope and limitation
- ii. **Chapter 2** is the conceptual and theoretical overview upon which the research is based. It presents a review of the relevant literature on poverty and decentralization in order to locate the issues of poverty,

and decentralization in their scholarly context. Prominent positions in the contemporary poverty and decentralization are presented. The traditional concept of participation is also reviewed.

- iii. **Chapter 3** presents the research methodology that was employed for the study. It concludes with a discussion on quantitative and qualitative research approach.
- iv. In **Chapter 4**, the background to the study area is outlined. The chapter provides a profile of East Gonja District, including a brief description of its socio-economic characteristics and the district administrations. It also covers selected poverty reduction programs implemented.
- v. **Chapter 5** presents the analysis on poverty and its causes.
- vi. **Chapter 6**, presents the analysis on the perceptions on the effectiveness of decentralization and participation
- vii. **Chapter 7** is the concluding chapter of the thesis. It presents discussions, theoretical and policy implications. The thesis ends with the references and appendices.

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