

Linkages between Decentralisation and Decentralised Cooperation in Ghana

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Summary

Since the early 1980s, Ghana has been involved in a decentralisation process. Its origin can be traced back to the economic crisis that emerged from inappropriate top-down approaches to development. Initially, decentralisation was seen as a policy which would empower local communities to initiate local development projects in a period when government was critically short of resources. Gradually, the emphasis shifted to institutional reforms that promote democratisation at local level, linkages between state and civil society, and processes of dialogue, representation and accountability. A legal framework was put in place for the devolution of central government functions to 110 local districts within a three-tier structure of Regional Coordinating Councils, District Assemblies and Town Area Councils/Unit Committees

Decentralisation has been a complex and fragile process. Local governments have been confronted with problems of legitimacy, lack of technical and planning capacities, as well as limited financial resources. Building a new administrative culture - based on local management systems that are participatory, transparent and accountable - is both a necessity and a difficult task.

Donor agencies have supported this decentralisation process. However, it quickly became clear that effective support cannot be provided within the confines of traditional project approaches to development, with short-term objectives and clearly defined budgets. New approaches need to be developed that are process-oriented, that seek to build new capacities and that promote strategic alliances between diverse actors in the pursuit of a commonly agreed local development agenda.

This study is part of a comparative research programme (including similar case studies in Mali and Mozambique) initiated by ECDPM and supported by the European Commission (EC). It examines how EU cooperation with Ghana under the Lomé Convention could help consolidate the decentralisation process. It starts from the premise that the EU's decentralised cooperation approach potentially provides a suitable framework for such an assistance. The guiding principles of this approach (i.e. the active participation of the different actors, the search for public-private partnerships, the delegation of management responsibilities, the choice for a process-approach and the focus on capacity-building) fit nicely with the requirements of a strategic support to decentralisation.

In practice, however, linkages between decentralisation and decentralised cooperation remain rather elusive in Ghana. Decentralised cooperation was launched in 1994 as a two-year pilot programme with limited funding. Progress in implementation has been hampered, in a first phase, by conceptual confusion, lack of appropriate institutional arrangements and weak capacities at different levels. In addition to this, decentralised cooperation tended to adopt a project-oriented approach (focusing on supporting many isolated initiatives) rather than facilitating dialogue and joint action between state organisations and non-state actors (in line with the dynamics of the broader decentralisation process).

Yet things are changing. This study shows that new strategic alliances between local government actors and non-state actors are emerging. Donor agencies, including the EC, are exploring innovative ways to build linkages between the various development players at local level, to increase the demand-making capacity of local communities and to promote local governance.

In a concluding section, operational ways are identified in which the EU's decentralised cooperation can help to build upon these potentials and develop a stronger articulation with decentralisation. It is argued, for instance, that district assemblies are a suitable location in which to place decentralised cooperation programmes. Rather than creating high level, ad-hoc management structures, it would be logical to devolve as much of management capacity as possible to district assemblies while building complementary structures with space for dialogue and collaboration between state and non-state actors. In the same logic, the EU's decentralised cooperation programme could seek to foster joint donor funding arrangements and support for district level initiatives.

Introduction

The implementation of the current decentralisation policies in Ghana was initiated in a period of crisis in State-led rural development. This resulted in a reduction in size of the State sector and a contraction in services provided by State organisations. In the first phase of the implementation of structural adjustment, the main emphasis was on deregulating State control over markets, divesting State enterprises, and on creating a leaner central State. However, this created attendant problems of serious under-servicing of a large proportion of the population whose health, sanitation, education, agriculture, credit provisions, etc. could not be addressed by the private sector. The reforms did not address the problems of creating a relevant development process which was driven by the needs of the supposed beneficiaries. In the second phase of the adjustment programme, the emphasis shifted to institutional reforms that promote democratisation and organisation at the local level, linkages between the State and civil society based on effective dialogue, processes of representation and accountability, and effective and transparent service provision. These developments require the existence of a stable, efficient and legitimate State that can organise and facilitate a favourable environment for economic and social welfare. In this context, the aims of decentralisation are to facilitate more effective linkages between civil society and the State and to promote better governance that responds to the needs and demands of citizens. In consonance with the structural adjustment programme, central government agencies are seen as facilitating, monitoring, coordinating and evaluating economic initiatives, while local government is responsible for developing, initiating and implementing development plans.

Decentralisation typically involves a formal devolution of decision-making and resources through legislation from higher State organs to lower government institutions. Additionally, the decline of the State and the downscaling of its service provisioning have resulted in the growth of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and community-based organisations (CBOs). Mobilised their own resources, these are filling gaps in service provision. These organisations are redefining the rights of communities to manage, undertake and participate in setting their own development objectives. While many NGOs were initially highly critical of the State and mainstream development policies they are increasingly working in collaboration with local government structures.

The spawning of large numbers of NGOs has made networking an important activity to ensure that they do not duplicate activities and this is often most effectively carried out through establishing relations with district administrations (the lowest organisations responsible for maintaining data and information for the smallest Zonal area). Growing numbers of NGOs competing for funds also forces NGOs to be more competitive and to ensure that their programmes fit into the overall development objectives of districts and the State. Donors frequently make the complementarity of NGO programmes with district and State development programmes a condition for grants. The most astute small and middle level NGOs thus ensure they maintain linkages with district and regional administrations and sector organisations and are abreast of the latest developments.

It is only the larger Northern NGOs with strong independent sources of finances and perhaps a commitment to more global agendas, such as global environmentalism, that can afford to maintain independence from local development administration. This development of NGO and State organisation relations can imply increasing linkages between an organised and well-informed civil society (or heterogeneous civil society organisations) and the State, and the devolving of decision-making to the lowest possible organisational level, provided that NGOs continue to respond to the needs of communities and community representatives reflect the needs of the poor, women and the youth, and not rural elites and entrenched political interests.

The process of decentralisation is complex and fragile involving a struggle between different paradigms of development, some of which have become institutionalised in bureaucratic and sector organs and agencies and others which are in the process of being institutionalised into new frameworks for development. In the past, local administration was hampered by top-down bureaucratic traditions which tended to protect elite interests and systems of patrimony rather than

solve economic and social problems. Consequently, rural people became marginalised from development and government administration, which tended to be seen as an external process rather than a part of their life. They made few demands on local government and felt little responsibility towards contributing to the building of their districts. Sector organisations did not integrated their services into the life of the district but waited for decisions from central office and the disbursement of funds before undertaking any actions. The districts have tended to flounder with no sense of direction, no vision of their potentials and their resources, and no attempts to harmonise development actions. They became a burden on central government and as resources dried up, the basic infrastructure and social welfare provisions fell into decay. In today's competitive world, the districts are being forced to reorganise, to become more self-reliant, to rationalise resources, to find internal sources of finance, to promote and market the resources of the districts to investors, and to generate funds and initiatives rather than wait for the disbursement of funds from central government. This calls for a reorganisation of the culture of district administration and planning. Emerging local governments are confronted with problems of legitimacy, building the capacity of a viable administrative culture, achieving a stable financial base for administration and development programmes, and developing a planning process that is transparent, relevant to the needs of the citizens, and which seeks to involve civil society organisations in decision-making.

Assistance and support to decentralisation cannot be effectively given within the confines of established project-oriented approaches to development with short-term funding horizons and clearly defined budgets. New approaches need to be developed that are process-oriented, that promote strategic alliances between diverse actors seeking to build new capacities, and to facilitate the emergence of an informed civil society that participates in defining a relevant development agenda.

The EU's decentralised cooperation approach appears to be a suitable framework for supporting decentralisation processes. In principle, it makes a wide variety of non-State development actors eligible for EU development cooperation resources. It puts actors and strategies at the centre of development rather than projects, and encourages bottom-up participatory approaches to development. However, linkages between decentralised cooperation and decentralisation are elusive. In its implementation, decentralised cooperation programmes tend to exhibit project-oriented approaches that focus on support for many isolated individual initiatives. It has not been able to develop an institutional set up and support for processes that develop linkages between civil society and State agencies in the search for a more participatory development agenda that reflects local level needs (Bossuyt, 1994).

This study explores the context, problems and short comings of implementing EU decentralised cooperation in Ghana. It traces the evolution of the current decentralisation process in Ghana as a response to the economic crisis that emerged from inappropriate top-down approaches to development. As a result, the current decentralisation process is struggling to deal with issues of popular participation in administration and local level development and of accountability and transparency in district management. It shows that decentralisation in Ghana has been fragile and hampered by lack of technical and planning capacities and finances. However, new strategic alliances between local government actors and non-State sector actors are emerging out of these constraints, which focus on developing capacity building linkages to empower community development and local governance. The final section identifies operational ways in which decentralised cooperation can help to build upon these potentials and develop a stronger articulation with decentralisation.

Decentralised Cooperation and European Commission Programmes in Ghana

Decentralised cooperation (DC) has been launched in Ghana as a two-year pilot programme with a budget of Ecu 1.5 million of which 1.3 million is to be disbursed to small projects. Formulation of the Decentralised Cooperation Programme (DCP) programme in Ghana was initiated in 1994 with a series of workshops driven by consultants. These workshops aimed to examine community, district and central government linkages; develop a shared understanding of the government's decentralisation strategy; and look at opportunities and constraints for developing community-based projects in line with the objectives of decentralised cooperation. These workshops were designed by an external consultant with little experience of Ghana and they did not involve some key central government institutions and a fair representation of the NGO community.

It was intended that the National Association of Local Authorities of Ghana (NALAG) would disseminate the concept of decentralised cooperation between District Assemblies and communities. However, NALAG was unable to achieve this objective due to lack of capacity and inadequate resource. In 1995, at the request of the Ministry of Finance and the EU delegation in Ghana, a consultant was requested to review the potential for a programme based on decentralised cooperation in Ghana and to design an operational framework for launching a collaborative programme. The consultant recommended the creation of a DCP Secretariat under an Executive Board to provide support services to beneficiaries. Selection and procedural criteria were recommended for supporting decentralised agencies and monitoring and evaluation criteria. These recommendations were not implemented, partly due to the perceived costs associated with the secretariat.

In Search of an Institutional Home

In the continued search for appropriate institutional arrangements the Commission invited a number of international and national NGOs to run the programme. They were unable to oblige, as the costs involved in what would have essentially been operational research involving design, monitoring and evaluation, and documentation could not be covered by the proposed budget.

Eventually an advertisement was placed in a national newspaper, outlining the aims of decentralised cooperation and inviting applications for the scheme. Potential decentralised cooperation partners were given a two-week deadline in which to submit their proposals. Out of 77 proposals received 33 were selected through the Steering Committee. Generally, the projects did not meet the broad selection criteria developed, and showed lack of understanding of the concept of decentralised cooperation. This was partly the result of:

- the two week period for submission of proposals was inadequate for the development of projects based on linkages between different State and non-State actors with community participation;
- an open criterion for submission of proposals that encouraged the submission of specific social infrastructure construction projects rather than process or capacity oriented programmes. More than 60% of the projects were concerned with constructing social infrastructure facilities.
- a poor understanding of the concept of decentralised cooperation by the applicants, and a lack of a forum for consultation and dialogue on the aims and objectives of decentralised cooperation, an evolving concept.

The DC project also had difficulty in obtaining essential information on the capacities of the organisations that applied for support. To solve these problems, a two-day workshop was held. Twenty-four of the 33 selected potential decentralised cooperation agents participated in the workshop. The workshop aimed to achieve a common understanding of the meaning of decentralised cooperation, and to acquaint potential decentralised cooperation actors with the framework and modalities of the programme, including concepts of participation and capacity building.

Since then, a capacity building component has been developed to provide support to the projects and to develop a database of potential capacity-building actors in Ghana. A network of capacity-building agents is now being built who will be responsible for providing technical training and support for the DCAs under the programme.

Implementation has been slow as a result of a lack of a consensus between government and the EU delegation on the interpretation of the Financing Agreement covering DCP and selection modalities for proposals. Some elements of government have attempted to influence the selection of a number of the projects. This conflicts with the aims of the DC programme, which seeks to build up civil society organisations and participation in democratisation. However, the DC programme has not been able to work out modalities as yet through which civil society organisations or the people of Ghana are involved in the selection of projects according to their own criteria and demands. Another challenge for the programme is how it will discern legitimate interest groups from those with largely commercial interests.

A central problem has been working out forms through which DC can facilitate a dialogue between State organisations and non-State actors and link the activities of DCAs to processes of decentralisation. The processes through which the objectives of DC were disseminated and the response has resulted in what essentially constitutes a group of NGOs, carrying out a number of unrelated and isolated projects that do not necessarily respond to the perceived needs of communities nor the capacity building vision for DC. The programme is in danger of becoming development project oriented, rather than exploring the dynamics between civil society and State, and the role of non-State actors in democratisation. In retrospect, the DC programme would have benefited from a research component based on an action learning cycle which examined the potentials and constraints embodied in processes of decentralisation in Ghana and in the experiences of various donor projects in Ghana, including other EU Projects. The DC programme, in future, can aim to find a niche in which it enhances existing linkages and capacity building initiatives and explores functional institutional arrangements to enable it to carry out this role.

For instance, the DC programme can be designed more as a complement to the EU Microprojects and the Human Resource Development Programme (HRDP), building upon the experiences and constraints of these programmes to facilitate a better accommodation of these projects to civil society needs and demands. The DC programme has, perhaps, suffered from being initiated at a time when different definitions of civil society organisations have come into being, from a period when civil society was very much influenced by the activities of NGOs, to one in which it has become more concerned with processes of decentralisation and interactions between various State and non State actors, along the continuum from local communities to local authorities.

The Microprojects

The Microprojects Programme works within a decentralised framework in which District Administration is its central focus. It provides financial and technical support for infrastructure programmes within the districts, such as provisions of schools, health, water and sanitation facilities, produce markets, and improved capacity to manage rural infrastructures. The intended beneficiaries of these programmes are rural communities and the project aims to enlist their participation in the projects. The benefiting communities are expected to contribute 25% of the capital costs of the project,

in cash or kind. The communities are expected to select their own project in consultation with their Assembly Member in consonance with the district's development planning priorities. This is initiated through a process in which focus group discussions of various community sections are held and then final decision-making is enacted at a general community forum. The communities not only reach a consensus on their most pressing infrastructure development need, but also on the form in which they will realise their contribution to the project, such as in labour or materials. Their decisions are carried to the District Implementing Committees (DIC) of the Microprojects and to the Microprojects Management Unit (MPMU) for evaluation and selection. Following a dialogue between the MPMU, the DIC and District Chief Executives (DCE) a final list of projects is selected for support according to specific criteria. After working out a schedule for implementation of the projects, the communities form Community Implementing Committees, which are responsible for managing the project. Several lessons have been learnt from previous phases including the need to introduce participatory diagnosis, planning and evaluation systemes.

The Human Resource Development Programme

The aim of the Human Resource Development Programme (HRDP) a 3.8 million ECU programme, is to support the process of decentralisation in Ghana by providing training for district officials. This includes training in the area of planning, implementation and evaluation of development projects, and financial management for district technical staff, planning officers and District Chief Executives. Training in the areas of participatory approaches to project design and community project management is developed for assembly members and opinion leaders. It is anticipated that 1100 district officials and 8800 assembly members and opinion leaders in all the 110 districts will be trained. The training is carried out by a number of Ghanaian organisations such as the Management Development and Productivity Institute, the Ghana Institute of Management and Public Administration, and local consultancy firms. These will be assisted by an international institution who will assist in curriculum development, training of trainers and back-stopping. The aims of the programme is to provide more efficient and transparent district planning.

Potential Linkages Between DC and Other EU Programmes

At present there are no linkages between DC and the Microprojects or the HRDP. In contrast, there are obvious linkages between the Microproject programme and the HRDP. Improved planning processes in the district will lead to enhancement of the Microprojects and more relevant projects that meet the social infrastructure needs of the communities.

Nevertheless, the DC programme has the potential to enhance the Microprojects and the HRDP by strengthening civil society organisation, and facilitating the ability of communities and other civil society organisations to make demands upon service providers and State organisations for an improved quality for their life. NGOs and other resource groups can play a role in this process by providing services and training, and by facilitating community organisation and the ability of communities to interact with development and State agencies.

However, this requires a focus in the DC programme which moves away from projects for communities to enhancing the linkages of communities with other State and non State actors, and enabling them to take advantage of the processes of decentralisation and democratisation to expand their role in defining their needs whilst demanding accountability. A move towards this position could be made by expanding the capacity-building element within the programme, to focus on making NGOs more sensitive to the needs of communities through forms of participatory training. This would encourage them to function as intermediaries between NGOs and district assemblies, complementing the work of the local level officials of decentralisation, the Assembly members and the Unit

Committees; and to focus more on capacity building of local-level organisations, community training and development planning. NGOs can be more actively involved in enhancing decentralisation processes, through advocacy of the extension of the rights of communities in decision-making. They can work to create platforms through which communities can make their demands felt. They can develop closer linkages with district assemblies with the aim of facilitating community inputs into the decision-making process of the assembly for more relevant and transparent development planning processes.

These options will be further explored in the following section, through developing an analysis of the processes of decentralisation and some detailed descriptions of interventions being initiated by other donors in the Kintampo, West Mamprusi, and Builsa districts to enhance decentralised planning and participation. This includes programmes in which NGOs are drawn into decentralised linkages between communities and district assemblies.

Historical Perspectives on Local Government in Ghana

Although decentralisation forms a central tenet of World Bank liberalisation reform packages, in some African countries, such as Ghana, Burkina Faso and Uganda, the conceptualisation and implementation of decentralisation preceded structural adjustment and developed as part of a radical critique of the failings of elite administration and corruption. Decentralisation was conceptualised as part of a radical populist movement to achieve a more popular democracy. While radical popular rhetoric eventually gave way to the hard realities of structural adjustment, decentralisation came to form a common ground in which governments and the World Bank began to formulate neoliberal reform policies, accountability, transparency and divestment, before more formal parliamentary election processes were developed. In these conditions, governments have played central roles in determining the content and structure of decentralisation. The present decentralisation policies have been implemented under structural adjustment in conjunction with the devolution of State enterprises and economic liberalisation. Decentralisation in Ghana responds to concrete social problems that have emerged in the postcolonial history of political administration. Although part of the decentralisation process has involved the State shifting the burdens of financing and public service management from central authority to districts, the present weakness of the State and its capacity to centrally manage the economy and social welfare requires new modes of administration. There have been attempts to create genuine new structures that facilitate greater local level democracy and representation and make the local level more responsible for development initiatives. While there are clearly attempts by central government to influence district policies, this has occurred within a process of significant reform. Resistance to decentralisation has often been most keenly expressed by sector organs and bureaucracies keen to preserve their privilege and old working codes. Detractors of the decentralisation process have been quick to point out its failings, but new legislation and reforms have been implemented to overcome some of these deficiencies, which suggests that government has commitment to decentralisation or that decentralisation has potential as a way of solving some of the problems of the State in managing recession and the increasing complexity of economic life in a highly competitive global economy.

Top Down Administration

Under colonial rule, local government tended to be organised along the lines of a command structure emanating from the governor in Accra. The colonial government established a system of administration based on indirect rule through Native Authorities. Local government was concentrated into the hands of the district commissioner and of the chiefs representing the local population. Chiefs were directly appointed by the colonial government. The colonial conception of traditional rule exaggerated the role of the chief to the detriment of checks and balances that had existed in pre-

colonial political systems. Where societies did not have chiefs, as among many peoples in the Upper regions of Ghana, the colonial authority created chiefs as political representatives. Chiefs did not represent the interests of the people to the colonial political authority, but the interests of the central colonial authority. Thus in the Northern Territories (the present Northern, Upper East and Upper West Regions) the appointed chiefs recruited labour for the mines and raised unpaid communal labour gangs for public works.

These modes of mobilisation for community development projects and labour requirements were highly unpopular. During the 1950s, in the era of decolonisation, with growing dissatisfaction with the system of Native Authorities, it became necessary to develop reform and to institute a more representative system of local government (Watson Commission, 1948; Coussey Commission, 1949). The local government reforms of 1951 provided for new district and local councils with an elected majority of two-thirds, and one third of representatives appointed by the chiefs (Newbury, 1964; Harvey, 1966).

In the immediate post-independence period, administrative reform introduced representative and elected district administration. However, the prominent role that the Convention People's Party (CPP) government played in selecting local government representatives defeated the objectives of these reforms (Ayee, 1994; Songsore and Denkabe, 1995). The subsequent slide into military governments reinforced this tendency, with district authorities acting as representatives of government transmitting the objectives of government policy to local organisations rather than responding to the needs and aspirations of citizens. While the Local Government Act of 1974 attempted to decentralise to 65 District Councils, this was not successful since it merely delegated power to District Councils that lacked financial and planning autonomy.

Despite the top-down structure of local administration, a strong tradition of popular community, youth and women organisation has existed from before the colonial period. It has independently been able to undertake community development schemes, including infrastructure development such as town sanitation development, road maintenance and path clearance, well digging, etc. (Ayee, 1994; Songsore and Denkabe, 1995). In urban areas, home town associations have organised remittances for the development of their areas of origin. They also play important roles in sustaining the cultural activities of the communities, at festivals, funerals etc. During the colonial period, these institutions became an important avenue in which the anti-colonial struggle was organised. Since then, most governments have exploited what remains of these grassroots organisations to further their interests (Ayee, 1994; Songsore and Denkabe, 1995). As a consequence, these community organisations tend to have the capacity to rapidly mobilise communities for externally defined agendas but lack a culture of articulating their needs and placing demands on government services.

Few channels have existed through which these organisations can make creative inputs into administration, policy development and development planning. In the past, central government has tended to set up its own cadre of semi-autonomous State-sponsored development organisations which are dependent upon the State for support and patronage. These organisations managed development projects with donor and government sponsorship. These projects were used to disburse scarce goods and services to supporters. As a consequence, the development process tended to be subverted by political patronage and economic development gave way to rent-seeking activities. In the Nkrumah period these semi-autonomous organisations included the Ghana National Farmers' Council, the Workers Brigade and the Cooperative movement. In the Acheampong period this included the Ghana National Reconstruction Corps and the integrated regional development programmes.

The limitation of these organisations is well illustrated by the integrated regional development corporations. These were supported by funding from external donors and the government of Ghana. They were organised under an executive committee which was responsible for programme management. The executive committee was regionally based. Members of the executive committee included political and administrative heads of the region, regional ministry and sector heads, chiefs and appointed representatives of farmers and other producer organisations. These producer group

representatives invariably reflected local elite interests entrenched within the government system of patronage. While the executive committee was responsible for decision making, the award of contracts, disbursement of subsidised inputs and information dissemination, and the control of funds was located in the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning in Accra. This resulted in a tendency to centralise the resources for achieving the objectives of the programme outside the programme management, and for central government to interfere in project management. This involvement in the minutia of development projects often led to delays in the implementation of projects and disbursement of funds as central organs took on more responsibilities than they could efficiently manage. The negative impact of this is illustrated by the considerable delays in transferring inputs to farmers which were needed before the farming season, which was characteristic of the 1970s (Hailu, 1990)

Songsore and Denkabe (1995) show how the top-down structures developed in the Cotton Development Board led to inefficient administration in which decisions could not be made in the absence of directives from the executive director. There was a lack of dialogue and meetings between staff and no flow of information from farmers. As a result of this vacuum, project resources could easily be diverted, dubious contracts awarded and charges grossly inflated. Unsurprisingly, the project was unable to meet its targets. Because of a lack of involvement of the beneficiaries - the cotton farmers in the programme - the corruption, waste and inefficiency continued to exist unchecked.

From Populism to Decentralisation

By the mid 1970s, this top-down patron-client organisation of local or community development had fallen into serious crisis characterised by economic mismanagement and insolvency. Many enterprises came to a halt and economic resources became increasingly scarce and were transacted through patron client networks rather than through the market. The June 4th Uprising of junior military officers ushered in a new structure of mass mobilisation of communities against corruption and appropriation of scarce resources by politico-bureaucratic elites. This led to the formation of the People's Defence Committees (PDC) that acted as vigilante organisations to check hoarding and profiteering. Given the serious economic crisis of the period they also mobilised communities for voluntaristic development initiatives. Following the December 31st military takeover that brought Rawlings back to power, this experiment in popular mobilisation continued.

The PDCs directly challenged the existing Town Development Committees (TDCs) which had been established from the colonial period and which tended to be dominated by local elites closely allied with the dominant political factions and chiefs. Instead of developing pro-active styles of leadership that promoted community development, the leadership of the TDCs tended to relegate most communities to development clientship and dependency, waiting to receive government grants and aid and contributing free labour to projects which were imposed from outside.

The PDCs emerged as organisations that sought to reverse the trend of passive development clientship and to promote popular community involvement in decision-making. They established themselves as pro government leadership organisations at the community level that mobilised the poor to defend themselves against exploitation and further their rights while articulating government policies in neighbourhoods, villages and towns. Because of their close relations with the military government, they often wielded considerable power in communities. The leadership of these PDCs often consisted of marginalised elements and youth without much political experience, who sometimes misapplied the political power invested in them. As the rule of the Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC) settled down and revolutionary rhetoric was replaced by implementation of structural adjustment, the PDCs were transformed into Committees for the Defence of the Revolution (CDR), and the main role of the CDRs focused on mobilising communities for development initiatives and coordinating community activities, arbitration of inter-community disputes, and dissemination of information and education.

Decentralisation emerged as the mode of transforming the CDR system and institutionalising it as a form of popular democracy rooted in communities. As early as 1983 the PNDC had made public its plans for decentralisation of administration as a way for creating 'a new democracy which will bring about greater efficiency and productivity in the State machinery through the involvement and effective participation by the people in all levels of administration' (Information Services Department, 1983). The lack of decentralisation in previous regimes was seen as having a negative effect on rural development:

Initiative and development at the village, district and regional levels became stunted, and has contributed to the massive gulf between rural people and the urban dwellers (Information Services Department, 1983).

Decentralisation was defined as 'the devolution of central administrative (not political) authority to the local level (regional district/local) in order to ensure popular participation in the administration of the various areas concerned from the standpoints of planning, implementation, monitoring and achievement of those services which go to improve the living conditions of the people and the orderly, fair and balanced development of the whole country concerned' (Information Services Department, 1983).

In the early 1980s, decentralisation was seen as a policy which would empower local communities to initiate local development projects in a period when government was critically short of resources, and which would legitimate the government by providing structures of democracy.

Decentralisation Policy

In 1988, PNDC Law 207 enacted a new structure for local government based on devolution of central government functions to 110 local districts within a three-tier structure of Regional Coordinating Councils, District Assemblies and Town Area Councils/Unit Committees. The District Assembly is the highest administrative authority in the district. It consists of elected and appointed members. Two thirds of the members are elected every four years and the other third of the members are appointed by the president in consultation with traditional authorities and other interest groups in the area. The District Assembly is headed by a District Chief Executive who is appointed by the president. The 1992 Constitution makes the further provisions that the DCE can only be appointed by the president with the prior approval of two thirds of the Assembly. The DCE can also be removed by two thirds of the Assembly passing a vote of no confidence. This is to ensure that the DCE is accountable to the Assembly.

The DCE is responsible for the supervision and coordination of departments and organisations within the district, the executive committee and the various subcommittee. The DCE is also the link between central government and the district, conveying and explaining the programmes of central government to the people. The members of the District Assembly also elect a Presiding Member from within their ranks, who chairs Assembly meetings.

The Town and Area Councils and Unit Committees are the lowest units of administration, linking the local level to the district and implementing plans. At the local level Assembly members are elected who represent the community/communities at the District Assembly. The Regional Coordinating Units are responsible for coordinating the plans of various districts and integrating them with national development policies and allocating to the districts public funds and grants approved by central government. Unlike under previous regimes they are coordinating rather than decision-making bodies.

The District Assembly is responsible for:

- developing a comprehensive plan for economic, social and spatial development within the district;
- integrating various sector plans;
- preparing district development plan and annual budget;
- mobilising the natural, human and financial resources within the district and protecting the environment;
- promoting social development and productive activities;
- initiating programmes for the development of basic infrastructure and provision of municipal works and services within the district.

To carry out these responsibilities, the Assemblies were given direct control over 22 departments. This was revised by the 1993 Local Government Act in which all the sector departments were placed directly under the assembly organised into 12 district departments.

The Executive Committee is responsible for implementing the decisions of the Assembly, and executing, coordinating and monitoring plans. It advises the Assembly on appropriate economic and sector policies for the development of the district, on the integration and coordination of sector plans, on the programmes of the various subcommittee, and on the harmonisation of development programmes within the district with national policies. It advises the assembly on the implementation of development programmes and projects and oversees their implementation.

Under the Executive Committee, a number of subcommittees are initiated which deal with particular sectors, such as the Development Planning, Social Services, Works, and Finance subcommittee. Each Assembly Member is expected to serve on at least one subcommittee.

The technical aspect of coordinating and implementing development planning is provided for by the Development Planning and Budget Unit of the Assembly which is responsible for providing planning data and information to the National Development Planning Commission. It works with sector organisations in collecting and synthesising planning and development data, formulating plans and budgets and in executing projects and programmes.

Local communities participate in the assembly by electing Assembly Members and Unit Committees, submitting their development needs to the assembly through the Assembly Members, and by contributing finances, labour and other resources to development projects.

The Assemblies draw their finances from locally generated sources and central government transfers. Locally generated sources include:

- taxes such as basic rate (a poll tax), property rates, and special rates imposed by the Assembly to raise funds for specific projects;
- fees collected on economic activities within the district such as market tolls, market stalls and kiosks, slaughter house dues and crop levies;
- licences, on a wide variety of items from dogs to hawkers, self-employed artisans, alcohol sales, etc.

Transfers from central government include ceded revenues collected by Internal Revenue Services and distributed among the various assemblies, and the District Assemblies Common Fund, a percentage (not less than 5%) of the total revenue generated by central government. These revenues are shared among the District Assemblies on a formula approved by parliament. Central government tends to appropriate the majority of revenues. A 1987 United Nations study of 38 countries found Ghana to have the second lowest transfers of revenues from central government (only 3.3% of centrally collected revenues in Ghana were transferred to local government). The majority of Assemblies are unable to devote substantial resources to development activities since most of their revenues are

consumed in meeting recurrent expenditures. In 1998 new measures have been introduced that earmark 35% of the Common Fund for specific purposes. This includes 20% that has to be earmarked to support productivity, income generation and provision of employment, 10% to support and sustain community development initiatives and 5% for poverty reduction and rural housing improvement. This should improve interventions of District Assemblies in rural development.

Challenges to the Implementation of Decentralisation

Major problems that have emerged in the implementation of the decentralised structure include:

- Difficulty in integrating decentralised departments into district assembly structures and decision-making;
- Poor information flow between different actors in the system;
- Lack of skilled personnel able to develop planning activities and create the necessary linkages;
- Problems of accountability;
- Lack of a sound financial base to support district development initiatives.

Decentralisation has attempted to integrate a wide range of administrative decision-makers with different perspectives and support bases. The decentralised departments have ended up with a dual allegiance in this process to national and regional sector hierarchies still dominated by top-down decision-making structures and to District Assemblies who have been given the mandate to coordinate their activities. Since budgets, salaries, promotion and conditions of service have been controlled by central ministries, district staff have often responded more to department command structures than the district and have shown an unwillingness to integrate themselves into decentralised district administration. This problem is now being solved by devolving department budgets to the district level under the control of the Assembly. The Ministry of Agriculture has now reorganised with District Agricultural Officers responsible for developing district agricultural plans in coordination with the Assembly and responsible for setting plans and budgets that are controlled by the Assembly.

In other sectors, the process of decentralisation is more complex. In the Forestry and Wildlife sector the Ministry of Lands and Forestry argues that timber resources in the high forest resource are a strategic national resource and cannot be coherently managed by numerous independent local authorities. However, savanna woodland and wildlife resources are seen as resources of local importance, thus the Ministry proposes to decentralise Forest Management in the Northern, Upper East and Upper West Region and to build the capacities of District Assemblies to manage savanna natural resources. In the High Forest, the Forestry Department will assist the Assemblies in developing environmental programmes outside the Forest Reserves and provide technical assistance for Natural Resource Conservation Divisions. The Forestry Department has also developed a programme of Collaborative Forest Management in which it is required to obtain the support of Unit Committees, and District Assemblies for Forest Reserve Management Plans. Detractors will argue that this merely shifts the burdens of bothersome worthless elements of Forest Management from the Forestry Department to District Assemblies. But it also shows the strength of decentralisation, in that the Forestry sector is being forced to reorganise to meet criteria of decentralised administration, and forced to think of the resources it manages in terms of their relevance to local people and local authorities and to national development goals.

The capacity of district staff to manage administration has also been problematic. Public administration capacity in Ghana has been weak with civil servants exhibiting a lack of motivation and initiative reinforced by a culture of top-down decision-making, a lack of ability to manage information and finances, and to plan and make future projections (Ayee, 1994; Schiewer, 1995). Thus, building up the capacity of the civil service has become an important aspect of the implementation of structural

adjustment. The situation is worse within districts which, because of their low prestige have experienced difficulty in attracting qualified staff.

Elected Assembly Members have also lacked capacities to clarify the needs of their communities and articulate these at Assembly meetings. Many Assembly members are not highly educated and become intimidated by the more educated DCEs and appointed assembly members (Ayee, 1994). They fail to contribute the perspectives of their constituents. This prevents the development of community participation in district planning.

As a consequence, development planning fails to develop relevance to the needs of the district, transparency and a sense of vision and direction. This is reflected in low expenditures on development projects and a lack of direction and principle in disbursing funds, which is often related to rent-seeking activities. Some Assemblies have disbursed more funds for loans to individuals and funeral expenses than for development projects (Ministry of Local Government, 1993:pp.125,141).

Few Assemblies have been able to generate a stable revenue base and most depend on external aid which as an unreliable and limited source of funding that cannot support a long-term planning process. Since external grants are largely tied to specific development programmes, they are not accessible to Assemblies. The revenues ceded by government and the Common Fund are insufficient to meet the needs of the districts. A large proportion of finances is therefore expended on recurrent expenditure and for projects in the district capital and few resources are spent on the rural hinterland (Schiewer, 1995). This undermines the basis of decentralisation which was to support a community-focused process of development. It creates disillusionment within the districts and a reluctance of citizens to contribute towards the basic rate, reinforcing the cycle of low revenue collection and investment in development projects and poor planning.

Many of these problems are not specific reflections on the District Assemblies, but reflect the nature of the crisis that has beset Ghana and other African countries from the 1970s and the attempts to introduce reform. Thus the problems of accountability, information flow and participatory decision-making processes equally beset centralised sector ministries and agencies. Many of these problems emanate from a lack of transparency at the central level. The deficiencies of District Assemblies are often highlighted by central sector agencies and ministries as part of a strategy to resist decentralisation and greater accountability to the local level.

While local districts have been given responsibilities for district planning, there are no real mechanisms by which they can feedback on the appropriateness of the decentralisation process to their conditions and regional imperatives. The Regions tend to be constructed as purely administrative units accountable to the centre rather than the districts. For decentralisation to achieve its full impact, it is necessary that the State facilitates the emergence of mechanisms where national strategic resources, regional interest, local needs and private sector interests in these various entities can be debated and integrated into policy frameworks, and in which districts can exchange experiences. Without this debate, there is a danger that local districts will remain repositories for social and infrastructure burdens rather than catalysts for local level development and the emergence of enterprise.

Linkages between Communities and Assemblies

The main response to these constraints has been to initiate programmes that seek to strengthen the capacities of the District Assemblies, to achieve a better integration between sectors and District Assembly Planning Units and to develop participatory approaches that make the planning process more responsive to the needs and demands of communities. In this respect the National Association of Local Authorities of Ghana has been asked to develop training for District Assembly members (although it has not yet developed the capacity to implement this) and several courses have been developed to better equip technical staff. The planned Institute of Government Studies will provide facilities to upgrade the skills of local government personnel and provide orientation courses for newly-elected assembly members.

Several donors have also initiated programmes on linkages between the various actors in local government, capacity building, and participatory approaches to community development.

The UNDP-supported National Programme on Governance Framework (NPGF) aims to facilitate participation of all citizens in the socio-economic and political development process and to promote good governance through improved public administration and empowerment of key civil society organisations. The target groups include Parliament, the Judiciary, the private sector, selected District Assemblies, and women's groups. The programme consists of five sub-programmes: Public Sector Management, Decentralisation, Private Sector Development, Government Institutions, and Civil Society. UNDP Ghana's Capacity 21 Programme also assists 8 districts to integrate development of human resources with environmental issues. Local NGOs, traditional authorities and district management committees are to be supported through this initiative.

In 1996, Danida supported a pilot project in four districts to build the management and planning capacities of District Authorities. The project provides three-tier support to Regional, District and sub-district structures with funds, logistic support and technical assistance, and a focus on enhancing participation, improved planning and budgeting skills and financial, data collection and reporting systems. The project has developed a district population database, economic profiles and promotional materials to attract donors and private sector investors to facilitate enhanced planning and revenue generation. Danida and the Ministry of Local Government are currently developing a support programme to include 17 districts over a five-year period.

Boxes 1 and 2 illustrate the GTZ-supported Rural Action Programme in the Kintampo, Gonja and Hohoe districts and the UNICEF-supported Community Based Development Programme in Builsa district. These programmes are similar in that they focus on a process of capacity building with a focus on the District Assembly, creating conditions for more pro-active planning with specific targets and long-term objectives, improved linkages with communities, more methodical data collection techniques, and greater responsiveness to the needs of different sections of the population. To enhance the interface between civil society institutions and local government, parallel activities are carried out at the community level. This facilitates community organisation and the articulation of needs. The programme also supports to community-focused development projects and activities initiated by the community to ensure that institutional innovations are applied to solving problems and reducing poverty.

Box 1. The Community Based Development Programme in Builsa District

The Community Based Development Programme (CBDP) in Builsa is a multisectoral programme that attempts to harmonise and improve the process of district planning and to enhance community participation in district development planning. It aims to empower communities through the acquisition of skills and knowledge through capacity building. Social mobilisation is linked to the provision of accessible and affordable services that meet the needs of the community. Building local administrative capacities is important in this process and the effective delegation of responsibilities to decentralised assemblies is seen as a catalyst to promote a more participatory local development process. The programme helps villages to develop and implement development plans through the training of Village Action Planning (VAP) teams.

The VAP teams are selected by communities from their own ranks and trained in methods of community animation to facilitate a process through which communities can prioritise their development needs. The VAP teams are trained to develop plans in accordance with the development priorities of the assembly. These plans are submitted to the Assembly where they are assessed, vetted prioritised and then sent to UNICEF for funding. Programmes being supported under the programme include the provision and rehabilitation of schools, clinics and wells and boreholes, the organisation of vocational courses for youth, the provision of grinding mills for shea butter processing, primary health care, agricultural assistance and provision of rotating credit programme for women. The programme also provides management training for district personnel, and it supports the creation of district information systems and enhanced planning, monitoring and evaluation systems. It sponsors NGOs working within the district to participate in training. Regular workshops are held including a review meetings in which all stakeholders participate in evaluating the performance of programmes and district planning. The VAP teams represent the communities and impart the knowledge they gain at the workshops to community members.

Sources: Interview with Mohammed Yakubu, Administrative Officer, Builsa District; UNICEF (1996)

Box 2. The Programme for Rural Action in the Kintampo District of Brong Ahafo

The Programme for Rural Action aims to enhance decentralised planning and decision-making, and to promote a participatory planning process that will involve local communities in defining and articulating their development needs. It uses a nine-step planning process in which communities devise development plans which are submitted to various organisations within the assembly where they are vetted and selected for funding:

The process begins with community animation in which a trained village facilitator from within the community initiates a process in which the community discusses its problems and potential solutions;

The village forum prioritises its development needs and forwards a proposal with ranked development priorities to the district administration;

The proposal is screened by sector departments to ensure that they are feasible and in line with sector directives - e.g. that clinics should not be sited within 10 km radius of each other - and detailed comments are attached. First-priority projects which fail the screening process are replaced by second-priority projects;

The relevant sub-committee assesses the relevance of the proposals to the overall objectives of the sectors and ranks them according to a series of predefined criteria, including the population of the area, the contributions the communities are willing to make in cash and kind to the project, proximity to the nearest facility, ethnic balance, etc;

The proposals are then ranked by the executive committee and submitted to the District Assembly as a comprehensive plan of action;

The District Assembly debates the relative merits of the proposals and selects the projects that are to be carried out during the plan period. Projects that are not funded can be re-submitted in the following planning;

Detailed budgets are prepared by the respective department in cooperation with the project;

The projects are implemented by the community in conjunction with the department and contractors;

The project is monitored by the community and relevant sub-committee.

The aim of the process is to create a demand-driven participatory planning process with accountability and transparency that responds to local level needs, and ensures that district funds are not used for political objectives or rent-seeking. The main provision by GTZ is capacity building and training to village level facilitators, sector departments, sub-committees and District Planning and Coordinating Units. Given the low level of finances available to the District Assembly, a budget subsidy was added to existing assembly funds to enable more projects to be funded.

Source: GTZ (1997) Interviews with R. Trenkle, GTZ, Accra and Alhaji Ziblim Yakubu, District Coordinating Director, Kintampo District Assembly.

Many positive experiences can be found in these projects with local assemblies. Many district secretariats and sub-committees have responded positively to the training programmes and have begun to develop their own linkages with civil society.

However several projects that have attempted to address community participation in governance and capacity building for District Assemblies have become derailed in the process, ending with a loss of direction. Frequently encountered problems include:

- a lack of clear objectives, mainly a result of pressures from technical sectors and technical considerations.
- the introduction of high-level steering committees where important decisions are made at interfaces

with central government rather than at the district level. This often results in an inadequate flow of resources and technical expertise to the districts. In such cases, capacity is built at the top rather than the bottom.

Linkages between NGOs and District Assemblies

The crisis of the 1970s resulted in a weakening of the abilities of the State to engage in development activities and a loss of confidence by donors in the capabilities of the State to manage the economy. In the ensuing vacuum, communities were forced to develop voluntary actions and central government to devolve powers to communities. While one strand of voluntary action gave rise to decentralised districts, a second strand resulted in NGOs playing an increasing role in local development (Amanor *et al.*, 1993).

NGOs have often been reluctant to develop collaborative programmes with government services (Wellard and Copestake, 1993; Farrington and Bebbington, 1993). However, the need to scale-up, to show that small projects worked out at the micro level have a wider relevance to society and engage in appropriate policy debates requires NGOs to engage in dialogue and linkages with government services. The rapid proliferation of NGOs also requires linkages to ensure that projects and programmes are not duplicated. Such linkages are best developed at the district level with District Assemblies keeping data on projects in their area.

As the early euphoria with the capacity of NGOs to manage community development give way to more critical perspectives (Vivian and Maseko, 1994; Clark, 1991) and less generous levels of funding, NGOs are under pressure to make their operations more effective and to coordinate their interventions with other actors. Increasingly, NGOs are scaling up by developing associational strategies or strategic linkages in which they piece together different programmes in different areas, exploring synergies between different programmes. Similarly, with increasing financial problems, District Assemblies are exploring linkages with NGOs that can result in complementary resource sharing, exchange of experiences and the training of assembly personnel in facilitating community organisation.

Some NGOs are contracting themselves out as service providers and trainers. An example of a project exploring strategic linkages between communities, private sectors and government sectors is the Community Water and Sanitation Programme (CWSP). The Ghana Water and Sewerage Corporation (GWSC) is contracted by the government to manage the project by facilitating its implementation. It contracts the private sector (profit and non-profit) to provide the goods and services for community water and sanitation including training and capacity building. The communities participate in planning, designing, constructing, operation and maintenance of improved water supply.

Other NGOs, such as the Presbyterian Agricultural Services, seek to disseminate successful approaches to sector organisations to further implement, while they concentrate on developing new innovative approaches.

Implications for Decentralised Cooperation

During the 1980s, the State was forced to redefine its role as a consequence of its poor performance. Decentralisation formed an important part of the reform process advocated by the government and by donors. Through the decentralisation process, District Assemblies with elected members became responsible for economic and social planning at the local level and for the management of district finances.

A second strand of reform attempted to create a more participatory development process in which people are more involved in and responsible for the development process. These reforms ultimately led to the decentralisation of sector agencies that are now responsible for coordinating their plans with district assemblies. Attempts to define a more participatory framework in various sectors and projects often come to the realisation that the longer term sustainability of the project depends upon building management capacities within District Assemblies.

Sharing Responsibilities

In the years of crisis, NGOs emerged as important organisations managing the fall out from the State sector, enabling people to put social safety nets in place and to build up organisational capacities and training programmes. However, NGOs are not elected organisations. They are essentially empowering organisations that advocate the interests and needs of local communities to the development community and the State, and build local capacities to articulate their own interests. The criteria to assess NGO interventions should include the capacity of communities to articulate their needs to local government and development agencies. Thus, NGOs are not alternative organisations to District Assemblies, but organisations that help strengthen the ability of civil society to influence and transform the Assemblies and to hold them accountable to the communities they represent.

Since donors and the State have been party to the process of decentralisation and the shifting of the management of development and welfare to the popular economy and civil society, they should both ensure that this process can be managed effectively and creatively. They need to ensure that decentralisation is a process to build a new democratic political and economic identity, rather than an exercise in marginalisation – in which problem areas are shed until a more robust State sector emerges. They both need to take responsibility for the process they have initiated rather than seeing it as a policy created or foisted upon them by others. They need to build the information and financial management and participatory community management capacities of Assemblies and Unit Committees, to provide them with tools that will enable them to begin to initiate an accountable local development process, and to develop the criteria to make elected or appointed representatives of the people or of government accountable to laid down procedures and codes. Without these developments, concepts of participation, decentralisation, civil society and transparency will remain easily-mouthed, fine-sounding, hollow liberal rhetoric hiding the deficiencies of current development strategies.

Long-Term Commitment to Capacity Building

While it is not clear how decentralisation will contribute to redefining political and economic identities, it is clear that this process forms an important part of current perceptions of how the present crisis can be resolved and that the process is not easily turned back. In the present period, this process can only be deepened by giving the District Assemblies the capacity to play a meaningful role in its management, by making them more responsive to non-State actors, and by empowering non-State actors to place demands on assemblies and to influence their development in accordance with the peculiarities of the district. This in effect means initiating a process that puts more weight on capacity building processes rather than on projects, and which initiates projects to develop and strengthen the capacity to manage projects in a self-reliant manner in accordance with the peculiarities and needs of a local district. In this context, decentralised cooperation should not be seen as a soft, humanitarian or peripheral poverty alleviation programme, but as a fundamental part of the process to restructure political and economic identities. It thus requires a sense of vision, of long-term planning, commitment and goals, but also flexibility to respond to unforeseen outcomes. This will require appropriate long-term grant assistance, a commitment to building support structures and institutions, technical support, and strong monitoring and evaluation processes as an inherent part of the programme.

Emerging Principles

Within Ghana, the process of decentralisation opens up considerable potential for EU decentralised cooperation initiatives. Although decentralisation has been complex and involved contradictory processes, there are clear openings for devolution to district authorities, and increasing participation of communities in development initiatives. Financial constraints and lack of skilled personnel have also created contradictory pulls within Assemblies. To a certain degree this has resulted in a lack of transparency, rent-seeking activities, inappropriate planning, and a legitimacy crisis for Assemblies with insufficient funds to engage in significant development activities.

However, attempts to overcome some of these constraints have produced new ways of working, based on the development of strategic linkages between government and non-State sectors. These linkages have attempted to overcome some of the weaknesses within the system by developing capacity-building programmes at the community, Assembly, and sector level. They have attempted to improve the information flow between communities and their representative Assembly members, promoting a better-organised and informed civil society. They have improved linkages from communities to District Assemblies and created better information-gathering and processing systems within Assemblies – to make them more responsive to the needs of their constituents. They have used existing capacities within districts to further enhance capacity building. They have used the experiences of NGOs in community organisation and specific sector programmes to develop training modules. More experienced NGOs have been used to train less experienced NGOs who then train community-based organisations. Increasingly, donors are seeing the District Assembly as a focal point for projects aimed at facilitating good governance and community-focused development.

District Assemblies are thus suitable locations in which to place decentralised cooperation programmes and in which to evolve management structures for the programme. Rather than create high level management and steering committees, it would be logical to devolve as much of the management capacity to District Assemblies, building complementary structures to support self-reliant management within districts and gradually extending and empowering structures within the district to take over the management of decentralised cooperation. These complementary structures should involve State and non-State actors in networks responding to the needs of capacity building and information collection within the districts. They should link with networks of NGOs and other service-providers and with central and regional government. These networks should not be hierarchically organised or dominated by central government. They should be fluid institutions that transform as they respond to the needs of decentralised cooperation within the districts. They should serve as avenues in which policy dialogue is carried out, experiences exchanged, in which successful innovations can be scaled-up by application to other areas, and problems explored. They should serve to monitor and evaluate decentralised cooperation initiatives within districts and facilitate capacity building programmes that solve existing bottlenecks.

A flexible funding structure is required for a programme that responds to the evolving needs of districts and allows new projects to be funded in relation to evolving and changing needs. This can best be achieved by empowering District Assemblies to design their own plans and manage their own budgets and by providing training programmes to enhance this capability. While this approach implies greater initial support and coordination, including higher funding levels than those allocated to current DC programmes, this should be cost-effective in the long-term. Giving the DC a home in the District Assemblies should eventually lower the transaction costs of the programme.

To effectively build up its potential, DC needs to embody the following principles:

- DC is an evolving concept and approach to governance and development that requires flexible and adaptable implementation arrangements
- focus on strengthening the interface between local government and civil society by linking capacity building objectives with community participation in development and poverty alleviation;
- involve local non-State actors in the provision of capacity building services to District Assemblies and the community;
- involve District Assemblies and non-State actors in the allocation, management and disbursement of programme funds, in the design and selection of project activities with local communities, and in the evaluation of activities. Devolve as much of the decision-making as possible;
- avoid duplicating and creating parallel institutions and functions as an autonomous programme management structure;
- create strong monitoring and evaluating systems at all levels of the programme, from community to District and other coordinating institutions;
- involve the private sector and create an attractive environment for private investors in the districts.

Proposed Institutional Arrangements

Institutional arrangements for a DC programme could be implemented through three different linked organisational processes:

- existing **district-based civil society** organisations (NGOs, CBOs, Unit Committees etc.), at the interface between civil society and local government. The main concern is to enhance the capacities of Assemblies to develop a district management process that empowers communities to address their own problems. This involves communities in defining, implementing, monitoring and evaluating development agendas that are tuned to specific community needs. It involves capacity building for Assemblies in planning and budgeting, developing district information systems, networking and building strategic alliances with non-State sectors.
- a flexible **network of service providers** or resource persons with capacity building expertise that can respond to the needs of the district-based organisations by providing capacity enhancing services. They could also build up networks, collate information and organise workshops to build upon experiences. Ideally these service providers would be contracted by the District Assemblies who, together with the communities, would monitor and evaluate their programmes.
- a small **national level** steering committee of **contracted technical** professional staff able to provide strategic guidance, supervise the programme and act as a board for a coordinating secretariat. The secretariat would provide linkages between the two networks of service providers and CSOs and facilitate the provision of services by the network of service providers to district programmes. Additionally, the steering committee and the secretariat would be ultimately responsible for refining selection and procedural criteria for the programme.

To be operational, the decentralised cooperation programme needs to begin by working with a limited number of District Assemblies or work within a limited geographical area and thematic scope to facilitate linkages between the various actors concerned, to enable transparency and ensure sufficient concentration of resources across the various linkages in the system.

In implementing this structure, it is important to build close linkages with sector agencies and key government ministries involved in decentralisation through representation or secondment to the steering committee and networks of service providers. Since most sectors have medium term development strategies in which decentralisation is a component, it is important to study these plans

and find courses of action that harmonise with the over-riding decentralisation strategies, while enhancing the process of decentralisation at the District Assembly level and the participation of civil society in decentralised administration.

As a complementary approach, given the large number of other donor initiatives in supporting decentralisation and capacity building of civic institutions, the EU decentralised cooperation programme could seek to build up joint donor funding arrangements and support for district level initiatives. This type of structure is already informally evolving as donors become concerned about duplication and conflicting signals and approaches that the programmes they support give. In conjunction with key State agencies in decentralisation, such as the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development and the National Development Planning Commission, a forum can be created to examine and learn from approaches to the participation of civil society in development planning. This would attempt to harmonise the various components of the decentralisation process with donor approaches to supporting decentralised initiatives, and integrate the various approaches. The aim should be to strengthen more appropriate donor support to the decentralisation process and more appropriate national policy frameworks for supporting decentralised development initiated by non-State actors, and configurations of State and non-State actors.

Looking Forward

From the Commission's standpoint, a programme of DC offers an opportunity to examine how to strengthen linkages and provide greater cohesion between programmes within the National Indicative Programme and to impact more significantly on the intended beneficiaries. To achieve this, DC can be placed in an operational research environment where emerging practices and lessons can be analysed, documented and debated. The output from this process could be made available to other networks including other donor sponsored decentralisation and governance programmes. Further investigation and research is therefore required to:

- explore the potential linkages between EU supported in-country programmes and how these can respond to the needs of DC and enhance civil society participation in governance and local development.
- Identify "space" within the existing relationships between Central Government, the Commission, local Government and civil society where local-level capacity building and the targeting of resources more directly to the intended beneficiaries can be facilitated.

Appendix 1: Methodological Note

Research for this paper consisted of informal interviews with key actors in the decentralised process. An effort was made to achieve a balance by interviewing actors at different points of the process with different perspectives, and at different levels of the hierarchy, and to follow specific programmes at various hierarchies. At the national level, this included actors from the EU, the various ministries involved in the process, representatives from other donor-supported national programmes, the National Association of Local Authorities of Ghana, and Country Representatives for large Northern NGOs. At the regional level, participants in the water sector programmes and NGO networks were interviewed. At the district level, Assembly secretariat members and NGOs were interviewed.

List of People Interviewed

Ms Maria Ketting	EU Rural Development Advisor
Mr G.D. Apatu	Head ACP/EU/ECOWAS Secretariat (Ministry of Finance)
Mr Addae Kyeremah	Director, Human Resource Development, Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development
Mr George Cann	Director, Policy Planning Monitoring and Evaluation Unit, Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development
Mr Antony L. Hagan	DCP Programme Coordinator - Plan Consult Ltd.
Mr Adjei Annang	Secretary General, NALAG
Mr Reinhard Trenkle	Economic Promotion Advisor, Programme for Rural Action, GTZ
Mr Elkjaer Morten	1 st Secretary, Danish Embassy, Accra
Dr S.K. Asibuo	School of Public Administration, University of Ghana
Mr Ben Pugansoa	Oxfam Country Programme Manager, Ghana
Mr Malex Alabekiya	Programme Officer, Association of Church Development Projects, Tamale.
Mr Coleman Adjeyomah	GAS Development Associates (Consultants involved in participatory training as Small Business Development Unit in Northern Region Community Water and Sanitation Programme), Tamale.
Mr Issah Salifu	Amasachina Self-Help Association, Tamale
Mr Mohammed Yakubu	Administrative Officer, Builsa District Assembly, Sandema,
Mr Moses Appiah	Technical Officer Presbyterian Agricultural Services, Sandema.
Mr Bani Bensa	Planning Officer, West Mamprusi District Assembly, Walewale.
Mr Alhaji Ziblim Yakubu	District Coordinating Director, Kintampo District Assembly.

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