

## Putting Humpty-Dumpty Back Together Again: Decentralization and its Limits in Sierra Leone

Hindowa Batilo Momoh

Dean: Faculty of Leadership and Governance Institute of Public Administration and Management University of Sierra Leone

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**Abstract:** Decentralization became the buzzword in developing countries in the immediate aftermath of the Cold-War in the 1990s. As a process and concept, decentralization was seen as the vehicle to put the enfeebled state back on the development trajectory. This was largely due to the cataclysmic impact of over-centralization of power and authority in the 1970s and 1980s that suffocated development and brought many countries in the developing world to the brink of collapse. In most of these countries, civil conflicts, national upheavals and social discontent became a commonplace. The promise of decentralization, with all its vicissitudes and vagaries, was huge and compelling. It promised to deliver and quicken service delivery; promote inclusivity and grassroots participation; improve poverty reduction and facilitate rural development; improve transparency and accountability; promote gender equality and women and youth empowerment; improve coordination and synergy of development efforts; promote local ownership, to catalogue a few. Fourteen years since its reintroduction, decentralization in Sierra Leone has mixed bags of successes and challenges. This article sets out to catalogue the critical challenges decentralization continue to face in Sierra Leone since 2004. The article identifies undeniable challenges including but not restricted to lack of political will to devolve functions by sit-tight bureaucrats, resource dearth to fund rural development projects, capacity deficiency of councilors and council staff to effectively function, lack of legal reform, economic malfeasance that deprive councils and rural marginals of the much-needed resources to undertake development projects, among others. It concludes that surmounting these limitations will fulfil the promises of decentralization in Sierra Leone.

**Keywords:** decentralization, service delivery, ownership, participation, devolution, over-centralization

### Introduction

Most countries in the immediate post-colonial Africa witnessed a noteworthy tendency toward political centralization, but the results proved catastrophic and appalling. As the socio-economic and political crises deepened, the situation was compounded by the ever-increasing urbanization that engulfed the continent by the 1970s and 80s and aggravated by the cold-war ideological world order within the same period, African countries were forced to search for new solutions elsewhere (Oluwu and Wunsch 2004). Pressure from international lending institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (WB) advocated good democratic governance with greater emphasis on decentralization. The argument was simple: the shift to local governance was expected to reduce central government expenditures and give greater voice to the locals in the management of their responsibilities, at least seemingly (Oluwu and Wunsch 2004).

From that moment on, Western and Africanist scholars have advanced arguments suggesting that decentralization has the tendency to improve citizens' participation in decision-making and access to resources much required for local economic development. The argument gained much currency especially in the 1980s when leaders in Africa embarked on decentralization and local governance reforms with the view to bring decision-making and resources closer to the many citizens who live in rural communities.

Dovetailing with the above, the advocacy to decentralize the already over-centralized political systems also witnessed the people's determination and their resolve to rid the continent of decades of political decadence and socio-economic depravity exemplified by personalized rule, neopatrimonialism and military dictatorship (Hyden 1992). Furthermore, major revisions in accountability were made so that the local public had a significant role in its own local governance (Olowu and Wunsch 2004). Local governance here means the utilization of local knowledge, skills, materials, finance and other resources available at the community level with the objective to ensure that citizens take over the management, planning, administrative and political control that assure development

outcomes. In other words, putting rural marginals at the helm of decision-making and at the center of their own development.

In order to conceptualize the strengths of decentralization unfolding in Africa, one needs to situate the deepened economic and governance crises that continue to characterize the continent in the last several decades. The economic decline of the 1970s that ended with the crash of several economies and the wrenching structural adjustment era in the 1980s, along with the crises of governance where single-party and highly centralized regimes lost legitimacy and at times also collapsed, led African civil society and leaders alike, as well as donors, to search for new governance strategies (Fox 2009). The continent needed governance and management strategies that would lift Africa from the political doldrums and economic inertia. It required an audacious and courageous shift from the past state failings especially in the overall management of resources, governance architecture, and social and state re-engineering. In short, bold steps were required to put the proverbial “humpty-dumpty” back together again.

Implementing decentralization was also predicated on a number of goals and objectives. Prominent among these goals are democratization, social and economic development, and stabilization of new or existing governing regimes (USAID 2009). The many theories propounded by academics, policy makers and political commentators view decentralization as the anchor for sustained democratization on the continent (Oluwu and Wunsch 2004). To these proponents, the real foundation for deepening democratization in Africa once besieged by dictatorship and despotism was the transfer of power and resources from the center to the lower strata of the state. That is, the transfer of power and resources would lead to the effective participation of the locals who have been left out of decision-making processes from the 1970s to the early 1990s.

In tandem with the above, there is also the argument that when power is being transferred to the micro-level of the state, and the democratic space is created for effective participation of citizens in the decisions that define their lives, this helps improve the chronic governance challenges on the continent. The governance problems revolve around chronic corruption, rent seeking, inability to deliver services to the grassroots, poor maintenance of public infrastructure, poor implementation of public programs, and lack of initiative at local levels (Wunsch 2014). One key reason that decentralization has been seen as means to resolve some of these problems is its potential to reduce problems of principal-agency (Wunsch 2014).

The history of decentralization in Sierra Leone is well documented (Abraham 2002, Momoh 2019). Attaining independence in 1961, Sierra Leone continued its decentralization policies bequeathed by the colonial project *albeit* slight modifications. District and Town councils existed all over the country delegating the management of local affairs (education, health and sanitation, road construction and many others) to elected local authorities. Although the process survived up to 1972, successive post-colonial governments intermittently frowned at and criticized its management policies (Abraham 2001) as antithetical to post-colonial development aspirations especially at the grassroots. The suspicions and apprehensions nurtured and openly stated by these governments gravely undermined the very existence of the institution of local government in Sierra Leone, which certainly paved the way for the All Peoples Congress (APC) government of Siaka Stevens to actualize his dream to abolish the system in 1972. The era of Siaka Stevens (1968 to 1985) was marked and marred by authoritarianism, overcentralisation of state power and resources, unbridled malfeasance and graft, marginalization and political exclusion of minority groups, institutionalization of political violence and electoral fraud (Truth and Reconciliation Commission report 2004, Abraham 2002, Momoh 2021), thus preparing the material condition for the eleven-year-old civil conflict.

The centralization of administrative and political power and authority in the early years after independence severely undermined the capacity and authority of local government institutions in providing service to their communities. Meaningful participation of citizens was absent; decision making was kept for the powerful elite whose interest was to preserve the status quo; service delivery was not monitored nor evaluated by the people; marginalization of the vulnerable groups became a commonplace; exclusion and political intolerance was the order of the day; in fact, choice became a luxury (DESEC 2009).

Emerging from one of the most brutal civil conflicts (1991-2002) registered in human memory, a new paradigm of governance and public administration became urgent and imperative for the Sierra Leone Peoples Party (SLPP) government of President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah. A new paradigm that would exorcise the country of the vestiges of colonialism and the infamous one-party dictatorship that brought the country to its knees. A new paradigm that would facilitate the full participation of citizens, especially the traditionally marginalized groups such as women and

the youth in the process of national reconciliation, post-war rebuilding and peace consolidation. A new paradigm that would ensure that elected local representatives are put at the helm of local affairs and decision-making is closer to the doorsteps of the rural marginals.

It is also argued that post-war reconstruction and peace consolidation can be an unwieldy, complex, delicate and an extremely problematic process, especially in countries where the infrastructure of the state has collapsed, its institutional framework weakened, its economic base depleted and its social institutions disrupted. In the absence of a viable and productive economic base and an operational institutional framework, post-war countries largely depend on the international community to provide emergency, humanitarian and development assistance and to promote peace building and development projects (Fox 2009).

The Sierra Leone civil conflict was extraordinarily brutal and devastatingly destructive. The Revolutionary United Front (RUF) and renegade soldiers completely destroyed the countryside rendering the population to move to cities deemed relatively safe. After the conflict in 2002, the government had the uphill task to provide safety and resettle citizens; rehabilitate and construct structures ransacked during the conflict; and bring normalcy with the view to attract citizens to return to their homes. In doing this, the government had to rely on international donor community to provide the technical expertise and financial resources to expedite the process.

It is argued that the government prioritized strengthening government economic management capacity, especially in revenue collection and macroeconomic management (Zhou 2004). The author further argued that financial and technical assistance to strengthen the Presidency, Ministry of Finance, central bank, and National Revenue Authority was sought from the World Bank, DfID, EC, and AfDB. The World Bank responded with two Public Sector Management Support Projects (Zhou 2004). The government and donors expedited the recruitment of technical experts from within and outside of the country to ensure an effective system was in place to deliver on the promises of decentralization. A secretariat—the Decentralization Secretariat (DECSEC) was created and tasked with the responsibility to manage and roll out decentralization in post-war Sierra Leone. The Ministry of Finance filled nearly entire departments such as the Budget Bureau and the Economic Policy and Research Unit (EPRU) with contract staff (Zhou 2004)

The government also prioritized increased spending on education, health care and agriculture. The rationale was to provide basic services that were needed especially in the rural communities at that time. Reconstructions of primary and secondary schools; primary health care centers; police stations; court barrys were high priorities of the government (IRCBP 2008). The Tejan kabbah led administration also embarked on re-establishing elected district and urban councils in fulfilment of the Framework for Peace, Recovery and Development developed at the Paris Consultative Group meeting in 2002. The key rationale behind the framework was to address two fundamental causes of the war: exclusion and deprivation of the rural masses. Political decentralization was seen as a way to re-energize local leadership across the country and open space for popular participation (Zhou 2004). It was also envisioned that opening up the political space for citizens' participation in decision-making processes and managing their own affairs would bring back old memories when district council schools, rural sanitation and health care centers were managed at the local level.

Fundamental to this study are the uphill tasks and challenges the process of decentralization continues to experience in enhancing grassroots participation in decision-making and control/ownership over local programs. Further, the study interrogated the challenges in empowering rural communities and the people to mobilize resources for local economic development projects that are critical in promoting democratic good governance and sustainable peace. Implicit in this statement is the conviction that decentralization reforms only make sense if they lead to a working political outcome: effective local governance (Oluwu and Wunsch 2004).

Closely tied with the above are the fundamentally critical issues of the continuous political centralization of key governmental functions that need to be localized but are still kept under the firm grip of political actors at the center. Additionally, the transfer of resources (financial, material and human) from the center to the periphery has been trickling down in dribs and drabs. There is also the question of the unwarranted delay in putting the necessary legal framework/instruments that could legitimize both politicians and local actors to implement decentralization policies. This is further compounded by the delicate issues of differentiation of role play, for instance, between local councilors and chiefs on the one hand, and between elected political actors at the national level (parliamentarians) and councilors, on the other.

## The Rebirth of Decentralization in Sierra Leone

The state of affairs in Sierra Leone at the end of the Cold-War can best be described as palpably appalling and abysmally horrifying. One of the critical events that birthed this debilitating situation was the passing of the one-party bill in 1978, which resulted in totally undoing the gains made on the eve of independence up to 1977. The one party was brutal in silencing the opposition, muzzling and gagging the press and media outlets and massifying the citizenry. The system exacerbated economic malfeasance, exasperated cronyism and rent-seeking, worsened the-already dilapidated health care and education sectors, intensified socio-economic deprivation, speeded marginalization and exclusivity of vulnerable groups, and aggravated pillaging and unrestrained looting of the national treasury. So that by the 1980s, Sierra Leone's human development and social indicators, including life expectancy, literacy, primary school enrolment, child mortality rate and maternal death rates, were among the worst in the world (UNDP 1989). It was not surprising that the country was ranked 126 out of 130 in the 1990 United Nations Human Development Index (UNHDI), a year before the start of the civil war (Momoh 2021). On the eve of the new world order, therefore, Sierra Leone was groveling under the weight of a debilitating political, socio-economic and cultural inertia. The conditions described above clearly prepared the material condition for the outbreak of one of the worst brutal conflicts (1991-2002) in human history. The human and material cost of the civil war was, therefore, very expensive and burdensome. Adhering to the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission report of 2004, the government of President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah set in motion the birthing of decentralization to put "Humpty Dumpty back Together Again".

Democratic decentralization (i.e. the revival of elected local government) was a declared policy of both military and civilian governments in Sierra Leone during the civil war of the 1990s (Zhou 2004). An early rationale for this policy was set out in a consultancy study commissioned by the National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC) junta in 1994 (IRCBP 2008). The consultants opined that the country's institutional framework had become severely over-centralized during the one-party oligarchy that spanned between 1978 and 1991. The APC government of Siaka Stevens had de-activated elected local councils in 1972, leaving local government in the provinces in the hands of a small field administration and chieftdom structures inherited from colonial "indirect rule" (Abraham 2001). District Officers were responsible for coordinating the activities of central government departments in the provinces, but the consultants observed that departmental heads tended to deal directly with headquarters in Freetown (Zhou 2004). The prevailing relationship between central government and the provinces, they noted, was that of the centre extracting resources (e.g. raw materials and taxes) with minimal return in the way of services. Such services as did exist were severely under-resourced and heavily dependent on the support of international NGOs (IRCBP 2008). Sierra Leone's democratic process, which was on life support during the war years, was rejuvenated in 1996 when the NPRC conducted successful Presidential and Parliamentary elections. Upon assuming power in 1996, President Tejan Kabbah kept his promise to democratize Sierra Leone. To achieve this, the government revived the defunct local councils in the country. He created a new Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development to shepherd and guide the decentralization process. The creation of the above ministry clearly demonstrated the government's commitment to decentralize and devolve power and authority from the macro to the micro level of the state. It was also an indication that the government wanted to right the wrongs of history and to allow the citizens space and time to effectively participate in decision making process unheard of since 1978. This democratic re-engineering became the platform for local citizens and rural marginals to participate in the planning and implementation of their own political and socio-economic development.

Many factors have been noted for the fast-tracking of the decentralization process. First, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report of 2002 has clearly blamed the outbreak of one of Africa's most brutal conflicts on the over-centralization of power and authority that witnessed the marginalization and exclusion of the vast majority living in rural communities (TRC report of 2002). It further revealed that the outbreak of the civil war was because of the abysmal failure of the central government to provide much-needed services to rural localities. Resultantly, planners for the resuscitation of local governance argued that local governance system with effective, accountable and transparent local authorities would serve as a critical instrument in delivering the policies of government and to re-establish law and order at the grassroots.

To accomplish this feat, the government established a Task Force on Decentralization and Local Government Reform in 2002 with the view to advice on the process of decentralization and local government reform. Series of coordinated and organized consultations were conducted between and among key stakeholders at the national,

regional, district and local levels. The outcome of these consultations and coordinated meetings informed the policy options and discussions on local governance and decentralization (DECSEC 2007).

Many abortive attempts were made to develop a policy on Decentralization that would inform an Act of Parliament. Failure to develop the policy document left the government with no alternative but to submit to Parliament the Local government Act of 2004, which was unanimously approved. This, no doubt, laid the foundation for the resuscitation of local governance in the country. From 2004 onward, successive local government elections have been held guaranteeing the rebirth of decentralization.

The Act provided the legal constitutional framework and statutory instrument that paved the way for the resuscitation of the decentralization process in Sierra Leone. The Act established nineteen local councils in the twelve districts and the Western Area of the country. Four consecutive local council elections, 2004, 2007, 2012 and 2018, have been conducted which have provided the political framework and governance structure at the local level. Currently, there are twenty-one local councils in the country after Karene and Falaba in the Northern region became districts in 2017.

On the positive note, a little over twenty years after the decentralization initiative was launched, it has become part and parcel of the democratization reengineering in Sierra Leone. Many observers and commentators argue that it will be very difficult, if not impossible, to reverse the current trend and democratic trajectory unfolding in Sierra Leone. It can, therefore, be safely argued that decentralization has come to stay *albeit* attempts to weaken the process. Recent events such as the re-introduction of the District Officer system in 2011 clearly reveal that the central government is not committed to the complete devolution of functions to the councils. Put another way, what the country is gradually experiencing is re-centralization of governmental functions and suffocation of the local councils to function. Rather than empowering local councils further, national elites seem to be following a strategy of “divide and rule,” preventing local councils from becoming strong enough to seriously challenge the political hegemony of the center (Oluwu et al 2004). Further, the attempt by the current government to introduce a non-partisan local government elections signals a deliberate attempt to suffocate and enfeeble may exclude citizens in the rural communities from practicing multi-party democracy. This, indubitably, have the potentials to kill plurality and suppress the democratic rights of the people to belong to political parties and practice such at the grassroots level.

### Limits of Decentralization

The results collected and collated from the Literature Review and some modicum of interviews clearly demonstrated that the decentralization process unraveling in Sierra Leone is still at the crossroads and experiencing a checkered political trajectory. Revived after many years in political limbo, Sierra Leone experienced an over-centralized system of governance characterized by the stultification of democratic institutions thereby making government largely unaccountable and endemically corrupt. This resulted in socio-economic decline as basic infrastructures were neglected in the rural areas in favour of the urban settings; and alienated the political and administrative systems associated with the formal state structure from the mass of the people who resorted to their age-old tested primordial institutions in the villages and rural communities. Some of the critical challenges facing decentralization and local governance are discussed below.

First, there is a hang-over of the long legacy of centralized government in Sierra Leone that continue to stone-wall the decentralization process. Historically, the line ministries have been major political actors and controllers of human and material resources. Many ministries have been reluctant to devolve functions and some of the functions that have been scheduled for devolution (e.g. feeder road maintenance using manual labour) are unnecessarily limiting (Zhou 2004). Lack of payroll devolution has hampered coordination between elected councillors and technical staff, with some of the latter seeing the councils as little more than funding agencies. It has also created absurd situations in which, for example, teaching supervisors still employed by the Ministry of Education in Freetown complain that councillors’ lack the capacity to monitor education services effectively. This has resulted in allowing sit-tight bureaucrats at the center to withhold funds and technical expertise (much needed at the decentralized level) at the center.

Second, the country embraced decentralization in 2004 barely two years after the horrific civil war. Much of, if not all of, the initial resources came from donor support. As such, funding agencies particularly the World Bank micro-managed the process in terms of providing the funds and technical expertise. What Sierra Leoneans experienced

hiring of external consultants to put together the decentralization policy with very little success. This meant that not much of home-grown ideas/strategies/plans prevailed during the initial period of implementation resulting in the high jacking of the decentralization process by donors. The effect of this has been the over-dependence of the councils on donor support.

Third, difficulties to raise own resources and the lack of financial resources in running the councils cannot be overstated. Additionally, resource scarcity to implement development plans and other council's programmes remain to be a concern to many. In the last several years in existence, councils have not been able to raise own sources resulting in over-dependence on grants from the central and/or from donors especially the European Union and the World Bank. Councils have narrow revenue base and cannot adequately generate internal resources due to the old-aged perception among rural marginals that taxation is exploitative. The citizens at the grassroots are extremely poor to be taxed and Resources (grants/subsidies) committed by the central government for the implementation of council's development plans are often too small and are hardly disbursed on time. The literature also reveals that grants and subsidies from central government are tied grants meaning they cannot be transferred to other budget lines. This clearly limits councils to utilize funds even when there is need to do so.

Fourth, capacity deficiency on the part of the councils and political interference continue to pose a threat to decentralization in Sierra Leone. Several capacity building initiatives have been organized the Decentralization Secretariat from 2004 to date. Yet, the turn-over of councilors at elections bring in new councilors who have no idea about decentralization and how its works. It is very clear that first time councilors have proven beyond every reasonable doubt that they need to be trained and fully capacitated in order for them to understand the basics of the decentralization process let alone to talk of council deliberations and operations. Most councilors are hardly literate enough to understand basic council and administrative procedures, statutory instruments and even the legal framework within which the council operates. Lack of knowledge and capacity to understand these documents greatly affect the effectiveness and efficiency of the council (Decentralization Secretariat 2009).

Fifth, councilors, administrative staff of councils and civil society members have been very apprehensive about the continuous political interference from the executive and MDAs. The literature reveals that council decisions are sometimes overruled by the Ministry of Local Government or from directives from State House. According to the DECSEC, decisions taken at council level reflect felt and induced needs of the people and, therefore, are legitimately articulated to benefit their constituents. Conversely, decisions originating from the government are predicated on preserving the status quo or seeking parochial political end. Since such decisions are influenced from outside and are not owned by the people, people are opposed to it and in many cases they tend to kick against such decisions. This has strained relationship between the people and council on one hand, and between the council and civil society, on the other.

Sixth, a worrying challenge pointed out is that of corruption and mismanagement of council resources. This was blamed on weak institutional framework and ineffectiveness of internal control mechanisms that could curb the menace. Structures hardly exist within the council to forestall corrupt practices and establish rules for punishment. Although has immensely improved over the last few years, corruption, which is a national menace and curse, continue to pose a threat to development and security in the council.

Seventh, corruption in Sierra Leone is endemic and has proven to be a serious challenge to national development. Local Councils have not completely escaped the scourge. The Local Government Service Commission charged with the responsibility to recruit competent staff, train staff and oversee the smooth administration of the councils is currently sufficiently ineffective and incapacitated to carry out the responsibility (DECSEC 2009). Incompetent Finance Officers recruited collude with miscreant council member to sometimes defraud the council of much-needed resources or do not simply understand how to manage the finances of the council.

Eight, the twin concepts of transparency and accountability are critical in the management of resources and information in public institutions with the view to deepening good governance. To ensure that transparency and accountability are at work, the departments responsible for internal control, preventing mis and mal appropriation of funds and ensuring that council staff and administrators follow the financial and administrative not to mention council policies should be strengthened (DECSEC 2009). The councils have the audit and finance departments responsible for internal control and preventing malfeasance but are palpably ineffective in carrying out their

functions. Because of the weaknesses inherent in these departments, mismanagement of resources and malfeasance are a common place rendering councils ineffective and inefficient.

Ninth, the gap between councils and ward committees poses a challenge to decentralization in Sierra Leone. Councilors, by law, are supposed to interact with their people through the established and elected ward committees and members of the civil society. In most instances, councilors hardly visit their wards and interact with their people. The people, therefore, have little or no idea what is happening in the councils. They are not privy to council activities, most do not participate in the drafting of development plans and, therefore, are cut off from councils activities. Because the people are not informed about what obtains in the council, they are not armed with the information of what decentralization is about. Second, they do not know what is supposed to be delivered to them and how that should be done. Third, ward committee members feel slighted and marginalized in decision-making. Fourth, there is lack of effective participation, the linchpin of decentralization and local governance. Finally, the people do not trust their elected representatives, which pose integrity challenges.

Tenth, until its review in 2021, the LGA has been replete with lacunas, inconsistencies, ambiguities and unanswered questions. For instance, the local government was never referred to as the backbone of local governance, which has left a fight between the traditional authorities and the councilors. Further, revenue collection was haphazardly dealt with in the document leaving room for conflict between grassroots actors. Additionally, no clearly defined roles exist between the councilors and the technical/administrative staff. This has posed serious problem wherein councilors have hijacked the roles of administrative staff.

Lack of clarity in the LGA of 2004 brings us to the issue of chief/councilor relationship. Although the literature views this as no more a serious problem, it has created a gulf between these two rural political actors. No matter how much Sierra Leone would want to be modernized, it still remains a traditional society. That is, no matter how much Africans want to push chieftaincy into the dustbin of history, it is still with us. Chiefs are custodians of the land and the people. They, therefore, wield enormous power and authority over their subjects. While the councils remain the backbone of local governance in the rural areas, any attempt to sideline and/or exclude chiefs from the governance architecture in the rural communities will result in disharmony and conflict. The councils cannot succeed without the input and support of the traditional rulers who are revered by their people and have the mobilizational capacity to attract people to any policy. As such, ways are to be sought how to co-exist and coalesce effort with them.

### Conclusion

It is an indisputable fact that decentralization continue to have a landmark impact on the political landscape in Sierra Leone. The fact that local governance and decentralization was introduced in 2004, which facilitated the transfer of power, authority and resources from the center to rural communities is noteworthy. This singular political initiative has changed the governance narrative and can, therefore, be viewed as a huge success. After twenty years in existence, decentralization both as a theory and a process will only continue to be improved upon. It will be difficult, if not impossible, for any government to dissolve and undo the process.

That notwithstanding, this article has presented a plethora of challenges the decentralization process is grappling with. Politically, there are visible signs that successive governments want to undermine the decentralization process. As argued earlier, lack of political will to fully devolve functions from the center continue to hamper progress. Sit-tight bureaucrats at the center are refusing to share power and authority with the councils, and as such, limits councils effectiveness and efficiency. Second the reintroduction of the District Officer (DO) system clearly undercuts the essence for which decentralization was introduced. The DO system has introduced power struggle between the DO and the Council chairman who, according to the LGA of 2004, is the highest political authority in the locality. This obstructionist “containment strategy” has the potential to thwart development efforts at the local level.

Economically, transfer of grants from the central government are not only significantly small but are disbursed late. The late transfer of resources has negatively impacted councils effectiveness in delivering on development outcomes. Second, the low level of own sources and the over-dependence on the government to provide resources to run the councils weakens accountability, limits independence and render the councils susceptible to the political maneuverings of the central government. Third, economic malfeasance has gripped the councils to the point that

limited resources available to deliver services are continuously pilfered for personal use. The negative effect of this on development outcomes at the local level are palpable.

Finally, the ambiguity contained in the LGA of 2004 particularly regarding chief/councilor relationship remains a conundrum. This has created a big divide between these two rural political actors. Chieftaincy remains key to rural development because chiefs preside over subjects while governments rule citizens. And more than eighty percent of the population live in the rural areas directly under the tutelage of chiefs. Besides, chiefs are custodians of both the people and land. As such, the success of councils, and by extension, the decentralization process hinge on the cooperation, support and input provided by chiefs. This is critical to service delivery and development outcomes envisioned by the process of decentralization.

### Recommendations

1. The government should have the political will in deepening decentralization in the country. The government should stop open and covert interference into the workings of councils and consider rescinding the appointments of District officers who are currently suffocating and demoralizing council activities
2. Government to develop/enact clear policies and regulations ensuring that bureaucrats at the centre devolve functions as prescribed in the LGA of 2004. A clearly defined devolution process should be the priority of the government going forward
3. The government should empower and build the capacity of councils to generate own resources from the localities. Expanding income generation to include farming, fishing, weaving, gara dying etc. have the potential to increase resources much-needed for implementing council development plans. This will help reduce dependency on donors and the government and, by implication, increase independence and autonomy
4. The MIALGRD should have an enhanced and strengthened role in monitoring and coordinating LC activities with reference to the relationship between councils and ward committees on the one hand, and councils and chiefs, on the other. A clear-cut policy should be developed spelling out functions and synergies between and among the local actors.
5. Measures designed by the Ministry of Finance to institute a reliable financial management system for the Central Government should be applied to LCs with specific and appropriate guidelines. The council's Audit and Finance Departments should be strengthened to allow effective regular monitoring to curb intended mismanagement of Council's resources. Such resources will be diverted to strengthen service delivery and fight poverty endemic in the rural communities.
6. The downward accountability aspect of decentralization is quintessential for the survivability of councils on one hand, and the sustainability of the governance process at the grassroots, on the other. It is about holding councillors and council core and auxiliary staff accountable and responsible for decision-making and their actions. It is about empowering the people at the Ward level (constituents and civil society/NGOs/CBOs) to question decisions and actions of their locally elected representatives and service providers freely and fearlessly. As such, it provides a window of opportunities for transparency and for the closure of leakages/mismanagement of local resources thereby diverting such resources to positively impact the lives of the ordinary citizens.
7. There should be citizen's oversight committee encouraged to function as civil society organization or community-based organization in all local jurisdiction with the view to help monitor LCs activities and rural development efforts
8. There should be a public budget hearing organized by the Department of Finance of the Council to be attended by Wards Committee members, Civil Society and NGOs and the public at the beginning and the middle of every fiscal year
9. Each Councillor should provide his/her ward a quarterly financial, political, administrative report of his/her stewardship
10. Councils should display on notice boards in the Wards budgetary estimates and plans on a quarterly basis for public consumption
11. A certain level of fiscal autonomy is required to ensure that potential benefits of decentralisation can materialise, although this autonomy has to be designed in manner that does not compromise overall national objectives and targets

12. Local Council election should be used as the most effective precondition for ensuring local accountability. Effective local accountability will also require citizens and politicians' access to information, institutional arrangements for politicians' oversight of planning, finances and staff.
13. There should be a National Capacity Building Policy that is based on national consultative meetings. Such a policy shall be a collaborative work between MIALGRD and the Ministry of Education where a standard guide of rules, regulations and procedures are designed to be followed. These established policies should be enforced to guarantee that councillors abide by the regulations
14. CSOs/NGOs/CBOs and the private sector should raise concern over crucial council decisions/activities through the media or other means to get their voice out, elevate the debate to solicit feedback from the people, and to justify their representativity and participation on behalf of the rural masses
15. Civil groups should have access to and be allowed to monitor and track down council activities such as bid openings, contract agreements, development plans etc from the inception to the end. They shall act as advocates of the people by providing the people with regularly correct information on council activities
16. Councils should operate transparently by displaying important information on notice boards, provide civil groups access to information on matters dealing with especially financial and legal matters, gender and generational issues
17. Councils should open space for gender mainstreaming and engagement with the view to harness the potentials of both men and women in their pursuits for equity, representation, group rights and self-advancement
18. NGOs and the private sector should register with the local councils and make available their plan of activities within the locality. This is critical to avoid duplication of projects, suspicion of hidden agenda, and would engender collaborative approach to rural development much needed in the country
19. NGOs and private sector should be part of the council's planning process because they have the resources (human and material), the technical knowledge and skills in planning, and have the drive to push projects through. They shall be seen as partners in the development of rural areas and should, therefore, be effectively involved in the planning process

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