Local State Institutional Reforms in Ghana

Actors, Legitimacy and the Unfulfilled Promise of Participatory Development
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Dedication

This work is dedicated to the memory of my father, Emmanuel Kwasi Sabbi. Ironically, poor health did not allow him to witness the realization of a dream which he so much cherished.
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1. Introduction: Institution-Building and Change

“If you want to make enemies, try to change something. You know why it is. To do things today exactly the way you did them yesterday saves thinking. It does not cost you anything”.

Wilson Woodrow (1918, p. 286)

“And it ought to be remembered that there is nothing more difficult to take in hand, more perilous to conduct, or more uncertain in its success, than to take the lead in the introduction of a new order of things. Because the innovator has for enemies all those who have done well under the old conditions, and lukewarm defenders in those who may do well under the new”.

Niccolo Machiavelli (1515/1958 Chapter VI, p. 29)

1.1 Institution-Building in the International Development System

This treatise analyses institution-building programmes offered as models of change by the international development system and their linkage to socioeconomic development in the Global South\(^1\). Thus, the study probes into one of the central questions posed by scholars of development policy in countries of the South. Specifically, the study points out the disjoint between the heightened rhetoric of institutions and economic well-being against the backdrop of empirical reality on the ground using Ghana as the point of reference. Generally, much contemporary development debates identifies the development problems of the Global South, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, as one of “bad institutions” (Collier, 2007, p. 64) and unable to deliver adequate public goods and services. Therefore, institution-building is vigorously proffered as the panacea for all the development problems in the regions of the South. Yet for any meaningful analysis to

\(^1\) The terms Global North and Global South are used as a heuristic to describe socioeconomic differences from a geo-political standpoint (i.e. Northern and Southern hemispheres respectively). However, I am aware that not all countries fit neatly into these two categories.
1. **Introduction**

Evolve, the meaning of institutions, their change and how they relate to the notion of development must be put in perspective right from the outset. The expression ‘institution-building’, though popular in international development discourse, is often used without adequate clarification. In fact, the concept of institution is not used in exactly the same sense among sociologists, political scientists and economists. For economists and political scientists, the emergence of particular institutions entails some legal processes or when some incentives are introduced (see Scharpf, 1997, p. 40; Lowndes, 2005, p. 291). For sociologists, however, the meaning differs quite widely; here, the production of institutions does not require command structures or specific incentives. Institutions are understood as some interactive meanings arising from cognitive structures based on societal definitions and consensus (see DiMaggio & Powell, 1991b, p. 8; Habermas, 1989, p. 30ff; and also Luhmann, 1986, p. 174). Again, from a constructionist perspective, repeated exchanges with this rule-like behaviour form the basis of institutions.

Despite the different notions, the underlying trend in the use of institutions in these three disciplines is that they all talk about some set of rules in societal settings. The institutional economics approach of Douglas North is apt herein. For North, institutions are rules and regulations that constrain and shape human interaction; they may entail “formal rules” (i.e. written documents such as constitution, laws, by-laws, property rights) as well as “informal constraints” (i.e. unwritten norms such as traditions, customs, taboos and their sanctions) (1995, p. 23). Informal institutions exist in both the Global North and South but they predominate in the latter (Jütting, 2003, p. 11). Therefore, their confrontation with the notion of well-functioning bureaucracy, in the Weberian sense, underlies the rationale for intervention by the international development system into the institution-building arena (Romeo, 2003, p. 92). Hence, the idea of institution-building in the Global South involves policies and programmes that attempt to introduce new sets of rules and modify existing ones often with an inherent expectation of making them efficient and effective.²

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² Conceptually, institution-building may suggest some constructive and desired tasks while reforms or institutional change may imply palliative attempts to remediing moribund and dysfunctional institutions. In practice, however, the two are mixed-up in everyday policy processes. Therefore, institution-building is herein used interchangeably with local political reforms and institutional change to describe attempts to establish new institutions and refurbish existing ones.
1.1 Institution-Building in the International Development System

In that same line of thought, local institution-building is frequently linked to poverty reduction and socio-economic development. That is to say, more robust and responsive local institutions will make local political leaders accountable in the provision of daily public goods to ordinary citizens. Yet, if we consider this notion of development to denote socio-economic well-being (or social change broadly) that includes improvement in the quality of life to wit better income, access to education and health, freedom and rights, etc. for people in the Global South (see Rauch, 2009, p. 12; Weizel, Inglehart & Klingemann, 2003, p. 341; Rogers, 1976, p. 225), then the connection between institution-building and constituents’ well-being is generally lacking (Jütting et al. 2005, p. 643; Crawford, 2008, p. 239).³

Even more intriguing, the very idea of institution-building that is being touted as the solution to development problems in the Global South is not new at all. In fact, institutional change especially in sub-Saharan Africa is connected very much to the very fiber of post-independence development policy itself. In that frame, institution-building focused largely on human resource development, administrative reorganizations and institutional restructuring (Neubert, 2015, p. vii). This practice followed failures and disappointments with development programmes in developing countries that gave rise to numerous questions on development intervention in the Global South. In fact, development as “mankind’s most ambitious collective enterprise” in the words of Robertson (1984, p. 1), had lost its allure and was replaced with critique and rebuke. Thus, the renewed interest in institution-building which became prominent in the 1980s and 1990s was influenced by two main critiques of the development process. The first was the disappointments with the international development system itself and the associated post-development critique (see Neubert, 1996, p. 2; Escobar, 1995, p. 47). Indeed, summing up Escobar’s ideas, Reid-Henry (2012) argues that development “was not only a problem to the extent that it failed” but was equally problematic in successful cases since it “strongly set the terms for how people in poor countries could live”.

³ I am mindful of the fact that the meaning of development differs among scholars and disciplines just as the indicators including Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and Human Development Index (HDI). Other researchers yet talk about freedom and other qualities of life. However, the central concern for all these approaches is the improvement in the living conditions of the poor and vulnerable in the countries of the South.
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The response to that critique was that development programmes will only matter if state institutions were strong and responsive to constituents’ well-being. This need for accountable institutions informed the second critique of governance and, thus, ushered in ideas of good governance, participation and development but which still remain rhetorical (Wunsch, 2001, p. 277). The limitations to institutional change and development, in spite of the renewed interests arise partly because the changes are narrowly conceived. The approaches do not consider institutional actors, their rationalities and preferences. Indeed, in sub-Saharan Africa, as elsewhere in the Global South, the international development system (together with the central state) has pursued reforms mainly from an efficiency standpoint. The philosophy behind these institutional reforms is often informed by neo-liberal economic growth arguments that seek to create a market system with limited state intervention (Loayza & Soto, 2005, p. 80 ff). It is unsurprising that these institutional reforms in sub-Saharan Africa in the 1980s occurred against the backdrop of retrogressing economies blamed on the nature and quality of the public service (World Bank, 1981, p. 40). Therefore, the main focus of the so-called ‘Washington Consensus’ was to address the state’s fiscal indiscipline by limiting its role in the daily economic and social life (see Williamson, 1990, pp. 7–10). The position of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) on the limited role of the state in institutional reforms was even more evident:

“(…) among many developing countries, the direct involvement of the state in economic activity is large and widespread, with state-owned enterprises (SOEs) having monopoly rights in a larger number of sectors, including manufacturing and the financial sector. While SOEs in developing countries generated eleven percent of GDP on average in the period 1978–91, in industrial countries their involvement was limited to five percent. In countries such as Ethiopia, Somalia, Sri Lanka, and Tanzania, the SOE share of manufacturing has been in excess of 30 percent (…). However, there has been a significant reduction in the involvement of state-owned enterprises over the more successful cases” (IMF, 1997, p. 85).

That limited state intervention had yielded positive institutional changes and economic outcomes was used to justify the need to restrict even further the role of the state by the Bretton Woods institutions. Similar notions of restricted state intervention in the Global South were expressed by the World Bank:

“There are many potential barriers to competition. In developing countries the main institutional barriers to domestic competition are government regulations on exit and entry of firms. Even in the tradable sector, international competition may not
lead to domestic competition, partly because of institutional barriers to competition, such as government regulations in product and factor markets that deter firm entry, exit, and growth. Excessive and costly government regulations also facilitate corruption and lead to adverse distributional consequences by inducing workers and firms to escape into the informal market (…)” (World Bank, 2002, p. 135).

Despite the limitations to these interventions, developing countries have followed that pattern of change quite religiously as a model for their development aspirations. Meanwhile, these institutional changes are still informed by the idea of a modern, well-functioning bureaucracy in the Weberian sense. And with awareness that these institutional requirements of the modern state are very weak or nearly nonexistent in the developing world (Hirschmann, 2011, p. 418; Herbst, 1993, p. 6), the state has been assigned that role in spite of its erosion from economic life. The state is now supposed to lead and fuel institutional changes to bring the desired development outcomes. The state has not only been enticed with incentives but also conditionalities to play that role. Nonetheless, this approach to institutional change is very restricted. It considers the problem of change and development as a policy and not a process. That approach views institution-building as mainly the formulation of appropriate ideas for implementation that will lead to desired changes but the problem goes further than that. Indeed, the neo-liberal approach was a closed perspective to development in the South. As Scoones (2009) puts it, in the 1980s it “had extinguished effective debate on alternatives” (p. 175).

Institution-building is rather a process of practices among actors. Indeed, state actors could strategically dance to the dictates of international development agencies while simultaneously being selective in the programmes for implementation. These actors have their interests, rationalities and preferences which do not always fit into the formulated change ideas. Again, institutions and institution-building may not necessarily lead to changes at all because they could be used by actors to preserve their existing institutional practices. Also critical is the source of the institutional change ideas from where they enter into developing country contexts; who supports those

4 Modernity as used here is an analytical category and differs widely from the normative attributes it connotes when used in modernization arguments. Following Eisenstadt (2000, pp. 3–5), modernity is seen as conscious human efforts to shape their own futures. In this study, the term is employed to describe contemporary processes and patterns of behaviour especially in local state administration (Neubert & Scherer, 2014, pp. 15–29; Macamo & Neubert, 2008, pp. 273–274).
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ideas and who implements what? These concerns suggest that the dominant notion of efficiency in the institution-building programmes can no longer help in explaining the change and implementation dynamics. Good reform policy is, as a matter of priority, a necessary precondition for institutional change and service provision. However, that is not sufficient; institutional reforms should rather focus attention on the institutional constraints within which good reform projects are implemented.

Meanwhile, a fruitful sociological framework that considers agency and interests of actors in shaping change and development policies on the ground has been offered since the 1970s (Long, 2001, p. 13) though rarely used in studies of institution-building. The approach advanced in this treatise follows the actor-centered analysis of change and development processes. Long (2004, p. 27) sees planned institutional change as a transformative process in which various actors with their rationalities shape and re-shape the processes on the ground based on their interests and meanings they give to that process. Therefore, studies on local institutional changes in the Global South offer better insights when they take into account the different groups of actors, their institutional environments, interests and rationalities when such changes are attempted as well as their responses and strategies with which they confront these changes.

1.2 The Context and Problem: Local State Institutional Reforms in Ghana

As elsewhere in sub-Saharan Africa, Ghana’s search for institutions that will produce goods and service and lead the way in social transformation is quite long. Thomi (1999) shows that immediate post-independence regimes realized the shortcomings of the institutions of the state and sought reforms to make them effective in providing public goods and services. From a historical context, the institutional reforms in Ghana could be put into three strands. Between the 1960s and 70s, there was a critical need for human

5 The institutional limitations in the public service should be situated within the shortage of skilled personnel to man state businesses after independence. This allowed less-skilled persons to enter the public service. The consequent dismal performance led to divestiture in the 1980s and 90s (Appiah-Kubi, 2001; Arthur, 2005).
resources so the emphasis was placed on capacity development, training and the provision of incentive systems for Ghanaian civil servants to manage the affairs of the state. This was followed in the 1980s by institutional restructuring under the structural adjustment programme. The intention was to cleanse the public service of stagnation and lack of productivity. The measures sought were to reduce the size of the workforce and to decrease the state’s involvement in the economic and manufacturing sectors through privatization of state-owned businesses (see Awortwi, 2006, p. 26 ff; also Neubert, 2015, p. vii). In the third case which extends till today, the good governance idea was pursued to deal with bad institutions and bad governance. The strategy sought was the incorporation of private sector management practices through results- and profit-based management techniques into the public sector (Hood, 1995, p. 106).

Interestingly, however, with the exception of some anecdotal cases of well-performing institutions (Grindle, 1997, p. 481; Grindle & Hilderbrand, 1995, p. 441), empirical evidence from critical reviews of institutional changes in the public sector have pointed to persistent limitations and weaknesses in the administrative and implementation capacity of the state and institutions (see e.g. Dodoo, 1997, p. 115; Ayee, 1997, p. 43; Schacter, 2001, p. 3; Adei, 2008, p. 285). Still, the institutional reforms have continued without stopping. Indeed, since the 1980s the development debate has been informed by two views on institution-building. The first, inspired by the efficiency model, sees public service reforms as necessary for economic efficiency given the high transaction costs associated with unclear, rent-seeking and inefficient state institutions (Nissank & Areyetey, 2003, p. 43). The second view derives from perceived weakness of local political institutions as incapable of delivering public benefits and rather serve as elite vehicles (Herbst, 1993, p. 6; Crook, 1999, p. 117) and sees reform of state institutions as key to improving governance structures (Adei, 2008, p. 275; Ayee, 1997, p. 38). Taken together, these views have been fundamental to the reforms in Ghana’s public service albeit with limited outcomes between the imagined and empirical reality.

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6 Grindle and Hilderbrand (1995) and Grindle (1997) found some well-performing public sector agencies in six developing countries including Ghana even under unpredictable conditions. The researchers cautioned that capacity-building approaches should pay attention to intentions that do not necessarily bring the highest pay-off (e.g. organizational culture and shared norms, professionalism, teamwork, etc.) that are often taken for granted.
1. Introduction

Particular focus on local state institution-building clearly elucidates this point. As a recent break-away unit of the main civil service, institutional reforms in the local state administration are numerous and reflective of the aforementioned three phases of institutional change in the larger public service. From the colonial administration’s disinterest in its formation to post-independence party patronage of the local state, the mainly copious administrative reforms often start as a review and could end up with some major ramifications based on the regimes’ interest and preferences in those changes. It is less remarkable that their impact on service provision and well-being of constituents was severely restricted (Crook, 2003, p. 80; Wunsch, 2001, p. 282). These challenges have brought the international development system into the local state institutional arena for almost three decades. Proffered by the Bretton Woods institutions, institution-building intensified with the 1988 decentralization programme. Their ideas for institutional change are based on the pillars of good governance and participation that lead to accountable and responsive local institutions. That by implication will help reduce poverty and ensure socio-economic well-being (see MLGRD, 2010, p. 6; Ernstorfer & Stockmayer, 2009). Despite this rhetoric, the empirical evidence linking local state institution-building to changes in the socio-economic conditions of constituents after more than two decades largely failed to point out any significant improvements (Jütting et al. 2005, p. 643; Crawford, 2008, p. 239).

The good governance discourse seeks to incorporate elements of societal values into local political processes being sensitive to the notion of the modern state as an imposition in post-colonial settings. This emphasis makes the discourse enticing or what Abrahamsen calls “seductive” (2000, p. 49) in the development arena. Even under the good governance umbrella, administrative restructuring continues to dominate the change strategies and the focus on local institutional actors is not emphasized even up till today. It was the more striking when one senior official deftly opined that in the automatic transfers of civil servants to work in the local state, “it was not as if the staff had had an option to leave or stay…it was the law and it was automatic”.7 The emphasis has rather been on the creation of more districts and administrative institutions though there are persistent doubts over the realization of that promised participatory democracy and development

1.2 The Context and Problem

goals (see Ayee, 2012, p. 633). Therefore, the feeling, interests and preferences of the actors who implement local institutional policies and programmes have been out of the question. Obviously, the continuous focus on administrative restructuring in the local institution-building to the neglect of actual practices of actors both as individuals and as a collective with their interests is ill-conceived. In fact, notions of institutional performance and efficiency are essentially defined by institutional actors based on these actors’ interests, rationalities and preferences (see Scott, 1987, p. 508). Thus, local state policy actors are not docile recipients of institutional change ideas. Rather, they are active players and have multiple institutional logics to which they adhere. They are also capable of confronting, within their work domains, other institutional forms and interests produced and reproduced by their general political setting.

Beyond the efficiency model, therefore, the fruitful question worth pursuing is: why has the cycle of institution-building persisted even when it does not relate to participatory development outcomes? This question begs for a focus on actors who initiate and implement change. Put specifically, the central concern of this treatise is to address policy actors’ concerns to wit: how these actors appreciate the change policies and their place in the implementation processes; their understanding of their roles whether as policy-makers or implementers; their underlying rationalities, interests and preferences and how they are expressed in the policy arena; whether their collective and individual interests in local policy converge or diverge. In the same token, the role of rhetoric must also be considered. The role of interests and rhetoric could not be limited to local state policy actors. Central state policy actors and their transnational counterparts also have interests and preferences that frame a specific response to the very administrative changes that are pursued. Taken together, the implication is that with interests and preferences of local state policy actors missing from the framing of the reform question, the administrative changes may make little sense in terms of their expected outcomes. Against that backdrop, this study proceeds to unearth the underlying rationalities, interests, preferences, and strategies of institution-building actors and how that shape local change processes in Ghana. The intention is to uncover the subsequent expression of these dynamics in relation to change and development rhetoric from the actor-centered and institutional frame of reference.
1. Introduction

1.3 Propositions in the Study

Given the lack of interest in actor-centered analysis of institution-building processes in the Ghanaian local state, the general argument set out in this analysis is informed by theoretical and empirically-grounded debates on institutional change processes and their consequences in the international development system. The general debate will be expatiated in subsequent chapters but summing up the key themes on ideas, practices and tactics inherent in these institutional changes, the following assumptions, as the theoretical and conceptual arguments bear out, are derived to underpin the study:

i. Local state institution-building ideas are part of the global institutional change programmes spreading to the Global South through organizations in the international development system. Consequently, support for these programmes come from actors in the Global North (see Meyer & Rowan, 1991; Meyer, 2000; Rottengburg, 1996).

ii. Local state institution-building encompasses the interface of different actors viz.: local bureaucrats and politicians, central state bureaucrats and politicians, and transnational actors who have different rationalities, interests and preferences that sometimes compete with each other. The change processes, therefore, involve negotiations, shaping and reshaping of the policies based on the different interests (see Long, 2001; 2004; Scharpf, 1997; 2008).

iii. Actors in the local state policy arenas have agency and, thus, capable of constantly attempting to exploit the rules and ambiguities, within the constraints of their institutional environment, to address their interests and preferences (see Lowndes & Leach, 2004; Lowndes, 2005; Scharpf, 1997; 2008; DiMaggio, 1988).

iv. Local state institution-building thrives on credibility of the processes and availability of funds. This need to furnish legitimacy inevitably leads to strategic decoupling of adopted institutional change ideas and to the enactment of some mundane existing practices that provide such legitimacy prerequisites (see Meyer & Rowan, 1991; Meyer, 2000; Brusson, 2006; Rottengburg, 1996; Kühl, 2009).
1.5 Research Questions

v. A step further, actors at all three levels of institution-building viz.: local, central state and transnational domains produce legitimacy narratives and rhetoric and present them to their local and international audiences as credible evidence of change. But reverting to their established mundane practices, therefore, institution-building processes, no matter how substantial they are, tend to yield very limited changes (see Lowndes & Leach, 2004; Lowndes, 2005).

1.4 Objective of the Study

The main objective of this study is to analyse the patterns and dynamics of local state institution-building and their linkage to the notion of socio-economic well-being in Ghana. Specifically, the study seeks to explore and understand the nature of institutions that shape local policy-making and change. To do that, knowledge of the type of actors working on local development policy becomes crucial; their particular characteristics and orientation to public policy and change in local state settings elucidate the nature of practices, competence and their implementations realities. To fruitfully grasp these change dynamics requires a comparison of everyday institutional practices of local state structures with some similar and dissimilar characteristics. This way, the nexus between local institution-building and participatory development rhetoric, as promoted in the international development system, could be properly systematized.

1.5 Research Questions

The specific questions addressed in this study are:

i. Who are the actors of local state institution-building and what are their underlying rationalities, interests and preferences?

ii. What are the rules and regulations that structure everyday local policy-making and institutional reform?

iii. How do local state policy actors conceive institution-building given their rationalities and interests, and preferences? What are
1. Introduction

their own interpretations of institutional change in relation to local socio-economic development?

iv. What are the behavioural responses to the change ideas and financial resources that flow from the international development system into local state settings?

v. What are the legitimacy practices and narratives in the institution-building processes vis-à-vis the rhetoric of local participatory development?

1.6 Rationale: Why Study Local State Institution-Building in Ghana?

Why is this study warranted after having pointed out earlier that there is no dearth of research on the processes of change in the local state structures (see e.g. Crawford, 2008, 2009; Ayee, 2000, 2012; Thomi, 1999, 2000a/b; Awortwi, 2011; Crook, 1999, 2003). The cogency and promise of this research derives from the fact that despite the unending cycle of institution-building in the local state, existing studies mainly follow the efficiency approach to change as defined by the policy formulators and promoters. Thus, those studies present a restricted perspective by ignoring a very important dimension in the institutional change processes: the interests and rationale behind the actions of local policy actors. By so doing, they fail to capture how local state actors negotiate their interests and preferences and how that negotiation shapes institution-building processes and outcomes. Also conspicuously missing are sociological explanations that throw light on the different actors, their way of thinking, their interests and preferences in the institutional reform processes (see e.g. Neubert, 2005, p. 436). Therefore, this study investigates and invites critical debates on the politico-administrative processes and the nexus between actors’ interests and the content of public policy as occurs in the Ghanaian setting. This study, while testing the tenability of neo-sociological research traditions in the study of local public policy yields findings that are policy-relevant for local institutional development. Thus, the study paves way for further research in the domain of sociology of public policy in Africa in general.

In addition, local state institutional reforms commenced nearly three decades ago and, thus, provide good enough time to gauge their promise of
participatory development with the reality on the ground. This is more pertinent because Ghana was among the pioneers and the longest in sub-Saharan Africa to embrace the local state institution-building experiment. It still continues to remain a potential model for the rest of the continent in the eyes of the sponsors of the change processes and the whole international development process (see Crawford, 2009, p. 58; Herbst, 1992, p. 4). Furthermore, previous studies have either not holistically approached the institution-building processes from multiple levels of embeddedness (i.e. local, national and international). Those that have attempted mainly treat the levels as distinct entities affecting institution-building processes at specific levels. This study attempts to bridge that lacuna with the benefit of ongoing capacity-building programmes in the local state that provide an appropriate setting to understand the various strategies and responses to institutional change as mentioned above.

1.7 Delimitations of the Study

The study is situated within the confines of the local state structure within the larger public service in Ghana. This derives from the fact that actor approaches in institutional analysis require well-defined organizational settings to allow for in-depth discussion and analysis of actor processes, intentions and behavioural dispositions regarding a particular public policy. In this wise, the study focuses on two local governments: Kumasi Metropolitan Assembly and Wa Municipal Assembly. The choice of these two organizations emanates from the fact that both of them are involved in the making of local development policy and the provision of local public goods but they have different experiences with regard to that provision based on the duration of establishment. Again, they are located in different geo-physical zones with different socio-cultural outlooks; characteristics that have implication for their everyday institutional practices and change. While the overall objective of the study does not seek to make overwhelming generalizations about all local governments in Ghana, it is expected that the differences and similarities from these focal organizations will not only provide the necessary information for understanding local institutional practices and change. Indeed, findings from the study will also help shed light and inform future research in other local governments in Ghana and beyond.
1. Introduction

1.8 Organization of the Sections of the Study

The study is organized into four main sections (see diagram in Figure 1) and presented in ten chapters. After this introductory chapter, the rest of the study proceeds as follows. The second chapter situates the discussion on local institution-building and change in theoretical and analytical frame from neo-institutional and actor-centered perspectives. Here, the very origin of the changes and the mechanisms through which they spread to the Global South are explicated. Using the concepts of legitimacy and institutional entrepreneurs, the chapter shows how local policy actors capably appropriate the very idea of institution-building to their own advantage and interests. This discussion facilitates the conceptual framework that helps to explain the complex web in which that process occurs. Chapter three commences the second section with an explanation for the constructivist-pragmatic methodological approach that underpinned the empirical research. The chapter details the multiple methods for collecting data and the different data segments. At the same time, the justification for choosing the two local governments is provided to wit their experiences as well as their geo-political locations in the jurisdiction of Ghana. The chapter again highlights the various organizations and departments covered in the two local governments, the nature of empirical materials, data processing and analysis as well as challenges encountered while conducting the field research.

In the fourth chapter, a brief insight into local state institutional change practices in Ghana is given to set the background for a description of the study setting and the rationale for the two organizations covered. The socio-economic profiles of the study areas, the local political interests and preferences and how they link to national political practices are given. Therefore, the particular orientations, characteristics, and rationalities of the actors involved in the processes of institution-building are clearly set out for the empirical discussion. Chapter five straddles the second and third sections by linking the discourse on institutional change to empirical realities in Ghana. It briefly explores the institutional change and development discourse with a reference to the Ghanaian case and sets the background for examination of the empirical data from Ghana. Following the more descriptive part, the third section employs the empirical evidence to critically analyse the persistent cycle of local state institutional reforms and the dominant development rhetoric associated with that. In chapter six, the inherent interests of local state actors, their institutions and their everyday provision of public
goods and services are discussed. The chapter unearths confounding factors in what has hitherto been described as a unified arena of local policy actors namely: Assemblymen or councillors and bureaucrats. It points out the difficulty in finding that balance between the interests, preferences and competence of actors in the local policy arena; a complexity that partly accounts for much of the disjoint between public policy programmes and social change realities.

To further understand the obscurity in linking the local institutional reforms to promises of participatory development, chapter seven argues that the quality of local political programmes must be seen as a reflection of the national and international policy and practices. The inherent interests in the
1. Introduction

institution-building practices by transnational actors lead the regime and central politicians to strategically adopt change programmes but ensure their interest in the local state is not withered. This chapter posits that local institutional practices largely reflect regimes’ preferences and, thus, the processes of change cannot be detached from national political processes and interests. The argument in chapter eight is that constituents’ expectations from the local state are based on the development rhetoric that is frequently touted but which could hardly match the reality on the ground. The apathy of local residents to the local state is posited to emanate not only from their perceptions of the local state as party-politically dominated but also the latter’s inability to address their socio-economic well-being despite the persistent rhetoric linking local institutional changes to socio-economic improvements.

The last section integrates the institution-building realities from the local and central state levels with the interests and preferences of transnational actors and from that draws informed conclusions. Chapter nine argues that the challenge of matching local institutional changes with socio-economic well-being on the ground comes from the specific rationale behind local institution-building. From a sociological perspective, it unveils the everyday, taken-for-granted practices of change beyond policy to change as process and practice. The chapter discusses how the need for the institution-building actors to present credible evidence of change fosters a persistent effort to produce legitimacy rhetoric and texts that could not be linked to the reality on the ground. Therefore, the institution-building process becomes a strategic approach for credibility while at the same time, the practices become trapped in a cycle. Chapter ten ends the discussion with a presentation of major findings and draws informed conclusions. The major contribution of the study is expressed in the use of actor-institutional perspectives to uncover the subtle, taken-for-granted practices and interests in the change processes and which help to perpetuate the cycle of institutional reforms while at the same time making it difficult to match those changes with promised development outcomes. Among the policy-relevant suggestions from the study is to confront institution-building with genuine intent and commitment towards qualitative changes instead of the over-reliance on quantitative indices and evaluations.
1.9 Concluding Remarks

Summing up, this introductory chapter has highlighted the dominant debate in the development system and the motivations behind the pursuit of institution-building across the developing world. In particular, the institution-building processes in public services across the sub-Saharan Africa region have been influenced by several factors that lie as much outside as within the local bureaucratic and political structures. This entanglement of the local with the global in the institution change processes informs and invites further discussions on these complex issues. The subsequent chapters on the making of local governments in Ghana expatiate on these entanglements and their consequences for local institutional processes and notions of socio-economic transformation.
2. Theoretical and Conceptual Analysis of Institution-Building and Change

The previous chapter pointed out the dearth of institutional analysis on local institution-building in the Global South. At the same time, the neo-liberal efficiency model has proved less helpful in explaining the cycle of institutional changes that obtains in the South given the former’s interest in profit and competition among individuals and institutions. That setback calls for alternative explanations. The main concern of this chapter is to point out the utility in analysing local political reforms from two related perspectives: actor-centered and neo-institutional analysis. These approaches help to set out a framework for the analytical task in this study. The chapter argues that institution-building processes that one finds in developing countries are embedded in international development practices and local on-the-ground realities are part of that web. This is what Robertson describes as the constant interaction between the local within the global (1992, p. 173). From the global level, the concept of “legitimacy” (Meyer & Rowan, 1991, p. 50) helps to explain how institutional change ideas spread from the Global North to the South through the international development system. At the contextual level, the concept of “institutional entrepreneurs” (DiMaggio, 1988, p. 14) explains the agency of institutional actors who are able to contest and exploit the institutions they work with to their own advantage.

Taken together with actor-centered institutional analysis of local political change in multi-level polities (Scharpf, 1997, 2008; Lowndes, 2005), these concepts help to formulate a conceptual framework in which policy actors’ rationalities, their interests and preferences shape and alter the very institutions which they seek to change. In addition, the legitimacy requirements of these change actors cause them to become hedged in normative traps for funds and credibility. Therefore, institution-building strategies in the Global South become strategically decoupled from practice by change actors (Meyer & Rowan, 1991) with a justification for more institution-building. The chapter, thus, argues that institutional change models through and diffuse within the international development system but their adoption and implementation are often contingent on local institutional practices and the
different interests to which they refer and are expressed. Sub-sections pre-
sented in the chapter include a discussion of the main tenets of the two the-
oretical approaches; empirical case studies that make use of the two ap-
proaches to analyse institutional change; limitations of the approaches to
explaining change; and then a conceptual framework derived from the two
perspectives to explain local state institutional changes in Ghana. The dis-
cussion begins with clarification of fundamental concepts in institutional
analysis.

2.1 The Rules and Players of Institutional Change

The concepts of actors, structures and institutions are basic to understanding
the notion of change pursued by the international development system.
These concepts are clarified here.

2.1.1 The agency-structure question

As pointed out early on, institutions are a set of rules with which individu-
als, acting as agents, initiate change and development programmes. Who
then are these actors? Giddens defines actors based on their agency and ex-
plains that agents are intentional human actors (1984, p. 8). Thus, agency
describes the capacity of these individuals to perform particular actions
based on intent. This idea of agency follows closely from the seminal work
of Max Weber on social action.8 In this framing, actors are those individuals
capable to act otherwise. They can participate or refrain from taking part in
given processes. Thus, actors have the ability to influence the “specific pro-
cesses or state of affairs” (Giddens, 1984, p. 14). This explanation points to
power position since actors may be armed with the ability to influence de-
cision and outcomes. As Long explains with regard to development pro-
cesses, social actors are simply not “disembodied” group of individuals who
acquiesce to development intervention. Rather, these actors actively shape

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8 The term agency is based on Weber’s work on social action (Weber, 1978) and is
still widely used in sociological analyses of development and change (see Neubert
of agency as it applies to social action in African settings. This is implied in refer-
ences to the concept in the empirical chapters.
information and strategies that confront them both from other local and outside actors (2001, p. 13). It is understood, therefore, that actors are individuals with the power (i.e. agency) to alter or make a choice as they pursue their goals in given social situations.

Agents’ actions and behaviour occur within defined institutional settings and, thus, point to structures. Institutional structure, according to Lopez and Scott, refers to “those cultural or normative patterns that define the expectations that agents hold about each other’s behaviour and that organize their enduring relations with each other” (2000, p. 3).9 Yet, the agency-structure debate remains unsettled; while some scholars (e.g. Fleetwood, 2008, p. 245; Shepsle, 1989, p. 135) show support for the preeminence of institutions (and structures) over agents, others (e.g. Lawrence, 1999, p. 163 ff; Lawrence, Suddaby & Leca, 2009, p. 5) posit that actors as agents have unmatched capacities to dramatically shape their institutions. Giddens (1984, p. 25) espouses a “duality” of the two in which both agents and structures influence each other in a recursive way. Yet, neo-institutional arguments offer by far the best explanation. Here, the institutional structure, despite constraining actors, simultaneously creates ambiguities that are exploited by well-placed and resourceful actors and, thus, the notion of embedded agency (DiMaggio, 1988, p. 14; Levy & Scully, 2007, p. 974; Lounsbury & Crumley, 2007, p. 1003). Meyer sums all that up with the argument that contemporary institutional processes are conducted by “agentic” actors whose capabilities go beyond ordinary actors (2010, p. 2).10 These actors use their expert knowledge to overcome structures and rules that constrain them.

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9 This definition is contested by Fleetwood (2008, p. 244) as well as Giddens (1984, p. 14) who view the definition as describing institution instead of institutional structure. They argue that agents do not interact with institutions but rather interact with other agents.
10 Meyer uses “agentic” actors to describe the autonomy and competence possessed by modern actors. This agency is seen as constructed and empowers actors to interact in a scientific and rationalized manner.
2. Theoretical and Conceptual Analysis

2.1.2 Defining institutions and organizations

Institutions and organizations are often confused with each other and used interchangeably but a clear distinction is herein required. Perhaps the simplest and, yet, elucidating distinction is the one provided by Douglas North who conceives of institutions as “rules of the game of a society” and “organizations are the players” (North, 1995, p. 23; see also Lowndes & Wilson 2003, p. 279 who offer a related view). For institutional scholars, the notion of institutionalization best describes “the process by which individual actors transmit what is socially defined as real” (Zucker, 1991, p. 85) and which over time takes on rule-like features. Organizations, on the other hand, are thought of as social structures set up by individual participants (actors) in the pursuit of specified goals (Scott, 2003, pp. 19–20). Given their interdependence, Meyer and Rowan use the concept of institutionalized organizations to describe particular organizations that are controlled by a high degree of rationalized institutional rules (1991, pp. 45–46). It suffices to say that organizations are arenas for the enactment and expression of institutionalized rules. That is to say, complex organizations are entities created by intentional actors to achieve specific goals and once created, the actions and interactions of the participants are governed and constrained by some set of rules. Most importantly, much contemporary institutional change, with capable actors and taken-for-granted practices, occurs in well-defined organizational settings.

2.2 Sociological Institutionalism and Change Programmes

This section discusses the relevance of the neo-institutional approach to the explanation of public policy processes and institutional change in the Global South. Although studies on institutional analysis of policy changes in the Global North are abundant (see Lowndes, 2005; Meyer & Rowan, 1991; Derlien, 2008; Mayntz, 1997; Scharpf, 2008), little is still known about their counterparts in the Global South. Therefore, this study using the institutional approach seeks to elucidate how public policy processes unfold in the South. Yet, there are interesting perspectives that analyse institutional change ideas and how they diffuse from a particular source to other local contexts. Translation arguments (also referred to as travelling models) highlight the various ways in which institutional change models find specific
expression in local settings (see Czarniawska & Sevón, 2005; Rottenburg, 1996, 2009). Another approach points to how these globally-diffused ideas encounter different frames of reference when applied within specific local contexts (see Loimeier, Neubert, & Weißköppel, 2005). Indeed, the frame of reference argument describes:

“Standards of evaluation and orientation which can be applied by actors in specific situation and which mark fundamental statements about the actual and ideal nature of the world. Frames of reference are thus a form of supra-individual orientation and they apply to groups of people” (Loimeier et al. 2005, p. 12).

In this line of thought, Loimeier et al. (2005) discuss how internationally-diffused models are expressed from various reference points beyond simple local and global categories. The main point deduced from these two approaches is that institutional change models do not reach local settings intact just as they were at their original source from where they diffused. Indeed, these ideas undergo critical reshaping, re-modelling and adaptation to fit the local institutional environments in which they are adopted. The frame of reference approach indirectly shapes the arguments presented in this study. Nonetheless, this study of institutional changes in local public administration requires explanation of specific actors and their patterns of behaviour in the policy process. This is best explicated by the neo-institutional perspective. Neo-institutionalism is preferred because it addresses the processes of diffusion and how the adopted ideas become eventually detached from their domains of implementation. This is especially the case of the international development system comprising international organizations, donors and recipients whose ideas, interests and practices inform and alter the programmes of change in the Global South.

2.2.1 Neo-institutionalism and the diffusion of change ideas

Neo-institutionalism, a sociological line of thought, argues that actors viz. individuals, and their organizations are embedded in wider cultural models

11 Bruno Latour (1986) discusses a diffusion-translation model from sociology of knowledge perspective and treats knowledge translation as a consequence of association and not the power held by actors per se. In the analysis of development cooperation, this model has informed the translation and travelling ideas on institutional change (see e.g. Richard Rottenburg, 1996).
2. Theoretical and Conceptual Analysis

(Thomas, Meyer, Ramirez & Boli, 1987, pp. 7–37) beyond some established rational rules. This approach sees actors as more capable because institutions “constrain and empower agentic” individuals when they act purposively (Meyer, 2010, p. 3). Neo-institutionalism draws greatly on the phenomenological and social constructionist traditions that view social reality as constructed by individuals in their everyday interactions (Meyer, 2007, p. 792). Institutionalism, as a process of interpretation of actions and reactions by others in similar fashion, contrasts realists argument that the intentions and interests of actors are independent of their institutional constrains (Meyer, 2010, p. 4). Contrary to rational-actor theories (e.g. contingency and resource-dependence) which view change as shaped by internal constraints and resources, neo-institutionalism explicates an interest in institutions, individual preferences and socio-cultural factors that help explain institutional change (DiMaggio, 1988, p. 3; DiMaggio & Powell, 1991a, p. 9). Thus, the theory pays attention to the taken-for-granted practices in everyday social processes and actions.

But what does neo-institutional argument tell us about institutional change? The theory attempts to understand why organizations in particular fields take on similar practices (i.e. become isomorphic) even when they are not under any central control. The reason given is that organizations adhere to pressures from their institutional environment (Meyer & Rowan, 1991, p. 49; DiMaggio & Powell, 1991b, p. 74). In that sense, the adoption of new institutional norms has nothing to do with their internal constraints or resources. In fact, the pressure to do so comes from cultural, institu-

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12 The “old” institutional theory largely emphasized conflicts, interests and cultural values while the “new” explores daily routines, institutional scripts and schemas. The growing convergence of the two is termed neo-institutionalism (see DiMaggio & Powell, 1991a, pp. 12–13). However, Selznick rejects the distinction between the two and argues that the distinction limits the theory’s contribution to research and practice on social issues (Selznick, 1996, p. 277).

13 Organizational field as used by DiMaggio & Powell (1991b, pp. 64–65) denotes a mix of different organizations in some specific institutional domain e.g. producers, consumers, etc. and who heed to some credibility pressures.

14 DiMaggio & Powell describe isomorphism as constraining process in which organizations in the same field tend to modify their organizational characteristics with the aim of becoming compatible with others. They identify three forms: institutional, mimetic, and normative (1991b, pp. 67–71).
2.2 Sociological Institutionalism and Change Programmes

tional and normative expectations and they are able to please their constituencies by adding new activities into their tasks (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991b, pp. 67–71).\(^{15}\) It is this institutional idea of isomorphism that aptly describes how global ideas diffuse and are adopted in different institutional domains with the help of international organizations.

On the diffusion of institutional change ideas at the global level,\(^{16}\) the neo-institutional approach uses the world polity debate (also world society approach),\(^{17}\) which perceives a worldwide institutional environment from which ideas, rules, and norms flow and diffuse (Meyer, 2010, p. 10). Here, the most important actors for the spread of global ideas are international organizations, professional groups and experts (Boli & Thomas, 1997, pp.184–185; 1999, pp. 19–20). As Meyer et al. succinctly put it, modern nation-states “are more isomorphic … and change more uniformly than is commonly recognized” (1997, p. 173). For our current purpose, governmental and non-governmental organizations in development programmes come up as the key agents for the spread of institutional ideas in the Global South. Beyond their generally recognized expertise, these organizations and groups are well-resourced to support their change ideas. Therefore, the world is seen as an interaction arena constructed and constituted by capable and purposive actors who move quite freely in transnational domains beyond the sole control of any one nation-state (Meyer, 2010, p. 12).

Even fundamental to the concept of diffusion is the notion that the spread of institutional ideas is not contingent on a search for higher efficiency in the domains where they are implemented. Rather, the adoption quite often is an attempt to gain more credibility in their institutional environment.

\(^{15}\) DiMaggio & Powell (1991b, p. 66) see institutional isomorphism as separate from competitive isomorphism in which competition for innovative and adaptive changes is emphasized. The authors also caution that the three categories of institutional isomorphism are only for analytical purpose because they are not empirically distinct.

\(^{16}\) Institutional arguments hold that the diffusion of organizational ideas in world society has roots in 19th Century Western culture; the cultural values entail human rights, democracy, individual freedom, equality, etc. This approach is different from that advanced by Luhmann (1982) who argues that the complexity with modernity means there could be only one social system and that its globality is reflected in the spread of communicative networks worldwide (p. 133).

\(^{17}\) Some scholars such as Martinelli (2007) reject the existence of a world society and rather argue that only transnational civil society and an international public space exist.
2. Theoretical and Conceptual Analysis

Neo-institutionalists refer to this as legitimacy seeking behaviour. That is to say, adopting new and catchy change models because they furnish actors and their organizations with credibility (Meyer & Rowan, 1991, p. 53). The adoption functions more or less as rationality myth; they ideas have little to do with everyday organizational practices. This by implication reflects institutional isomorphism in which the uptake of new ideas go beyond the logic and resources of their institutions to demands of the institutional field (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991b, p. 75). Thus, actors in political institutions and nation-states adopt new change ideas in a ritual-like manner to enhance their chances of being accepted by their audience in both international and local political environments. Legitimacy practices may include rhetoric and vocabularies about efficiency, rationality, stability, national and international acceptance of their strategies (this idea will be expatiated in section 2.4). In our present case, state and local state departments may appear legitimate if they can successfully adapt to the institutionalized expectations of their environment where there are the police, customs, health, education departments and other interest groups all of which adopt new change models and put pressure on each other for compliance.

But how do we explain why new institutional ideas change very little in terms of outcomes? Neo-institutional concept of decoupling is useful in this respect because it describes the dilemmas faced by adoptees of new institutional ideas who do so in order to appear legitimate. They must strive to be efficient (according to some set criteria of efficiency which require them to follow their established daily routines) but that will not be congruent with their adoption of new ideas (Meyer, 2010, p. 12; Meyer & Rowan, 1991, p. 56). To circumvent this dilemma, the theory argues, institutional actors and nation-states adopt the new institutional ideas but strategically decouple them from their everyday activities. This prevents the new ideas from affecting their established institutional practices. This is the only way they

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18 A related and oft-used approach on the spread of political institutions is diffusion of innovation. Stroh and Heyl (2015) employ this approach to analyse the diffusion of constitutional courts in French West Africa.

19 DiMaggio and Powell (1991b) show how decoupling allows isomorphism at the organizational structures (where copying obtains only as rational myth and not to enhance efficiency) without affecting the everyday implementation structures. Thus, the adoption of new ideas do not necessarily affect the realities of daily routines.
could appear credible and up-to-date while resorting to their existing practices (Meyer & Rowan, 1991, p. 57). In general, decoupling appears endemic because the adopted ideas are informed by a mix of several external practices that cannot be adopted in toto from another context and be expected to work as planned (Meyer et al. 1997, p. 154). Thus, decoupling shows how institutional ideas that spread globally are taken up differently and reflects what the modernity discourse describes as selective interpretation and resistance (Eisenstadt, 2000, p. 14).

Even if they attempt implementation, the many institutional inconsistencies will ultimately lead them to decouple. That is to say, it is easy to copy some but others may not work at all in the institutional settings in which they are adopted. Therefore, most of the rhetoric on the adoption of new institution are often empty and hypocritical and are used to gain legitimacy (Brunsson, 1989, 2006). Indeed for Brunsson, “organizational statements and decisions” do not necessarily “agree with organizational actions” (1989, p. 231). Therefore, decoupling becomes the only way out for decision-making under these uncertainties. Again, “political and administrative leaders frequently over-sell new reforms” by promising what they cannot achieve (Christensen, Lægreid, Roness, & Røvik, 2007, p. 72). In particular, developing countries tend to adopt complicated institutional ideas although they are incapable of implementation leading to their being decoupled (Hafner-Burton & Tsutsui, 2005, p. 1399). These behavioural tendencies, despite furnishing legitimacy for funds, conceal their very concrete local institutional challenges. The adopted ideas are taken up only at the level of abstraction without giving any clear indication and guidelines on how they would be done how different they would be from previously adopted project ideas. What occurs is that, as rationality myths, they are loosely adopted with the hope that things work out somehow.

Yet, this notion of decoupling is useful for our present purposes at least for two reasons. International change actors may find it difficult to ensure implementation of the change ideas and, thus, resort to decoupling and some quantitative metrics to gain credibility. At the same time, there are other local policy actors who are capable enough to exploit institutions which could otherwise make some modest changes. This draws our attention to the notion of institutional entrepreneurs which we examine briefly in the next section.
2. Theoretical and Conceptual Analysis

2.2.2 Entrepreneurs and institutional ideas

By far, the most interesting aspect of neo-institutional arguments as they apply to this study is what really happens after the adoption of change ideas. Beyond what decoupling tells us, all or parts of the diffused ideas may reach the implementation level and these ideas obviously may have to confront local policy actors. Given that these policy actors are capable and act with intent, the concept of “institutional entrepreneurs” helps us to explicate the dynamics of implementation, if and when they are sought. DiMaggio shows how “organized actors with sufficient resources” create new institutions to pursue their mutual interests (1988, p. 14). A related concept is what we will call policy entrepreneurs; a group of actors who profess expertise on local development by structuring what, how and when specific policies should be undertaken. Hence, seen as agentic and purposeful, institutional actors capably and actively shape the very institutions that organize their activities. In fact, these actors use their interests and agency to enact new sets of practices to adapt and contest their hegemonic structure to which they respond (Levy & Scully, 2007; Lounsbury & Crumley, 2007). The notion of interests is the subject for discussion under actor-centered institutionalism but it suffices to say that, given their intentions and interests, local policy actors capably alter adopted change policy tremendously. Therefore, it becomes onerous to achieve planned institutional changes since these powerful actors could twist the rules in their own interest. They can also use their agency to preserve both existing institutions and their interests. These actors may further innovate new strategies and practices from the rules. Innovation does not depend on the type of rules per se; the actors can do so with new, old or both (Levy & Scully, 2007, p. 974; Lounsbury & Crumley, 2007, p. 1003).

That local policy actors can thwart institutional change is posited by Lawrence et al. who use the concept of “institutional work” to explain the different ways in which “individuals, and organizations” act on purpose in

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20 However, the impression should not be given that all entrepreneurial skills in the policy arena are counter-productive. In fact, agenda setting requires such skills and commitment of change the state of affairs. What is important here is whether such skills are laden with public or private interest and how much of it is at stake.

21 Hegemony in the Gramscian sense is a dominant group that is able to maintain the status quo by persuasively enticing subordinates to acknowledge its moral, intellectual and economic ideals (Gramsci, 1971, p. 161).
“creating, maintaining and disrupting institutions” on which their daily lives depend (2009, p. 1). Institutional actors may put up sets of actions that seek to create or transform and affect those institutions (Lawrence et al., 2009, p. 3). If for instance, local policy actors perceive domination from central or transnational domains when new ideas are introduced, they may very well craft calculable spaces in the rules and make self-interest assessments in order to exploit any ambiguities in their institutional settings and take advantage of that (see Levy & Scully, 2007, p. 986; Scharpf, 1997, p. 64).

In what they refer to as “institutional dirty work”, Hirsch and Bermiss (2009, p. 272) carefully show how institutions could be preserved through strategic decoupling. In our case, these actors comprising central or local government actors often engage in a wide range of institutional practices to transform and also maintain key institutions under the guise of change. Typical patterns of behaviour among a particular group of local policy actors also referred to as ‘municipal entrepreneurs’ in this study will be discussed extensively in the empirical chapters.

2.2.3 Research in neo-institutional analysis of change

The neo-institutional approach has informed several empirical studies on how and why institutional ideas are diffused and adopted both at organizational and nation-state levels some of which are discussed herein. At a contextual level, the seminal works of US scholars on local governments and city structures (Tolbert & Zucker, 1983), administrative expansion of public schools (Rowan, 1983) and formalization and standardization practices in public schools (Meyer et al., 1988) have shown that adoption and implementation of administrative and institutional ideas were far beyond the internal organizational requirements. They clearly reflected the character of the institutional environments in which they were embedded. Even though in all cases, there was no central authority over which the changes could relate, they had been adopted in relation to the pressures of their institutional environment and they were more widely diffused in the form of formalization and standardization of processes and procedures. Thus, what the studies tell us is that those organizations had responded to the isomorphic pressures in their environment because doing so provided a legitimate basis to continue providing their services.
2. Theoretical and Conceptual Analysis

At the global level, there are studies on the spread of international non-governmental organizations across continents (Boli & Thomas, 1997), human rights programmes (Harfner & Tsutsui, 2005), environmental protection policies (Schofer & Hironaka, 2005), female education and empowerment programmes (Charles & Bradley, 2009) and the global diffusion and adoption of formal primary education (Pritchett, 2014). These studies generally point out how widespread this international diffusion and pressure for adoption of institutional ideas obtains across national boundaries. However, in most cases, the adoption reflected empty promises because nation-states especially in the South who eagerly adopted the global ideas were those least capable of implementing them. They were often adopted only as “window dressing” but were strategically decoupled from practice (Harfner & Tsutsui, 2005, p. 1378). Yet, they offered international legitimacy to the adoptees much to the neglect of the quality of change promised.

Quite interesting to the current case is Kühl’s (2009) study which focused on diffusion and adoption of institutional concepts by international development organizations. He pointed out that although these organizations frequently adopt capacity development concepts with some hope that the concepts will help their projects become meaningful in developing countries, the primary incentive for the adoption is to meet the legitimacy requirement of their financiers and audience. This is typified by their persistently changing concepts including institution-building, and capacity development. For Kühl, when the effectiveness of these organizations are questioned, then they quickly come under pressure to adopt the so-called new effective strategies in order to gain credibility and funds for their projects. This situation is largely influenced by the commitment of funding institutions to support the new concepts as well (2009, p. 575).

Even more interesting is how the internationally-diffused ideas find expression at the level of implementation. Studies on actors’ practices during the political transformation of post-communist Czech Republic (Hirsch & Bermiss, 2009) and Romania (Verdery, 2003) to capitalist states provide compelling evidence on the diffusion of institutional change ideas and practical implementation realities. In both countries, central government bureaucrats and politicians engaged in a wide range of institutional practices to transform and also maintain key institutions from the communist regime.

22 For a discussion on diffusion of global education, see Meyer and Ramirez (2000), and Schofer and Meyer (2005).
2.2 Sociological Institutionalism and Change Programmes

In the Czech Republic, despite their public support for capitalist economic reforms, local policy actors devised strategies that preserved socialist policies by becoming majority shareholder in most banks and private companies and, thus, maintaining key features of the past regime.23 Similarly in Romania, the transition gave rise to a new class of agrarian actors, mainly former communist officials who strategically used their skills and insider knowledge to become sole entrepreneurs of land and equipment and enjoyed that monopoly despite their support for privatization. The studies above show how the push for homogenous practices could become complicated and an eventual decoupling of promise from delivery. Indeed, transitional and developing countries tend to quickly adopt global institutional ideas proffered by their international counterparts while on the backstage, they strategically decouple the new ideas from practice and even preserve their existing institutions.

2.2.4 Critique of the neo-institutional approach

The neo-institutional approach is theoretically enlightening. With the concepts of diffusion, legitimacy and decoupling, it convincingly explains how specific patterns of institutional changes are not contingent on individuals or organizational characteristics but as a result of some cultural, ritualized and universal values. In addition, using the world polity debate, the theory draws attention to consequences of copy-cat adoption of institutional change ideas promulgated in world society and which are taken up by nation-states because they provide credibility. The neo-institutional theory also captures a significant dimension of social and organizational experiences that most theories neglect (DiMaggio, 1988). Despite its strength, the neo-institutional approach has not evaded criticisms. In particular, the theory gives only modest attention to actors’ interests since it often considers such interests as poorly articulated through actors’ behaviour and, hence,

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23 Similar observations of decoupling are reported by Helbardt, Hellmann-Rajanayagam and Korff (2012) in the case of Burma (Myanmar). In particular, international acceptance of the regime’s programmes after several years of isolation provides credibility while at the same time the military elites hold on to the top echelons of the administrative structures and, therefore, keeping intact the practices of the previous regime.
2. Theoretical and Conceptual Analysis

less theoretical focus on that (DiMaggio, 1988, p. 5). Historically, neo-institutional theory has focused on macro-level analysis and sees institutions at the macro-level as determinant of individual behaviour and, thereby, focusing on reproduction of institutional elements (Zucker, 1991, p. 84).

Another weakness of the theory is that although it appreciates the agency-structure tension, it does not offer adequate theoretical insights in explaining individuals’ actions (Battilana & D’Aunno, 2009, p. 42). This limitation restricts its utility to taken-for-granted and complex social arrangements that self-interested actors could rarely alter. Thus, while the theory uses the concept of decoupling to relate action-structure to agency, it does not take that argument to its logical conclusion. Again, despite the neo-institutional theory’s description of agency of modern actors as highly “scripted” than “hard-wired reality” (Meyer, 2010, p. 14), it tends to emphasize adoption and decoupling of organizational forms thereby neglecting the differences and dynamics of internal organizational structures (Powell, 1988, p. 116). Thus, it somewhat de-emphasize the contestations and negotiations arising thereof in the pursuit of the adopted institutional change ideas.

Further, the theory is somewhat limited in its explanation of the origin of institutional ideas and how they die out. That is, why some institutional ideas diffuse while others do not, and why innovations vary in their rate of diffusion. It only discusses institutional changes as a finished product (DiMaggio, 1988, p. 12). It is quite remarkable to note that decoupling is unable to explain different micro-level attempts to implement institutional reforms and how that unfold over time. Last but not least, while the theory regards the agency of contemporary policy actors as made of universal interests beyond individual interests, there is credible evidence that institutional actors tend to contend with self-interest versus the general interest in the implementation of public policy (Scharpf, 2006, p. 64; Long, 2001, p. 13).

Following the above critique, some institutional theorists (see e.g. DiMaggio, 1988; Lawrence, et al. 2009) have focused attention on agency and interest to advance a syncretic perspective: one that combines strategic approaches with neo-institutionalism to analyse actors’ specific strategies as

24 Neubert and Daniel (2012, p. 6) suggest that the neo-institutional theory focuses on growing similarity between organizations in nation states and, thus, links global processes to developments mainly at the meso level of social organization of the nation-state. It gives only limited attention to intentions of local actors and their practices.
2.3 Actor-Centered Institutionalism

responses to the constraints of their institutional environments. Yet, an ade-
quate and more elaborate explanation of actors’ interests in institutional
change especially in local political structures is better explicited by a strand
of actor-oriented perspective referred to as actor-centered institutionalism
to which we now turn.25

2.3 Actor-Centered Institutionalism

The actor-centered institutionalism is an approach pioneered in Germany
by Mayntz and Scharpf (1995b) and Scharpf (1994, 1997) which combines
perspectives on individuals’ motives and their choices (i.e. methodological
individualism) with institutional arguments to explain varying interests of
actors in policy formation and implementation within well-defined institu-
tional settings. The most interesting aspect of this approach, which is help-
ful for our present purpose, is that it does not claim to be a specific theory
of the policy process or its outcome. Rather, the approach provides a frame-
work for analysing policies and their change in practice (Mayntz & Scharpf,
1995b, p. 39). In this sense, it pushes disciplinary boundaries beyond polit-
ical science and political sociology to include economics and development
studies in general. The conceptual tools for empirical policy studies may be
used in governance and service institutions including local politics, health,
education and trade unions (Scharpf, 1997, p. 34). This framework, influ-
enced greatly by action-theoretic literature, is premised on the assumption
that there cannot be any adequate analysis of institutional structures without
recourse to the patterns of behaviour of actors who play the rules (Mayntz
& Scharpf, 1995b, p. 43). Therefore, any analysis of institutional change
must be seen from the standpoint of “interactions among intentional actors
(individuals, collective or corporate actors)” whose actions are “shaped by
the characteristics of the institutional setting within which they occur”
(Scharpf, 1997, p. 1).

25 An alternative to addressing the limitations of decoupling would be the concept of
travelling models (Czarniawska & Sevón, 2005) which explains the continuous
circulation and transformation of ideas through different processes of translations.
Another is the concept of appropriation (Hahn, 2008) which shows how goods and
ideas produced at the global level are transformed and used in given local contexts.
However, the actor-centered institutionalism is preferred herein because of its fo-
cuses on policy in specific institutional settings.
2. Theoretical and Conceptual Analysis

The approach assumes that human action is shaped by socio-political processes even in well-defined institutional settings with clearly marked responsibilities and competence. While these boundaries may blur explanations of self-interests, they are still insufficient in explaining actors’ behaviour without resorting to the cultural and institutionalized rules associated with, in particular, their actions and their status positions (Scharpf, 1997, p. 34). Therefore, the focus of explanation is purposeful actors (highly organized collective and corporate actors) who typically act in the interests of constituents and not for themselves per se. Thus, it is possible to treat large units as composite (aggregate, collective, corporate) actors since their institutional environments are less free than autonomous individuals. Nevertheless, the framework is not limited to composite actors but allows for individual level analysis in empirical settings whenever it becomes imperative (Scharpf, 1997, p. 12).

Actor-centered institutionalism focuses mainly on actor constellations viz.: “the actors actually involved in the policy process” and their “specific capabilities, perceptions, and preferences” (Scharpf, 1997, p. 43). Self-interests of different actor constellations, it is argued, severely undermine institutional change. This is because although rules and regulations attempt to constrain their behaviour and the pursuit of self-interests, collective actors most capably use the institutional design to create and preserve their self-interest as much as possible (Scharpf 1997, p. 39). Following this self-interest argument, the framework helps to point out how problematic it is to pursue institutional change especially in local political settings. Indeed, with the benefits of their status and inside knowledge of the rules, local actors could preserve institutions to their own advantage even if those institutions are no longer needed (Scharpf, 1997, p. 64; Lowndes, 2005, p. 294).

Guth and MacMillan (1986) use expectancy theory of motivation to analyse self-interests and preference of middle-level managers in the implementation of change strategies. They found that when middle managers perceive that their self-interests are not considered or disagreed with policy makers or general management, they may redirect or even distort change strategies according to their own preferences (pp. 322–324). However, the authors downplay the importance of cultural and institutional factors in the expression of individual preferences and choices.
Drawing on the game-theoretic model, the framework shows the confounding influence of interests of different actor constellations in negotiations on public policy through the “negotiators’ dilemma” (Scharpf, 1997, p. 124). That is to say, even in a negotiation situation where a superior solution is desired by all policy actors, their self-interests come into conflict, constraining the attainment of any optimal outcomes. Thus, the negotiators’ dilemma presents a tradeoff between optimal policy outcomes and individual preferences and often leads to sub-optimal outcomes even if consensus is beneficial to all parties.

In short, what the approach shows is the difficulty in designing, modifying and implementing institutions because powerful policy actors with institutional and individual interests may hijack the entire process to their own advantage (Lowndes, 2005, p. 294). Given its analytical appeal, the actor-centered institutionalist approach has underpinned numerous studies on interactions between actors of local political and administrative changes (see e.g. Mayntz & Scharpf 1995a; Scharpf, 2006, 2009; Coleman, 2001; Bartle, 2006).

2.3.1 Actor-centered institutionalism and local political reforms

Studies using the actor-centered institutionalist approach, especially in the Global North, explore countervailing effects of actors’ self-interests and preferences when policy decisions are sought. Fritz Scharpf’s pioneering works on the European Union (EU) as a multi-level polity especially on problem-solving constraints to integration (Scharpf, 1994), the joint-decision trap (Scharpf, 2006), and the limits to legitimate decision-making in the EU (Scharpf, 2009) all point out the relationship between policy actors’ interests, their preferences and strategic use of their competence that often lead to sub-optimal outcomes. Indeed, on institutional reforms within the EU, member governments represent not only the interests of their constituents but also their own institutional self-interests i.e. a concern for autonomy and influence. Hence, when faced with territorial problems with no
autonomous solution, these actors give their authority to higher-level institutions, yet, they still try to influence the exercise of that competence (Scharpf, 2006, p. 849). In general, therefore, the consensus required from member-states to legitimate EU decisions could very hardly be reached by member-states governments especially when those decisions are opposed by some of their citizens (Scharpf, 2010, p. 16).

Still within the European regional environment, another study comparing market liberalization reforms in Norway and Switzerland, two non-EU countries within the European political environment (Bartle, 2006), points out how interests, preferences and particularly strategies of policy actors immensely shape policy outcomes. Indeed, both countries have had very centralized industrial arrangements but experienced both EU and international pressure to liberalize their markets. Yet, their non-membership in the EU meant they did not feel very compelled to reform. In the electricity sector of Switzerland in particular, divergent interests and preferences among policy actors in different sectors including labour unions, farmers and environmental groups conflicted. Therefore, adequate reforms in the electricity sector did not occur. In Norway, rural political interests and labour unions did not support liberalized markets per se. Yet, the electricity sector was relatively liberalized than in Switzerland. Even so, the key difference in the policy process in the two countries was that in Switzerland, policy actors had a key strategy of referendum (Bartle, 2006, p. 431) which enhanced their chances of opposing the overall collective benefits of liberalized markets in the European economic environment.

On a more general level of the Global North, studies comparing interests in policy negotiations between governments and agricultural groups in three OECD countries viz. Canada, US, and Australia (Coleman, 2001; and Coleman & Grant, 1998) have demonstrated how farmers’ groups were considerate of individual farmers’ interests even when realization of the collective interests appeared satisfactory to all the actors. In the discussion on policy change between protectionist vis-à-vis liberal market programmes, the studies show that it was especially in Australia where self-interests were more glaring. Agricultural groups and their actors were in favour of liberal policy changes by a center-left government that did not depend on the support of farmers instead of a conservative government which traditionally supports the interests of rural farmers and, thus, counted on the latter’s votes. The twist was due the fact that farmers’ groups saw they could enhance their incomes under a left-leaning government with liberal market polices and
where farm benefits were based on individual production levels. In the case of the conservative protectionist policies, the subsidies were fixed and incomes were more stable (Coleman, 2001, p. 231). Thus, despite the general benefits of conservative policy packages that may cushion all farmers under situations of uncertainties, more individual control over incomes were preferred. These observations draw our attention to the nexus between policy formulation, institutional capacity and ultimately self-interests. All these shape policy outcomes in complex polities and, thus, their success or failure in several ways.

If we now move to studies that use this approach at local political level, most interesting for our purpose herein, Mayntz and Scharpf (1995a) already pointed how policy actors and those with political interests used their preferences and strategies to shape not only federal level politics with different political coalitions and organized associations with their institutional interests but also local-level institutional changes (pp. 30–31). More recent analysis of the joint-decision negotiation dilemma in the same setting by Scharpf (2008) elucidates the occurrence of actor interests and preferences in policy settings with examples on reform programmes including infrastructure, agriculture, and health sectors within the German federal arrangement. These institutional changes sought to facilitate autonomous policy-making competence for both the federation and the states (Länder). Yet, the reforms could only be implemented to a limited extent because the process was affected tremendously by existing institutional interests, practices and preferences. Differences in interests between big and small, and affluent versus less affluent Länder were very evident. Whereas governments of the economically strong Länder could not accept enhanced exclusive federal control, the federal government also rejected exclusive Länder authority over matters with nation-wide repercussions. That situation, Scharpf (2008, p. 561) observes, led to trade-offs that limited gains in exclusive competence to both sides.

Further studies of local political processes in the UK, some what a role model for the setting of this study, provide interesting insights into how local and central political actors could use the very idea of local political reforms to hijack change and even preserve existing practices. From contestations by different political actors that lead central political leaders to adopt control-based strategies (Lowndes & Wilson, 2003) through to the craftiness with which local political leaders embrace new change models but manage to exploit ambiguities that help them advance their interests
2. Theoretical and Conceptual Analysis

(Lowndes & Leach, 2004; and Lowndes, 2005), these studies point out the difficulty in controlling planned institutional change given the actors’ competing interests, preferences and strategies. In the special case of ICT provision for local governments, the benefits to constituents were more evident. Yet, institutional entrepreneurs had effectively managed to forge spaces, extend and preserve their influence even when the dominant position of IT professional is diminishing. Indeed, key actors in the local political arena, as entrepreneurs with specific interests and preferences, were influential in creating the need for e-governance services and the several departments providing ICT needs for the local governments (Lowndes, 2005, p. 304). Thus, they had effectively become entrepreneurs in the local political arena.

2.3.2 Synthesizing the sociological and actor-centered institutionalisms

The actor-centered institutionalist approach is invaluable in that it highlights important aspects of interaction-oriented research, which views institutions as crucial for the interactions among policy actors, the outcomes of their actions and implementation choices (Scharpf, 2000, p. 764). This approach brings into sharp focus why a particular policy is or not adopted, and its focus on empirically-grounded hypotheses allows for understanding policy change as process with more open outcomes than one seen as given. Again, it allows researchers to study the inherent interests of policy actors while at the same time unravelling their strategies and the extent to which their interactions are constrained by the institutional structures. Thus far, we observe that the neo-institutional and actor-centered perspectives help to explain institutional processes, and the dynamics of policy formation and reform in institutional settings. Whereas actor-centered studies of institutional reforms in the public sector are popular in the Global North (Mayntz, 1997; Scharpf, 1994 1997, 2006; Lowndes, 2005, etc.), they are rare in the South. Therefore, the fusion of the actor-centered institutionalism with ne...

28 The actor-centered institutionalism does not explain the source (i.e. origin) of the institutional change ideas; it mainly discusses how purposeful actors come to negotiate the change ideas in the sense of some collective (and individual) self-interests. The combination with neo-institutional theory, therefore, bridges that gap.
2.4 Conceptual Framework for Analysing Local Institutional Change

Institutional theory provides a more plausible framework for explaining institutional reforms in local political settings in the South.

The actor-centered institutionalism is a useful approach for explaining change processes in governmental and self-organized associations that involve state-intervention (Mayntz & Scharpf, 1995a, p. 9 f; Scharpf, 1997, p. 34). At the same time, legitimacy narratives and rhetoric as explicated by neo-institutional arguments (Meyer & Rowan, 1991) speak directly to policy practices and change in action. Taken together, they particularly help explain the processes of local political reforms. More significantly, the two approaches converge on the notion that institutional entrepreneurs capably shape the context and content of what is to be implemented (DiMaggio, 1988, p. 14; Lowndes, 2005, p. 304). Further, the approaches are methodologically complementary, focusing on empirical processes of institutional changes with interest in actors preferences and interests in institutional settings where culture matters (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991b; Scharpf, 1997). The two are subsequently joined to explain the germane factors that shape and re-shape local state institutional change processes from their diffusion, adoption, and decoupling.

2.4 Conceptual Framework for Analysing Local Institutional Change

The objective underpinning this study is to analyse the patterns and dynamics of institution-building in the Ghanaian local state. As has been stated earlier, mainstream development approaches touted in public policy analyses often begin on the premise that policy decisions could be effectively realized in an optimal way (see Clay & Schaffer, 1984, p. 185). In fact, that view has been challenged by critical development studies and thoughts that embrace different sets of actors, their interests and agency in shaping public policy (see McGee & Brock, 2001; McGee, 2004). Indeed, the process of policy-making involves negotiation and contestation between alliances of knowledge-based experts or “epistemic communities” (Haas, 1992, p. 2) and networks of political actors and interest groups who shape and reshape change programmes and their outcomes on the ground (Smith, 1993, p. 64). Therefore, policy decisions essentially involve a space; an arena of interface and interaction which is conceived as a contested space. Spaces are shaped and re-shaped by the agency constructed by actors within their socio-political contexts (Gaventa, 2004a, p. 274). It is in this policy arena that the
2. Theoretical and Conceptual Analysis

complex and actual behaviour, preferences and interactions among actors become observable (McGee, 2004, pp. 114). Hence, to understand how change programmes unfold in specific contexts and how legitimacy rhetoric structures the conditions within which development assistance operate, the only helpful approach is to consider the behaviour of actors, their interests and their interactions with the institutions within the wider context of institutional change.

The theoretical perspectives discussed above situate the embeddedness of local institutional change policies in wider political and global processes. However, they do not offer an integrated perspective in which these change ideas and dynamics flow from global contexts to local settings. Therefore, a framework conceptualizing and linking all these relationships is required for our present purpose. A framework acts as a conceptual guide that allows researchers to piece together different pieces in their study in order to make meaning of their subsequent findings. It allows them to evaluate and revise their findings and through that the various segments of the study are effectively communicated (see Smyth, 2004). The framework employed herein uses concepts from disciplines including sociology, political and administrative sciences and the broad field of development studies to model the relationship between actors, their rationality, interests and the structures within which the entire institution-building ideas diffuse and are practically expressed in local contexts. This conceptual framework makes it possible to analyse patterns from the data in order to explain local institutional changes in Ghana without pre-empting particular outcomes. That helps to avoid falling into the normative traps of the efficiency model of change. The main concepts used in the framework are discussed to bring out their meaning and usefulness in this analysis of local institutional change.

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29 A model is linked to a framework because it presents a complex phenomenon in a simplified manner. It facilitates an understanding of something that could not be readily seen or directly experienced (see Pabjan, 2004).

30 The framework on local state institutional change is not exhaustive for the entire Ghanaian bureaucracy. It acts only as an entry point to understanding this complexity from the standpoint of the local state.
2.4 Conceptual Framework for Analysing Local Institutional Change

2.4.1 Constructed legitimacy within institutional reform programmes

The concept of legitimacy is used quite differently in the social sciences but it is generally understood, from the seminal work of Weber (1978), to denote power that is recognized by social actors who are affected by its application (i.e. legitimate authority). When used in sociology, the concept commonly describes the belief that some patterns of behaviour are “appropriate” based on some societally prescribed “definitions” (Suchman, 1995, p. 577). Quite often, legitimacy is used in the collective sense just as Suchman puts it:

“When one says that a certain pattern of behavior possesses legitimacy, one asserts that some group of observers, as a whole, accepts or supports what those observers perceive to be the behavioral pattern, as a whole – despite reservations that any single observer might have about any single behavior, and despite reservations that any or all observers might have, were they to observe more” (p. 574).

This collective notion of legitimacy makes it a social process that is constructed for instrumental purposes. In line with the constructivist approach drawn on in this study, the concept of legitimacy is seen as constructed. Explanations of organizational behaviour from the sociology of organizations hold that organizations thrive based on their ability to furnish and maintain legitimacy (see Meyer & Rowan, 1991, p. 53). For organizations, the degree of societal acceptance enhances their credibility. Thus, beyond their produce and services, organizations must continually enjoy “cultural endorsement” in order to be seen as legitimate (Scott, 1995, p. 45). Hence, in the institution-building arena under consideration here, this endorsement may come from audiences in both international and local settings and specific actions are used to accrue this endorsement.

31 A distinction is sometimes made between strategic and institutional legitimacy: the former describes legitimacy as a resource that is instrumentally sought by organizations from their audience to achieve their goals (Oliver, 1991; Elsbach, 1994). The latter views legitimacy as some cultural definitions that determine how organizations survive (see Meyer & Rowan, 1991, p. 53). However, the two approaches are joined in this study because organizations in the real-world face both strategic challenges and institutional pressures. Therefore, legitimacy may simultaneously be used as an instrumental resource and as taken-for-granted belief system (see Suchman, 1995, p. 582).
2. Theoretical and Conceptual Analysis

Legitimacy, herein used, is the tendency and ability of politico-administrative actors to stage authenticity and credibility in the ‘eyes’ of their national and international audiences (e.g. IMF, World Bank, development banks, etc.) in the wider institution-building processes within which they are all embedded. These attempts are instrumental – given that their *raison d’être* and survival depend on the continuous flow of funds and other resources. Legitimacy as perpetuated in the institution-building processes cannot only be seen as a taken-for-granted quality per se (cf. DiMaggio, 1997, p. 270). Rather, it must be seen as a social process that is constructed (Johnson et al., 2006, p. 58; Suchman, 1995, p. 577; Elsbach, 1994, p. 83) within the context and constraints of development interventions and funding for institutional change programmes. The construction of this legitimacy obtains at multiple levels: transnational organizations must show to their national governments how judicious development funds have been dispensed; national governments must prove to donors how effective funds for institution-building processes and poverty reduction are ‘judiciously’ utilized; local state actors must demonstrate to the regime and donors that their commitment to institutional change remains resolute.

Legitimacy narratives are, in fact, more than just a discourse. They involve behavioural and instrumental enactments as means to achieving a particular end. The underlying rationale behind these behavioural strategies is for them to appear credible and secure transnational funds and resources. These instrumental patterns of behaviour and how they disguise institutional dysfunctions are discussed in the empirical chapters. The process of constructing legitimacy involves actors drawing on different legitimacy norms to justify their actions within the wider sphere of institutional change. References to formal rules and legislation, acceptance by transnational organizations, and joint local-international implementation approaches are but few examples. These behavioural tactics and patterns even though contested cannot simply be ignored; they are part of the reality of legitimacy judgements meant to elicit benefits including funds. This construction of institutional-building legitimacy is often implicit (Scott, 1995, p. 45) and its maintenance may be contested in several ways (Johnson et al., 2006, p. 59). However, by disguising the practical workings of their institutions, these

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32 Connelly (2011, p. 931) suggests that discourse should be seen as more than just spoken or written text; it should include enactments i.e. doing the kind of things about which a legitimacy judgement might be made.
actors together with their behaviour patterns lead the institutional change process to become trapped in an unending cycle of re-building.

2.4.2 Legitimacy rhetoric and institution-building enticements

Rhetoric is fundamental to furnishing legitimacy in the institutional reform processes (see e.g. Halliday et al., 2010 Suddaby & Greenwood, 2005; Stephen, 2015). As a carefully crafted persuasive strategy, rhetoric helps enhance an organization’s image while it evades responsibility or what it claims to do (see Conrad, 2011, p. 188). In this sense, rhetoric enhances the chances of luring the reform process into being trapped in a constant flux of re-building. By institution-building traps, we refer to persistent attempts towards institutional change in an unending cycle and which outcomes are rarely linked to promises of participatory development. The adoption of new institutional ideas may provide credibility from both international and local audiences and may also make funds and resources available. Yet, once they are strategically designed, the adopted ideas may rarely change existing institutional practices. In short, these institutions may be caught up in “capability traps” because their very notions of development and ability to act on them remain rhetorical (Andrews et al., 2012, p. 5). Even beyond, a cycle is set in motion for more funds, more institutions, and more re-building. In short, it is posited that these legitimacy preoccupations and the institution-building cycle are strategically designed, the rationale of which seeks to benefit the central regime and its politicians whichever government is in power. The interrelations of these complex processes in the institutional change enterprise are analysed in the framework.

2.4.3 Levels of analysis in the framework

The conceptual discussion leads us to three levels of analysis viz.: the local state; the central state; and transnational levels. The overlapping concerns in these levels of analysis are discussed in details in chapters six to nine. Nonetheless, an overview of how they relate in the conceptual model (Figure 2) is helpful. Combining the concepts of diffusion, decoupling, constructed legitimacy, competing actor interests, and institution-building traps, it is possible to comprehensively conceptualize the complexity and
contradictions within the local institution-building processes. Again, the framework helps to offer an alternative explanation to the persistent institutional reforms from the standpoint of diffusion of reform ideas and the strategic decoupling of the action-structure from the reform ideas and the rhetoric through to their re-branding and re-adoption of new and sometimes complicated ones. As depicted in Figure 2 and starting from top downwards, institutional reform ideas are developed and diffused through development cooperation (see level 1) which contains an epistemic community of experts and funders on local policy.

This diffusion is done in a reflexive manner; there is an awareness of those ideas that have been tried before and how they could be refurbished to present a particular logic of their usefulness. The institutional change ideas that diffuse are encouraged for adoption by national governments with promises of support (see Level 2). These ideas from the world society are attractive: the visions and ideals they express such as democracy, good governance, participation, etc. together with their support and resources make them irresistible to governments in the South. However, for the actors at the second level of analysis, these ideas mean more than just institutional reforms; the ideas need to be strategically designed to allow the actors exploit whatever institutional ambiguities there are in order to perpetuate their interests and influence. Therefore, in what is referred to as the arena of interaction, we observe the crafty interfaces of the actors and the actual implementation realities of these reform programmes.

As their interests and preferences intersect within the institutional constraints, the peculiar practices of change and development also become obvious (see Level 3). In this arena, the interaction and deviation from planned expectations smacks of cloaking in organizations as the bureaucracy and political structures are used for purposes and ends quite different from what was promised. Yet, these everyday practices laden with interests that enhance cloaking point to higher level interests from both the central state and transnational actors. These interfaces, contestations and negotiations lead to plausible competing interests of the policy actors thereby producing constraints that frustrate the local institutional reform project. Pressure from the epistemic community of experts and financiers; central state experts who

33 For instances of organizational cloaking, see Selznick’s (1980) study of the TVA and grassroots. Lieberman (1997) also presents interesting insights from a case study of the Southern African Development Cooperation.
2.4 Conceptual Framework for Analysing Local Institutional Change

World society setting: Diffusion
External development actors & financiers; epistemic community of experts & ideas on development

Level 1: Transnational Analysis
Pressure & interests of external actors

Changing reform ideas
Developing new and rebranding reform ideas; Adoption of new institutional concepts

Level 2: Central-State Analysis
Central actors, interests & legitimacy

Institutional change outcomes
Centrally-dominated design; decoupling of new ideas; constructed legitimacy: rhetoric, texts and narratives; sub-optimal outcomes; institution-building traps

Competing interests of actor constellations
Interests, preferences and friction between bureaucratic & local politicians; interests and pressure from external actors

Actor constellations & interfaces
Local public actors, central state, & external development actors

Institutional constraints
A mix of formal/ informal norms and practices; networks, patrons & followers; resource challenges

Level 3: Local State Analysis
Local policy actors, interests & preferences

Adoption of institutional ideas
Capacity-building; capacity development; institution-building; human resource development

Level 1

Arena of interaction
Reforms, interest, and contestations

Level 2

Figure 2: A Conceptual Model of Actors, Interests and Preferences in Local Institutional Reforms
2. Theoretical and Conceptual Analysis

share the specific vision of their transnational counterparts namely getting things done by any means possible; the commitment of the central regime to institutional reforms which is strategically designed to its own advantage; and local state actors who pursue personal-political ambitions within the framework of local institutional change. Even in the arena of interaction, limitations of institutional change become strikingly evident. Yet, with their particular need to appear legitimate in the face of development assistance and their conditionalities, these local development actors tend to strategically decouple the adopted institutional reform ideas from their action-structure (i.e. their day-to-day activities). The change ideas apply only in formal discussions and not in what they actually do. If questioned, for example, in the form of assessments, the local policy actors adopt numerous legitimacy narratives, rhetoric and quantitative metrics so their activities may appear credible.

Nevertheless, the policy outcomes are different and cannot be linked to change expectations based on standards defined by the reformers. After external evaluations on progress and what went wrong, the previously-diffused reform ideas are modified, re-branded into new sets of ideas and re-diffused again through the international development system to nation-states.

Nation-states, on their part, readily and strategically adopt them. In the end, an unending cycle of reform traps and their associated legitimacy rhetoric is set in motion with no genuine link to the qualitative changes on the ground nor any recourse to the development rhetoric. As the framework and conceptual arguments depict, much of the emphasis in this study is placed on policy actors at the local level. This focus derives from the fact that most of the institutional change ideas are implemented within the local political arena. Therefore, it is at the local level that everyday practices and responses to development intervention become manifest.

2.5 Concluding Remarks

In this chapter, the discussion has shown the usefulness of joining the two institutional perspectives to explain institutional change processes in the Global South. Although the approaches independently explain institutional change, their combination show more promise in explicating, in particular,


2.5 Concluding Remarks

Policy actors’ interests, preferences and patterns of behaviour in the adoption and manifestation of institutional change ideas as they diffuse from the Global North to the South. The neo-institutional approach highlights the embeddedness of local institution-building practices within the wider global and international development enterprises. In so doing, it shows how institutional ideas are diffused and adopted in developing countries but also how the ideas become particularly decoupled from everyday practices. Therefore, the theory draws attention to how local development actors instrumentally adopt change models for purposes of gaining legitimacy in the eyes of the international community to attract resources and funding but strategically preserve their existing institutions for their daily routines rather than changing them. This explanation points out agency of local reformers to shape institution-building programmes on their own terms. The actor-centered institutionalist approach goes further to situate the exigency of actors’ interests at the center of the institutional change processes. It highlights how interests of policy actors enhance negotiation and preservation of the existing institutions within the change processes. Thus, these actors may resist any attempts, through institutional change, to alter their interests and preferences often via the numerous strategies at their disposal. Therefore, institutional change processes tend to yield less than optimal change and much of institution-building is geared towards preserving interests that sustain the old arrangements.

The conceptual framework which synthesizes the two institutional approaches helps us to analyse institutional changes in local political settings in developing countries. The framework points out that the policy actors within the local state are not passive recipients of change ideas. They have agency and strategies which they use to shape the policies on their own terms and preferences. Therefore, ideas diffused through development cooperation may be strategically decoupled for credibility and resource purposes. All the policy actors (i.e. local state, central state, or transnational) have a stake in the construction of this legitimacy in the institution-building arena. Paradoxically, more institution-building efforts will be called for which may not translate into change outcomes; they only become traps for doing institution-building business over and over again. This conceptual framework allows us to overcome the normative expectations from the efficiency-based models for analysing local institutional reforms. The empirical chapters that follow discuss in details, these complex relationships be-
2. *Theoretical and Conceptual Analysis*

tween actors, their interests, and preferences and how they shape the adoption, implementation and impact of development policy within the Ghanaian local state.
3. Methodology: The Empirical Study Design and Data

Before relating the concepts to empirical reality, an understanding of the context and how empirical data were gathered is critical. This chapter discusses the different strands of data that served as evidence for the study and the methods used in collecting that evidence. The study goes beyond any one dominant paradigm in the social sciences to a pragmatic approach. The study’s research question sought to understand how actors’ interests, rationalities and preferences shape local state institution-building processes. Therefore, a primarily qualitative approach was followed which helped to unearth the underlying assumptions about actors’ behaviour in local state institutional change. Yet, local state institutional changes go beyond individual interpretation of their lived experiences in their administrations. These actors work with policy documents and information that structure their behaviour in several ways. Thus, multiple strands of existing data on institution-building were joined with the primary qualitative data in a complementary manner. This approach is consistent with institutional studies that join multiple data sources to describe specific patterns of behaviour in institutional change processes (Mayntz, 1985; Zucker, 1991; Tolbert & Zucker 1983).

After situating the methods used in constructivist-pragmatic context, the other sub-themes proceed to discuss the processes used to generate the empirical data and how these data were processed to make them intelligible for the analysis of local state institutional reforms. This iterative process involved coding and recoding the data and organizing them under themes to facilitate a logical presentation and analysis. The chapter concludes with inevitable challenges of time and resources in doing field research in state settings given especially the persistent suspicions that come with that undertaking.
3. Methodology: The Empirical Study Design and Data

3.1 Framing the Basis of Knowledge in the Study

The social sciences comprise different claims to knowledge in explaining how individuals interact and organize their everyday activities. For our purpose, insights into the ontological realm within which knowledge of state bureaucracy is nurtured as well as epistemological notions of what constitutes the appropriate way to set up and enhance the work of the local administration are invaluable.\(^{34}\) Thus, for the current research question a helpful approach to understanding the rationalities, interests and preferences of actors in policy settings is to pursue how the actors construct their reality of change. At the same time, different strategies are available to these actors in their construction of that reality of institutional change so a pragmatic approach helps to unravel how and why these actors construct what they do. For example, why would some top-ranking officials persistently ask their subordinates in the local councils to lump together quarterly meetings and hold all of them in the last quarter of the year? A pragmatic approach helps us to understand the logic behind these actions and how practical they are for the task of the local administration.

From a constructionist-phenomenological perspective, “any attempt to understand social reality has to be grounded in people’s experiences of that social reality” (Gray, 2004, p. 24). That requires a genuine attempt to understand, for instance, how the actors in that domain know about the phenomenon and their reception and responses to it. In this way, new meanings emerge that may be different from those held by outsiders about the phenomenon. The notion of ‘experience’ points to the importance of socio-cultural milieu (Grbich, 2013, p. 8; Rugg & Petre, 2007, p. 137) in the creation of meanings about particular phenomena. In the case of institutional change programmes, one is confronted with uncovering how policy actors know, perceive and interpret these change programmes; their feelings about the changes (i.e. whether or not they like the changes) and their specific personal and collective reactions to the changes. Thus, an understanding of local institutional change requires a careful study and questioning of how policy actors create meanings from change ideas that enter their institutional domains and how they make use of those ideas in their everyday practices.

\(^{34}\) Kuhn’s exposé on paradigm (1970, p. 175) initiated a controversy among social scientists on the nature of reality (Lentz, 1992, p. 317; Maxwell, 2013, p. 42). These divisions are no longer helpful in contemporary social research.
This involves looking at policy realities vis-à-vis empirical reality as interpreted by the actors. Yet, uncovering the exact patterns in the construction of meanings is not a given. This requires the researcher to carefully analyse what patterns work in the creation of meanings from change programmes in everyday situations.

The notion of pragmatism offers “heuristics” that “open up new topics to find new things” (Abbot, 2004, p. 191). Pragmatism involves employing workable patterns and activities that allow one to arrive at “warranted assertions” (Morgan, 2007, p. 66). Regarding the research question under investigation, a pragmatic approach is to find out how local policy actors are able to create their own meanings from the change programmes and still remain credible to receive the support in doing their tasks. That will involve looking beyond one particular approach to a combination of processes and strategies with which these actors make that happen. Therefore, the quality of output for analysing the research question gains priority over the methods used especially when studying interaction settings that involve complex overlaps of actors and rules. Therefore, these two perspectives help us to understand the pragmatic construction of institutional change reality in which actors’ interests and preferences remain at the core. That approach, of course, requires employing different strands of data and methods to unravel the different rationalities and assumptions held by these policy actors in a comparative framework.

### 3.2 The Multi-Methods Design for the Study

The research design, which logically shows the structure, techniques and activities for addressing the research questions and drawing conclusions (Hart, 2005, p. 312; Yin, 2003, p. 19; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011, p. 53), employed in this study is a comparative one. The primary reason is that local institutional reforms in the Ghanaian context are situated in different politico-administrative settings in which institutional interests and rationalities of actors are expressed. That called for a comparative design to describe how the socio-political environment shapes local administrative reforms in different settings (see Neubert, 2005, p. 431). In comparing practices of different locations and levels within the local administrations, it became imperative to employ a mixture of different data sources and techniques to facilitate in-depth analysis of institutional change processes while...
3. Methodology: The Empirical Study Design and Data

simultaneously allowing one to make substantive statements about everyday interaction patterns, behaviour and general attitudes of policy actors in the change process (Mayntz, 1985, pp. 43, 50).35

Hence, this study adopted a pragmatic combination of different types of data to uncover the responses and strategies with which local policy actors confront change programmes. Following the research question for the study, the multi-design began with “evidence gathering” from “various sources and many levels” (Klassen et al., 2012, p. 378) where local institutional processes are shaped. Two main strands of data namely primary and existing official data were collected from the organizations studied. This task was undertaken together with internship and participatory observations in a complementary manner to describe the pattern of local institutional changes in the two study areas as discussed below.

3.3 Contextualizing the Study: Multi-Level and Multi-Site Locations

As mentioned earlier, this study on complex interaction processes within local state institution-building could not be adequately analysed from one study site. The local administrations differ in size and location; factors that affect institutional complexity and actors preferences. Therefore, observations of the policy process both vertically and horizontally and across geographic locations were required. The multi-sited approach has a comparative dimension because it allows for juxtaposition of phenomena that are conventionally and conceptually kept apart (Marcus, 1995, p. 102). Nevertheless, studies of politico-bureaucratic change processes require the availability of information and experience in managing the local state and the provision of goods and services. Hence, the multi-site approach used in two comparable administrative regions namely Ashanti and Upper West and the two local governments viz. Kumasi and Wa. The Ashanti Region located in the middle belt of Ghana has a long-standing experience of civil administration which dates back to the colonial regime compared with its Upper West counterpart, a relatively new region in the northern belt created in 1983.

In addition, specific data were sourced from the Regional Coordinating Councils (RCCs), decentralized directorates of agriculture and health, the

35 Mayntz discusses compatibility of multiple data and methods as well as their use in complex policy research settings.
3.3 Contextualizing the Study: Multi-Level and Multi-Site Locations

Local Government Ministry and the Local Government Service Secretariat. These different institutional settings helped derive better understanding of the local institutional changes especially by linking macro-level influences with micro-level practices and outcomes (DiPrete & Forristal, 1994, p. 333). Together with the multi-level approach, the study fully grasped the interaction between local political actors and bureaucrats, regional and central state bureaucrats and politicians, and transnational actors.

3.3.1 Study organizations and unit of analysis

Analytically, the focus of analysis in this study was the local state while key departments and individuals herein referred to as institutional structures and actors constituted the unit of analysis. The fieldwork in multi-site and multi-level structures gave rise to a diverse nomenclature of actors and data. The study mainly covered two administrative regions namely Ashanti and Upper West while Accra served only as a subsidiary location for specific data and actors of interest to the study (chapter five gives details on the reasons for choosing the study locations). First, four focal organizations namely the two RCCs, the Wa Municipal Assembly (WMA) and the Kumasi Metropolitan Assembly (KMA) were studied. Following the multi-level approach, the views of informants in the substructures namely sub-metropolitan district councils (in the KMA) and zonal councils (in the WMA) were learned together with actors in the town councils and unit committees of the two local administrations. Second, decentralized directorates of agriculture and health were studied to understand their stakes in, and responses to, the reforms and actors’ reactions to those changes. Their selection was based on the dynamics of their integration into the local state administrative apparatus: the agricultural directorate is purely integrated while the health directorate is only ‘partially’ integrated and their status as department of the District Assemblies (DA) remains contested. This inherent double-tension between politics and administration made the comparison even more interesting. Expert views from one implementing agency enriched the informed views from state actors. The multiple study settings with different actors and interests were the focus of data for the study.
3. Methodology: The Empirical Study Design and Data

3.3.2 Sources of evidence

Individuals and organizations reveal their intentions, actions and inactions through a number of ways including verbal and non-verbal communication outlets. These could come up as overt expositions but sometimes in subtle ways that require the researcher to probe deeper in order to unravel them. Two main strands of data were targeted from primary and existing sources. Primary data came from in-depth expert and key-informant interviews with actors in the study organizations. Consistent with Rosenthal’s interpretative approach (2011, p. 151; 2012, p. 205), the interviews were conducted within the context of interviewees’ narratives of their experiences with institutional reforms in their work domains. This approach also allowed the researcher to make suggestive remarks to the interviewees when they were very uncertain about the state of affair on the topics being considered. Second, existing data including reform policy documents, performance appraisals, funding schemes, administrative reports and newspaper items (mainly from state-owned outlets) were sought and reviewed. Their epistemological value depends on the credibility and processes through which such materials were generated. These documents were obtained from the departments of the study local governments and the Local Government Ministry and allied departments. Although some of the documents were available to the public, others remained exclusive for internal official use and permission was sought before they were released to the researcher. After a careful selection process, the documents were subjected to rigorous content analysis.

A supplementary strand was observations via internship by the researcher in the DAs and RCCs as well as participation in workshops pertaining to reforms of the local state structures. The activities included among others, mid-year reviews of programmes by the RCCs in Wa and Kumasi, regional budget hearings, DAs fee-fixing programmes, and public accountability forums. These three strands of data helped to gauge the intended and actual outcomes from the reforms. The researcher’s prior familiarity with, and key contacts in, the Ghanaian public service were the main entry points and access to information in the study organizations.
3.4 Study Actors and their Characteristics

The primary interest of this research has been to understand how policy actors and those working in local state settings adhere and react to local political reforms in their work domains. Given that these structures comprise both political and administrative strands, a multiplicity of actors were targeted and employed in the study. Based on the need to understand in-depth the everyday institutional practices, a more purposive selection procedure was utilized to make the selected actor groups very diverse and to reflect the varied interests of the actors in the change processes. To fully grasp the dynamics of local state institutional practices and change, actors with specific knowledge and expertise on the change processes were selected. This ensured the maximum information was learned from the actor groups.

3.4.1 The sample and selection strategy

A derivative of saturation sampling was employed to make observations and interviews from the policy actors in a contrasting manner and stopped only when no new and dominant issues were emerging in the dataset. This was the point of saturation. Popular in qualitative studies especially grounded theory (Marshall et al., 2013, p. 11; see also Eisenhardt, 1989), theoretical saturation or saturation sampling is “the continuation of sampling and data collection until no new conceptual insights are generated. At this point, the researcher has provided repeated evidence for his or her conceptual categories” (Bloor & Wood, 2006, p. 164). For the interviews not to become limitless in this study, the interviews stopped when all contrasting views from the interviewees were exhausted and no new information emerged. At that point, the research had become theoretically sensitivity (see Bloor & Wood, 2006, p. 165). That is, “categories cannot emerge until they ‘earn their way’ into the theoretical scheme” (Morse, 2004, p. 1123).

Unlike grounded theory, the case studies gathered information on practical and lived experiences that provide insights into local state institutional change. Therefore, the saturation sampling approach was adapted to suit the multi-level comparative design in which the cases help us to verify the theoretical framework (Yin, 2003, p. 45; Eisenhardt, 1989).
### 3. Methodology: The Empirical Study Design and Data

However, with saturation sampling embedded in an ongoing data collection process, it is impossible to determine the number of study participants ahead of time.\(^{37}\) Indeed, despite the small numbers suggestion by some authors, other researchers (see e.g. Sykes, 1991) argue that the small numbers are not inherent characteristics of qualitative research per se and, for mixed designs in particular, only “medium” sample size is required (see Srnka & koeszegi, 2007, p. 40). Therefore, through the multi-level design and multiple case studies, the researcher was able to carefully select from an array of well-informed bureaucrats and local politicians, actors whose ideas were relevant to explaining the interests and preferences in the programmes and processes of local institution-building. After all possible contrasting views had been exhausted, the research had yielded interviews with 102 state actors comprising bureaucrats and local politicians.\(^{38}\)

#### 3.4.2 Number of study actors and their statuses

The informants selected comprised local politicians and bureaucrats viz.: Assembly Members (both elected and appointed) in the two local administrations and their sub-district structures (i.e. decentralized departments); technical staff and bureaucrats in the two RCCs; bureaucrats in the regional and district directorates of agriculture and health (deconcentrated departments).\(^{39}\) In general, the opinions of 103 well-informed actors made up of 102 state actors and one non-state (implementing agency) actor were stud-
3.4 Study Actors and their Characteristics

ied. The 102 state actors comprised 98 (96.1%) in the two local administrations and four (3.9%) central state actors. The 98 actors from the local administrations included 77 (78.6%) from the Ashanti and 21 (21.4%) from Upper West regions. Together, these actors comprised 52 (53.0%) local political actors (i.e. Assembly Members and unit committee members) and 46 (47.0%) bureaucrats and technocrats who implement the day-to-day tasks of their local administration (see Table 1).

Table 1. Comparison of Basic Information on State Actors covered in the Study by Location

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Profile of State Actors</th>
<th>Regional Focus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ashanti (n=77)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>13 (16.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>68 (83.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actor Type</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loc. politician</td>
<td>43 (55.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technocrat</td>
<td>34 (44.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Status</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Representative</td>
<td>43 (55.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle Level</td>
<td>17 (22.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior Level</td>
<td>17 (22.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mode of Rep.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elected</td>
<td>35 (81.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appointed</td>
<td>8 (18.6%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Field Research, 2013/14. N=102; includes all state actors in the study. Note. Representation alludes to local politicians only; Percentages are calculated for within-regions only; *=corresponding actors not selected/not applicable to the region.
3. Methodology: The Empirical Study Design and Data

Of the 52 local politicians, 41 (78.8%) were elected to their position while the remaining 11 (21.2%) were appointed on behalf of the President. The difference in number of informants in the study areas did not happen deliberately but rather consistent with the characteristics of the two local state structures. The KMA as a metropolis has several layers of substructures compared with the WMA which, as a municipality, has a limited number of substructures for local governance (see details on this in chapter four).

The experiences of the study actors were crucial for the study since that shapes their knowledge of reforms in their work domains. Therefore, for actors in administrative, non-political positions, only those in middle and senior level positions were selected and interviewed. This was to ensure that they have gathered enough experiences as regards local political changes in their domains. For local politicians, the timing of the field research proved useful since first-time Assembly Members and their unit committees had spent considerable time (i.e. at least three years) in office. For non-first-timers, their experiences within the local state were overwhelming. Overall, 73 state actors were studied in the first phase of research while 29 were covered in the supplementary phase making a total of 102 well-informed state actors who provided information for the study. It is worthy of that that the smaller number of women in this study is a hint on the general pattern of occurrence in both civil and political life in Ghana.

3.5 Empirical Data and Collection Procedure

Two phases of extensive fieldwork were conducted from June to October, 2013 and again from August to October, 2014 and employed in-depth expert and key informant interviews to understand the interface between reforms, actors’ interests and the tasks of the local governments from well-informed actors. Based on the multi-site and multi-level approaches and given the different sizes of the two local governments and their substructures, of the 32 weeks of research, 16 weeks were spent in Kumasi while eight weeks were spent in Wa. The remaining eight weeks were spent in the central government departments in Accra for selected interviews and documentary search on institutional reforms in the local state. The collection of

40 The expert interview from the implementing agency took place in January 2016, during a short, visit to Ghana.
3.5 Empirical Data and Collection Procedure

empirical evidence from the administrative departments and actors proceeded as follows.

3.5.1 The case study strand

The primary research strategy was qualitative since the study sought an in-depth understanding of the processes of institution-building and change from the actors’ perspective. A case study research is an empirical enquiry into a “contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (Yin, 2003, p. 13). The case study research gives more discretion to the researcher especially in the interpretation of the evidence than other research methods allow (Yin, 2003). Given the study’s objective to understand the meanings local state actors ascribe to reforms, it made use of interview guide and protocols to organize the in-depth expert and key-informant interviews with separate themes for the different categories of actors. The processes started with consent seeking and approval from the administrative departments concerned. All the actors in the study were reached by the researcher in person and in-depth expert interviews, which go beyond individual experiences to broader professional and everyday practices (Gläser & Laudel, 2009, p. 12), were conducted with the administrators. The themes related to their work experiences in specific departments and the changes they have witnessed as regards local state institutional reforms.

Key-informant interviews were held with the political actors who have knowledge and understanding of the phenomenon understudy. Interviews were pre-arranged to determine the time and location: for those in administrative capacities, interviews were held in their offices and for the local political actors, the location varied ranging from the premises of the DAs, their homes and also at places where DA activities were held. Majority of the interviews were electronically-recorded after interviewees had consented to that request. Indeed, only a handful (four informants) refused to be voice-recorded so the researcher took notes instead. The duration of the interviews varied widely between fifteen minutes and one hour and thirty minutes. Follow-up visits and interviews were joined with already recorded sessions for those informants. Rosenthal’s (2012, p. 205) historical-interpretative approach helped to unearth the lived experiences of individuals in specific social situations. Given the tension between politics and administration in
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the case study settings, much of the insights held by the actors are sometimes discussed in private. Therefore, the interpretative approach provided the platform for understanding actors’ work experiences which might otherwise be omitted from an analysis of their everyday performance of local administrative tasks. One example was: “could you please take me through your work experience in the public service?” Equally, with the interpretative approach some suggestive themes (see Girtler, 2009) were introduced which allowed the interviewees to confirm or refute critical views on the local administration which they might not readily want to delve into or may attempt to selectively avoid. An example was: “every reform process encounters difficulties. Would you say the process in your department has been difficulty-free?” Another was: “what if I say that the town councils in the metropolis are no longer useful because of the sub-metro councils?”

Yet, without pre-empting any biases to changes and the direction they take in the local state administrative structures, interviews began with general ideas about those experiences in their departments and the changes they have witnessed so far. Interview partners were, thus, more open to direct the course of the interview while the researcher made sure the topical areas of interest to the research were not lost in the narratives. These topical areas included among others, the rationale for the reforms, whether or not the actors liked the idea of change itself; how it applied to their work domains; how the reforms actually worked as experienced in their work environments; and relations between administrators and politicians. Short memos were written at the end of each interview and detailed comments that preceded the interview and afterwards as well as other personal details about the interviewees where necessary.

3.5.2 The existing institutional data strand

This segment of data came from existing sources including official statistics and authorized publications from the departments of the two local administrations.41 Other sources included published studies as well as newspaper publications that were pertinent to the question under study and added fur-

41 Hindess (1973, pp. 28–44) for instance shows the analytical value in the use of critically evaluated official statistics in social science research.
3.5 Empirical Data and Collection Procedure

Further insights (Church, 2001, p. 33). This analysis of existing data supplemented the insights from the interviews and observations. Beyond their legislative instruments, ordinances, and standing orders, data on development projects, poverty indices and voting trends in local state elections were collected to explore the link between institution-building and socio-economic well-being and how constituents react to the services provided by their DAs. Further, data on financial resources from the central government and transnational funding schemes to the DAs, performance appraisals, minutes of meetings, and annual reports, were analysed in order to unearth the relevance of funding on the DAs’ tasks. In particular, the District League Table (DLT), an index that evaluates the DAs’ performance in education, security, water and sanitation, health and governance was used to relate their practices to the quality of service delivered. Based on observations from the two study DAs, data on external funds to all DAs in Ghana were collected and used to highlight how the DAs’ practice of preoccupying themselves with these funds occurs in other local governments.

3.5.3 The research internship

To understand how the institution-building processes unfold in everyday situations, complementary research activities viz. internship and participation in workshops and seminars were undertaken to cross-validate observations with the issues raised in the interviews. During the first field trip which lasted for a period of five months (from June to October, 2013), the researcher spent a considerable amount of time participating in public forums and workshops organized by or with the two local administrations. The researcher was assigned temporary workspace during research stays in both RCCs and enjoyed open invitations to both DA and RCC events. The internship involved participating in administrative and policy events including budget reviews at both the DA and RCC levels, fee-fixing discussions of the DAs, mid-year reviews of development programmes, and financial accountability forums organized by the DAs together with their transnational partners. Since the internship had no prior expectations, many of the observations were serendipitous in some ways.

As Becker points out in his discussion of imagery in social scientific research, such observations “aren’t random, but they aren’t completely determined either” (1998, p. 28). This open approach helped to build and refine
3. Methodology: The Empirical Study Design and Data

the concepts as things unfolded in the course of doing the research. The internship yielded first-hand insight into how legitimacy rhetoric and narratives are constructed in the institution-building processes. Key themes included how local policy actors construct the everyday provision of local public goods and implement local institutional reforms. These served as qualitative data sources on performance that aligned the DAs’ tasks to the support from development intervention programmes.

3.6 Processing and Analysis of Data

A key aspect in the analytical phase in this study was to generate patterns from the field data to make logical arguments from the different strands of data collected for this study. First, the qualitative interview data were systematically coded with carefully chosen coding schemes based on the objectives of the study and research question and then processed electronically to generate the analytical patterns to wit three themes. These were: local political actors and administrators’ interactions, central-local state relations, and practices of international development actors in the institution-building processes. Sub-themes included central state domination, mistrust of bureaucrats, personal-political interests, etc. The data from the in-depth expert and key-informant interviews were transcribed using the transcription software F4 Plus with its in-built timestamps that helps one to trace quotations from transcribed interviews to the exact location of the source audio file for verification purposes.

These data were subsequently processed electronically with the data analytic software MAXQDA Plus version11 for mixed-methods research. This software supports analysis and management of qualitative data and the extraction of descriptive values from interviews. This transformation of interview data into numerical values allowed for categorical description of informants’ attitudes and opinions on the local state institutional reforms (see Srnka & Koeszegi, 2007, p. 33).

Any attempt to extract or use numerical values does not imply making inferences about the larger setting of local public administration in Ghana. The numbers only describe the views and opinions of the study actors although such opinions could analytically reflect the situation elsewhere.

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42 Any attempt to extract or use numerical values does not imply making inferences about the larger setting of local public administration in Ghana. The numbers only describe the views and opinions of the study actors although such opinions could analytically reflect the situation elsewhere.
3.6 Processing and Analysis of Data

emic and etic views of the policy actors in a complementary manner (see Otten & Geppert, 2009). The primary data values in the tables were culled from MAXQDA Plus quote matrixes and the Chi-square statistic was subsequently computed with Microsoft Office Excel and IBM SPSS Statistic 23.43

Interviews were analysed at two levels; first by fieldwork notes (herein field memos) which consisted of summaries of key issues discussed by interviewees; all the interviews conducted had summaries detailing the main ideas of the themes discussed. These memos allowed for identification of gaps and attempts to fill those gaps in the subsequent interviews. The next level was a critical appraisal of specific interviews which were fully transcribed and discussed in details for the analysis. Coding of data was informed by both literature and observations from the field. Tentative ideas on what and how local public policy was conceived guided the first phase of research and coding of that data. Codes on how much external financial assistance the DAs receive, what legitimacy rhetoric transpires in the local policy settings, etc. opened up the themes for further questioning and coding of the data. These codes were subsequently revised and improved after the second phase of field research during which reasons and explanation behind policy actions and choices were sought. Codes and sub-codes such as why legitimacy narrative are important to the DAs; DAs’ preoccupation with external funding and assessment processes, etc. were created to facilitate the analysis of data.

Content analysis technique was used to make sense of the existing institutional documents (both numbers and text data) (Cohen et al., 2007)44 through which patterns on institutional change practices emerged. Despite the political interests inherent in some of these documents, they at the same time offered an opportunity to match rhetoric with on-the-ground reality. Again, as existing documents, the researcher was free from actions that may have obstructed or subtly influenced the content in a politically-correct manner. The researcher carefully made intelligible the connection between these data and the broader analytical frame. Existing administrative data and documents from previous studies, journals articles, and newspaper outlets

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43 The Chi-square ($\chi^2$) is the main non-parametric statistic which supports the data and, thus, useful for this undertaking.
44 One goal of content analysis is to transform verbal, non-quantitative document into some analytically quantitative data patterns (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007, pp. 197, 475–476).
3. Methodology: The Empirical Study Design and Data

focusing on local state practices helped shed light on the trends in the institutional reforms and local development outcomes, particularly poverty reduction. Further, observations and participation in seminars were activities that gave practical insights into everyday performance of local state business, institutional reforms and implementation processes. Participation in these activities allowed the researcher to cross-check with those provided by key informants in the interviews and showed, in particular, how legitimacy processes are constructed.

Last but not least, the protection of identity and privacy of informants was very critical to the study; the researcher anonymized the identity of the administrative informants by referring only to their offices or departments in the generic sense without a direct reference to their exact positions. This was helpful because in most cases, two or more informants were interviewed in a given department. For local politicians, references were made only to their sub-structures which consist of several wards represented by different Assembly Members. Case reports were written from the field memos and enabled the researcher to be reflexive on the aims and ideas gained from the study (Weatherbee, 2010, p. 807; Yin, 2009, p. 131). Based on the design and research objective, the study follows a logical argument in prose accounts and interspersed with relevant figures and tables to analyse emergent themes that help draw informed conclusions.

3.7 Challenges Encountered during the Field Research

The field research which joined multiple locations and methods was not without difficulties. Yet, these methods generated quality data for explaining processes germane to local institutional change more than what other techniques (e.g. oft-used quantitative surveys) could have uncovered. Discussed below are the key challenges encountered and how they were confronted.

3.7.1 Representativeness of study actors’ views

It should be mentioned that data collected from in-depth interviews and key informant discussions represent the views and perceptions of bureaucrats
3.7 Challenges Encountered during the Field Research

and local political actors studied. Although their views are based on personal knowledge, experiences and expert views, these actors were carefully selected in a contrasting manner and interviewed until the point of saturation was reached. Therefore, their positions, to a large extent, described local institutional practices and outcomes for the study areas. Again, the triangulation of multiple data and methods and cross-validation of observations with interview data helped to circumvent limitations from individual opinions. Further, expert interviews from the transnational actors would have been useful but that was beyond the scope of this study given the multiple locations and actors. Nonetheless, insights gleaned from the implementing agency and observations in activities in which these transnational actors were very active and made statements as well as existing data on their support schemes were used as proxies for their roles in the institution-building process.

3.7.2 Character of the field and methods used

Politico-administrative research often raises eyebrows from state officials in whose domains the study was situated. The state and its apparatus, especially in developing countries, often appear surreptitious and somewhat skeptical about any research activity that questions what the state does. In this sense, despite official approval of the research in the study departments, it was still to be expected that some well-informed public servants would be reluctant to give details on how they conduct everyday institutional practices and become conscious especially of the fact that their views were being digitally-recorded. Some informants even insisted severally on questionnaire items being handed to them to complete instead. It was, therefore, not surprising that once the recording stopped, they were willing to give more insights often via illustrations. This was more so the case when the first phase of field research coincided with the Post-2012 National Election litigation such that all public officials were ‘suspicious’ of whoever wanted information from them or to interview them. To allay their doubts, the researcher used the field memos which proved invaluable in capturing important information with or without the electronic recorder. The themes for the interviews had to be constantly reframed in order not to mislead or generate any undesirable reactions and anxiety on the part of public officials.
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3.7.3 Researcher’s position in the field

On the level of researcher reflexivity, the statuses of the key contacts\(^{45}\) who gave official consent for the study to begin could have made the junior level informants feel ‘compelled’ to grant interviews even if they were unwilling to do so. At the same time, the researcher’s background as a scholar from southern Ghana who is comparing administrative practices between the north and south of the country may have irritated some informants, especially in Wa, Upper West. The first impression people had was whether the study attempted to perpetuate existing stereotypes in which the north is often perceived as less-oriented towards change. In addition, using only the English language to conduct the interviews gave the impression of the researcher being an ‘outsider’. In general, this situation dragged on some scheduled interviews for some time and even affected the length of some of the interviews. With this awareness, the researcher used extended stays to clear any such doubts and to show the relevance of the study to the local state. The length of time spent in the administration and the local councils brought with it a sense of trust that yielded more information for understanding their everyday enactment of local state institutional processes and service provision details. Thus despite being seen largely as an ‘outsider’, the approach adopted yielded information valuable which the so-called ‘insider’ researcher may not have readily received.

3.7.4 Taking sides and empathy

From a purely sociological perspective, the researcher did not take the side of bureaucrats or local politicians as some ethnographers do. Even if significant attention was given to the local politicians, it was because their views have largely been neglected in the institution-building debate. In fact, the researcher was interested in the interaction of the different actors on local policy processes and their outcomes more than the perspective held by one group per se. This open approach to interaction helped to uncover inherent tensions even within the administrative strand of the local state. For in-

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\(^{45}\) The contacts were top-ranking directors including the researchers’ relative who worked in the Wa municipality.
3.8 Concluding Remarks

This chapter has highlighted the relevance of the multi-methods approach used in the gathering data for the study. Informed by the research question to understand the complex process of local institutional practices and reforms that cannot be grasped from one particular methodological standpoint, multiple data from two study locations were generated to answer questions on processes of local institution-building and change. Through the case study research strategy, primary qualitative data were collected from a wide range of well-informed politicians and civil administrators in the two local administrations studied. Research internship and observations complemented the primary data and gave insights into everyday practices in the local state and its reforms including central-local state relations, and the relationship between political actors and administrators at multiple levels of interaction. It was quite striking to observe how eager and willing some of the local political actors especially those opposed to the incumbent regime were to voice out their disagreements over the everyday performance of local state tasks in which these local politicians participate. Another intriguing observation was the incessant call by local politicians for some form of fixed remuneration and a development fund in order to address the numerous expectations of their constituents. These concerns shaped local political processes tremendously.

Existing data focusing on performance and key funding schemes for the DAs, poverty indices, election trends for the two DAs, and relevant academic publications were also utilized. Collectively, these data allowed for adequate analysis of local institution-building processes and the changes they promise to bring about. Last but not least, although some challenges emerged in the data collection phase, they were approached and circumvented with practical field insights. In the next chapter, the background of the study setting and characteristics of the actors are presented to highlight the specific institutional domains within which these interlocutory actors
3. Methodology: *The Empirical Study Design and Data*

perform their various tasks and the complexity involved in their execution of institutional reforms and change.
4. The Institutional Context and Characteristics of the Study Setting

The aim of this chapter is to highlight the reasons for choosing the two local governments by explicating the similarities and contrasts in their socio-political environments in which local public administration and institutional changes occur. A nuanced comparison of their everyday performance of public administration and institutional change emerges from their historical and contemporary experiences in the provision of local public goods and the north-south divide that is very well evident up to this day. Following that, the characteristics of the study regions, party-political preferences at the regional level and how that shape local institutional change are discussed. This undertaking is particularly helpful because the institution-building arena in the local state involves multiple actors and contexts. The chapter also points out the endearing features of neo-traditional authority and local-national political relations on the general conduct of public administration and political reforms in the local state.

4.1 The Study Regions: Why not Other Locations?

Implementation studies especially in the Global South must generally pay attention to locality because many factors and processes interact in locations where public policy is formulated: actors interact in close proximity; there could be easy or complex channels to access information on policy and implementation; etc. Again, location is related, in some extent, to the availability of information and experience (see Thomi, 2000a, p. 85). In sum, there is a qualitative difference in how policy actors and constituents perceive and respond to processes of institution-building based on specific locations where that occur. For the two study regions, Ashanti compared with other middle belt regions has an impressive experience of civil administration that dates back to the colonial period and this makes it particularly interesting to study how the so-called ‘new’ local state structures implement policies and programmes. Again, Upper West presents an interesting contrast; it is preferred to the Northern and Upper East since it is relatively new.
4. The Institutional Context and Characteristics of the Study Setting

and ‘less experienced’ because it was carved out of the Upper Region into a full-fledged region in 1983 with Wa as the capital. Therefore, Upper West provides the rare opportunity for comparing everyday administrative practices and institutional reforms of northern Ghana with that of Ashanti in south-central Ghana.

The focus on the two local state structures was equally informed by the case study research approach, which entails an interest in individual cases implying an empirical enquiry that investigates contemporary phenomenon within its real-life setting (Yin, 2003, p. 13). This selection of the number of cases and the locality (herein study sites) depends essentially on the research question at hand. The selection of the two regions and the two local administrative structures was, therefore, research question-driven. To understand how local political reforms work, it is less helpful to study central government location which is the seat of official rhetoric. In fact, with most
policy and rhetoric taking place in the capital, Accra, one could easily miss everyday responses to those policies at the sub-national level. On the contrary, policy processes, interactions and responses surrounding implementation become manifest in studies of local administrations from the interior and its hinterland. But the interior is not homogenous so the north-south divide and experience with civil administration were useful criteria for selecting the study locations. The research was conducted in two politico-administrative settings namely Kumasi, the seat of the Ashanti Region and Wa, the capital of the Upper West Region (see Figure 3). The study utilized an inventive approach within which different sites and multiple levels (or layers) of activities, socio-economic contexts and actor characteristics yield comparable analytical outcomes. In particular, the socio-economic contexts in which local public goods and institution-building take place were analytically useful.

4.2 The North-South Divide in Ghana: Excursus on the Genesis

A discussion of the socio-economic profile of the two study regions facilitates understanding and analysis of their local state and administrative practices. The socio-economic statuses of the two regions mark a somewhat stark contrast between the “affluent south” and the “less affluent north”. Recent surveys on socio-economic well-being in Ghana have consistently ranked the Upper West Region among the bottom three compared with the Ashanti Region which has always placed among the two most affluent regions in the country (GSS, 2008, p. 95). In retrospect, factors such as the resource-rich south (with cocoa, gold, bauxite, manganese, etc.); the late start of formal education; and the colonial government’s attitude towards development in the ‘resource-deficit’ north all accounted for the vast differences in socio-economic well-being between the two regions (see Table 2). This obvious socio-economic dichotomy between the north and south of Ghana, and which gives impulse to the numerous development debates, has both geo-political and historical underpinnings. Although the socio-political and economic underrepresentation of the north is the subject of much academic research and popular discourse, the historical dimension with roots in colonial administration of the northern territory is rather fundamental. Some authors situate the economic development gap in policies of the colonial regime, and some cultural logics of the ethnic groups in the north
4. The Institutional Context and Characteristics of the Study Setting

of Ghana. In this line of reasoning, two issues stand out namely economic and socio-political processes especially based on Dickson’s (1968) influential work on the northern section of the country.46

Table 2. Background Characteristics of the Study Regions in National Context

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>National</th>
<th>Ashanti</th>
<th>Upper West</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population*</td>
<td>24,658,8</td>
<td>4,780,380</td>
<td>702,110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Size (square km)*</td>
<td>238,535</td>
<td>24,389</td>
<td>18,476</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy (%)*</td>
<td>74.1</td>
<td>82.6</td>
<td>46.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poverty via Head count (%)**</td>
<td>24.2</td>
<td>14.8</td>
<td>70.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author’s compilation based on the GSS (2012*; 2014**) Reports.

First was the political economy of the colonial government which drew cheap migrants from the north to serve in the mines of the colonial administration and in the booming cocoa economy in the south, especially in Ashanti. This provided higher standards of living that were not readily available in the north (Dickson, 1968, p. 690). Migrant labour from the Northern Territories under colonial administration was cheaper for the southern mines where gold prices in the world market had risen to new levels from the mid-nineteenth century to the twentieth century. That migration was spurred by the unwillingness of the southern youth to work in the mines; it was against their beliefs that work in the underground mines was low in status and associated with some evil spells (Anarfi et al., 2003, p. 10). In addition, given the erratic environmental conditions in the north for

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46 Kwamena Dickson’s work from human geography perspective was acclaimed as one of the few studies by African geographers to treat the development trajectories of the colonial regime with so much wit but little emotions. This seminal work influenced subsequent critical discussions on the subject in the social sciences (see e.g. Bederman, 1970).
most of the year, migrants could earn enough and return up north when those conditions got better.

Further, with the exploitative interest of the colonialists, two main structures were evident in the spatial economy of the country. A center-periphery structure emerged under which the center consisted of the forest belt where production of raw materials was concentrated especially in Kumasi. Second, the coastal port structure that emerged was such that the towns played a crucial role in import-export activities (Adarkwa, 2012). As a result, the northern parts of the country were in principle exempted from any developmental activities and benefits, thereby, necessitating the birth of a developmental gap between the north and south (Dickson, 1968). This partly accounts for the underdevelopment and the least urbanized nature of the modern-day administrative regions in Northern Ghana: Upper West, Upper East and Northern regions that have persisted till today (see Adarkwa, 2012, p. 4). To be sure, much of the economic development plans under British colonial administration paid little attention to the Northern Territories; roads, railways, factories etc. were rather built in the southern sector since most of the mineral wealth of the Gold Coast, of interest to the colonial administration, were found in the south. The north was, thus, deemed economically unimportant for anything apart from its market of cheap labour for the southern economic sectors (Dickson, 1968, p. 690; Sutton 1989, p. 659).

The other factor is the lack of interest in setting up educational facilities in the north. As regards education and development of human capital in the north, the colonial administration hardly supported any elaborate education system in the area (Benning, 1990). It was rather missionaries that began the efforts of establishing schools, yet, with very limited support from the colonial administration. This was because the colonial regime was skeptical about the intent of the missionaries who at the time consisted mainly of French and Canadian priests. This situation posed a psychological challenge of sabotage to the British colonial administration given the former’s closer links to the French colonial empire with possibly long-term objective to extend French rule over the territory (Howell, 1997, pp. 115–116). Nonetheless, a major factor for the colonial neglect of education in the north was

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47 Until 1925, only five primary schools were built by the colonial administration in the whole of the Northern Territories with lower enrolment levels. In fact, as Benning (1990, p.14) points out, in the 1925–1926 school year, the total enrolment in state-supported primary schools in the Northern Territories was as low as 394 pupils in total.
4. The Institutional Context and Characteristics of the Study Setting

informed by their unwillingness to halt the benignant rise of migrant labour from the north by providing very little chances of educational opportunities to the people. The education system in the north, thus, did not see any improvement until Ghana attained independence in 1957 (Benning, 1990, p. 24).

Other scholars have sought to explain the north-south differences from some cultural logics of socio-political and historical antecedents among the northern ethnic groups. Agyeman (1987), for instance, discusses the late start and embrace of Western education from two standpoints. First as the author asserts, the pyramidal authority system among the southern ethno-political organizations supported their assimilation into Western school systems compared with the ethnic groups in the north which had hierarchical authority systems that made them assimilate only partially. Second, the southern groups were introduced to Western education long before their northern counterparts. Over there in the north, Koranic education had taken roots before the introduction of Western school education (Agyeman, 1987, p. 114). Thus, for the author, although the colonial administration had a negative attitude generally towards the north, their cultural and political values came to worsen their already precarious socio-economic situation. It was, therefore, not surprising that after independence, Kwame Nkrumah, the first president initiated major development programmes for the country and the north in particular received some boom. Especially the introduction of a scholarship scheme for the north saw increases in enrolment and the emergence of educated youths in the area. However, with the overthrow of Nkrumah, subsequent regimes could not sustain that momentum and the three northern regions have consistently been ranked the poorest in the country.

Without joining the debate on the reasons accounting for the failure of the post-independence development plans for northern Ghana, one thing remains clear. In the context of the dire socio-political and economic situation, most Ghanaians from the south held negative opinions about working in the north or accepting transfers over there. Although this attitude no longer holds sway per se, it nonetheless militates against the conduct of public administration in the regions of the north. In fact, some public servants (e.g. doctors, nurses, and teachers) still refuse to take up job appointments in northern Ghana given the economic and infrastructural challenges which they consider as ‘punishment’ for working for the state (see Adusei-Asante & Hancock, 2012, p. 92). Added to this, the frequent outbreak of
inter-communal conflicts in the north (Lund, 2003, p. 588) also account for reactions of southerners to take up appointments in the north based on existing narratives about their safety. Indeed, given that formal sector employment accounts for relatively small percentage of overall employment, the number of formal sector employees in both study regions is not large but even smaller in the Upper West (see Table 3). These factors affect the enactment and performance of local state services because local administration is made, accessed and utilized by the local public in the context of their socio-economic status.

However, a caveat is required here; the socio-political and economic conditions in the north of Ghana do not warrant pre-empting one of the study regions over the other in the conduct of public administration. Indeed, Lent’s study of public servants from the Upper West Region shows that despite the limitations faced by northerners in entering the public service, given the low levels of education provision and achievements, those few public servants from the area tend to be more dedicated, more disciplined and proudly feel committed in their service to the state (see Lentz, 2014, p. 177). Nonetheless, the nature of socio-political setting affects the quality of local state administration as well as its relationship with the central state.

Table 3. Formal and Public Service Employment Outlook in the Study Regions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employment Type</th>
<th>National</th>
<th>Ashanti</th>
<th>Upper West</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Employed</td>
<td>10,479,485</td>
<td>1,983,194</td>
<td>280,361</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal Sector Employment</td>
<td>1,456,593</td>
<td>284,731</td>
<td>19,965</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Service (State)</td>
<td>655,884</td>
<td>129,783</td>
<td>14,218</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quasi-Public (Parastatal)</td>
<td>14,207</td>
<td>2,459</td>
<td>236</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal (Private)</td>
<td>786,502</td>
<td>152,507</td>
<td>5,512</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author’s compilation based on the GSS (2012) Report
4. The Institutional Context and Characteristics of the Study Setting

In particular, the fact that modern local public administration took a relatively longer time to reach the north compared with their southern counterparts suggests there are both similarities and inevitable contrasts in the conduct of local public policy and change. The local state project was thus premised on the hope that these hitherto disserted regions will catch up with their counterparts in the southern Ghana through the promise of participation in local priority setting.

4.3 Ashanti Region and the Local Self-Government in Kumasi

The south-central city of Kumasi is the capital of the Ashanti Region and forms an important transport and commercial hub for both domestic and international traffic. It is the key transportation link between the south and north of Ghana as well with the surrounding countries. Kumasi’s strategic location makes it a brisk commercial and administrative center, sometimes regarded as the “commercial capital of Ghana” (Devas & Korboe, 2000, p. 123) with West Africa’s largest open-area trade hub, the Kejetia Market. With a population of 4,780,380 inhabitants (GSS, 2012, p. 34), the region has consistently placed second after Greater Accra as the most affluent, economically (see GSS, 2014, p. 14; 2008, p. 94). The region is largely homogeneous with over 75 percent of the inhabitants from the Akan ethnic group. However, there is a sizeable migrant population from the Ewe ethnic group with about four percent and particularly from the northern Mole-Dagbani ethnic group with over 11 percent inhabitants (GSS, 2012, p. 34), thus, reflecting the north-south migration trends as discussed early on. The region’s socio-economic conditions informed population growth through the influx of people from every part of the country and beyond its frontiers mainly to the Kumasi metropolis.

As mentioned earlier, the Ashanti Region is known notoriously for its fiercest resistance to colonial domination and when it eventually succumbed, the colonial administration made several concessions. But the region’s rich mineral resources, agricultural potential and strong centralized

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48 There are several sub-groups under the Akan generic category including the Asante, Fanti, Brong, Ahafo, Akwapim, Akyem, Denkyira, Assin, Wassaa, Sefwi, etc. These groups are located in the south-central, forest areas of the country and constitute 47.5 percent of the total population in Ghana (GSS, 2012).
political organization (i.e. the former Ashanti Empire) were at the core of its rise in prominence in both the economic and social life of Ghana and, thus, a focus of in-migration (see Anarfi et al., 2003). The gold resources and the cocoa economy were compelling factors that made the colonialists establish an outpost and later, administrative units.

A 1902 Bill formally annexed Ashanti and the governor had the formal authority to depose or suspend chiefs, while the concurrent expansion of the colony’s infrastructure and administration provided an avenue for educated Africans to play some roles in the civil administration. That, in turn, decreased the power of chiefs and their traditional office even further (see McLaughlin & Owusu-Ansah, 1994, pp. 17–19). Yet, the centralized political structure of the empire made Kumasi the focus of administrative and economic activities and hence its status in modern economic life of Ghana. In the Ashanti Region, the persistent influence of the Asantehene and the Kumasi chiefs has a bearing on the civil administration and public authority in general. This is especially the case in land administration and dispute resolution in which the Asantehene holds the status of *primus inter pares* (see Ubink, 2007) such that the local land administration and management departments have to adjust their tasks and practices to such influence. The popularity of neo-traditional actors in civil administration is based, not on satisfaction with the tasks they perform per se, but rather on their traditional role as repository of culture (Ubink, 2008, p. 176).

National political preference in the Ashanti Region in general leans towards the New Patriotic Party (NPP) for which reason the region is often regarded as the stronghold of the NPP. Historically, the region favours the ‘Danqua-Busia-Dombo’ political tradition, Ghana’s political right and precursor of the NPP. That tradition holds a strong opposition to the socialist ideology of Kwame Nkrumah, the first President of the Republic. The NPP promotes the so-called ‘property-owning democracy’ which alludes to neoliberal free market and enterprises thinking. That tradition contrasts with the ideology of Ghana’s political left, the National Democratic Congress (NDC) which is viewed as ‘social democracy’ (see Elischer, 2008, pp. 190–191; Obeng-odoom, 2013, p. 78). It should be pointed out, though, that in practice no clear-cut differences in these divergent ideologies could be discerned.
4. The Institutional Context and Characteristics of the Study Setting


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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ashanti</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NPP (%)</td>
<td>28 (85)</td>
<td>31 (94)</td>
<td>36 (92)</td>
<td>34 (87)</td>
<td>43 (91)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NDC (%)</td>
<td>5 (15)</td>
<td>2 (6)</td>
<td>3 (8)</td>
<td>3 (8)</td>
<td>4 (47)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total No. of Seats</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper West</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NPP (%)</td>
<td>– (–)*</td>
<td>– (–)*</td>
<td>1 (10)</td>
<td>3 (30)</td>
<td>– (–)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NDC (%)</td>
<td>8 (100)</td>
<td>7 (88)</td>
<td>7 (70)</td>
<td>6 (60)</td>
<td>10 (91)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total No. of Seats</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


49 In 2008, there were 2 (5%) Independent Parliamentarians (i.e. non-party members) from the Ashanti Region. The People’s National Convention (PNC) party is somewhat active in the Upper West Region. Its share of the seats in the region has been: 1 (12%) in 2000; 2 (20%) in 2004, and 1 (10%) in 2008. There was 1(9%) Independent Parliamentarian in 2012 in that region.
For instance, there has been no clear departure by any government from the divestiture of state enterprises, public health and social welfare programmes started by regimes in the two political persuasions.

The affinity of the Ashanti Region with the NPP is illustrated by the election of members to the Legislature of the Fourth Republic since 1992 in which an overwhelming majority of the Parliamentarians has come from the NPP (see Table 4). The consequence, as discussed in the empirical chapters, is that the central regime’s interests in local political issues (e.g. regime appointees to the local state) have overt and covert implication for the conduct of public authority in the local state. In terms of modern administration, although the Gold Coast Colony was established on July 24, 1874, it did not extend to the borders of Ashanti until 1896. It was only after the defeat of Ashanti that the British proclaimed a protectorate over the kingdom (see Wilks, 1989, p. 7). After the exile of the Ashanti King, Prempeh I, a resident commissioner to Ashanti was appointed with powers over civil and criminal jurisdiction. Each Ashanti State was administered separately from Kumasi and was ultimately responsible to the Governor of the Gold Coast. Ashanti became a colony following its final defeat and annexation in 1901 at the so-called War of the Golden Stool (see Allman, 1990, p. 269; McLaughlin & Owusu-Ansah, 1994, p. 16). Subsequently, a permanent fort and garrison was maintained in Kumasi.

The land area of the Kumasi metropolis is 254 km² with a population of 2,035,064 according to the 2010 census report (GSS, 2012, p. 98) but at the time of the study, the city’s population was estimated to have reached 2,396,458. Given its sheer size, there are nine sub-metropolitan district councils under the Metropolitan Assembly namely: Asokwa, Bantama, Kwadaso, Manhyia, Oforikrom, Nhyiaeso, Subin, Suame and Tafo-Pankrono; 21 Town councils; and 92 unit committees (i.e. an Assembly Member with five representatives for each ward in an electoral area) to help administer public authority (see Figure 4). After initial processes and experiments with local political reforms in the late 1980s, this local government was established by legislative instrument, LI 1614 in 1995. This was reformed with LI 2059 together with a subsidiary legislation, LI 1805 in 2004 to manage its sub-district structures. This DA is expected to provide the basic public services of physical and economic planning, sanitation, health, education, infrastructure and security as stipulated for all districts. In additions, as a metropolitan authority, it places further emphasis on its budget
and holds a legal department to address the complex management and legal problems in the urban socio-political environment.

Figure 4: Map of Kumasi, Ghana showing the Sub-metro District Councils in the Metropolitan Assembly. © Author. Design: Cartography Dept., Cape Coast, October 2014.

4.4 The Upper West Region and the Local Self-Government in Wa

The Upper West Region presents some contrasts. With Wa as the capital and largest settlement and consequently host to numerous government institutions, it is an interesting case given its unenviable status as one of the poorest regions in the country. As one of the smallest regions in the country, it has a population of 702,110 inhabitants in 2010 (GSS, 2012, p. 34) but it is populated mainly by indigenous groups with over 73 percent from the
generic ethnic category of Mole-Dagbani\(^{50}\) followed by the Grusi group with over 20 percent inhabitants. By its status, the region has a high incidence of poverty. Indeed, while poverty is very high in the north of Ghana, the Upper West Region had just over three percent of the inhabitants in the higher income levels (GSS, 2014, p. 14; GSS, 2008, p. 95). As alluded to previously, the colonial regime erroneously held the impression that Northern Ghana lacked natural resources which they could exploit and, thus, devoid of any economic potential. As a result, the colonial state viewed Northern Ghana as lacking in terms of already existing capital which was readily located in mining and cocoa production in Southern Ghana. The north, therefore, became the location for cheap ‘labour reserve’ to be tapped for industries in the south which promoted out-migration from the north (Dickson, 1968, p. 690). Again, the slow pace of implementing educational policies, industries and agricultural social infrastructure made the migration even more attractive to the northern youth and, thus, further widening the socio-economic disparities (see Benning, 1990, pp. 14–25; Songsore, 1996, p. 55; Sutton, 1989, p. 659).

Despite the efforts of the post-independence administration under Nkrumah to commit socio-economic development projects\(^{51}\) to improving the lives of the people of Northern Ghana, not much has changed in the northern relative to the southern regions and the former still remains somewhat enigmatic to the development process. Conditions in Northern Ghana did not improve and perhaps became worse after the overthrow of Nkrumah since those regimes aimed their policies at cutting funding for social welfare programmes and favouring privatization of state enterprises. The neo-liberal policies led to privatization and cutbacks in government spending which intensified poverty in the already deprived north. Although, in 1983, the Upper West Region was carved out of the Upper Region through the decentralization process, itself part of the larger Structural Adjustment Programme, that did not alter the situation in the north and as a result, Northern

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50 This major ethnic category has sub-groups such as Dagomba, Dagaaba, Wala, Kusasi, Mamprusi, Nandom, Builsa, Nankansi, Nanumba, etc. They are located in the northern guinea savannah section of the country and form 16.6 percent of the total population (GSS, 2012, p. 34).

51 Despite the general perception that most of the social-economic investments in the north took place in areas which showed political support for Nkrumah’s regime, this was not true of the Upper West Region because it mainly identified with different political traditions in Northern Ghana which opposed the former.
4. The Institutional Context and Characteristics of the Study Setting

Ghana, and Upper West in particular, has consistently ranked near the bottom in rankings of socio-economic improvements in Ghana (see Songsore, 1996). With the region largely dependent on agrarian subsistence and rain-fed agriculture employing most of its people, the long dry season between October and April, spurs the seasonal migration to the south.

In Wa, the capital, there are some trading and commercial activities with a small services sector that support the municipality and the region as a whole. Yet, the influence of neo-traditional authority (i.e. chieftaincy) and ethnicity on the conduct of public administration in the Upper West Region, as elsewhere in the country (Lund, 2003, 2006) is quite evident and couched along the tensions between the pre-colonial chiefly versus chiefless societies and groupings. For instance, the creation of new local state structures (DAs) in certain parts of this region is often intertwined with local politics, narratives of indigenous versus settlers which raise key questions about ethnicity and territory in the making of public authority (Lentz, 2001, 2006). Local political elites tend to use these criteria to influence debates on land ownership, political authority and the rights of taxation in new local state and administrative structures (Lentz, 2006, p. 902) perpetuating the intractability of neo-traditional role as well as setting the limits for central and local state monopoly in the making of public authority. The recent case of such influence especially in Kumasi, Ashanti is discussed in chapter six.

The Upper West Region, on its part, generally leans politically towards the NDC although it is not seen as the strong hold of a particular political party. Indeed, it has primarily supported the NDC in all elections held in the Fourth Republic. Historically, the region favoured the Danqua-Busia-Dombo and opposed Nkrumah’s socialism but the emergence of the People’s National Convention (PNC) founded by Hilla Limann (a native of the Upper West) in the Fourth Republic rendered that alliance less tenable. Nonetheless, the weakness of the PNC in the region, coupled with its ideological similarities to the NDC, has paved way for the latter to become the dominant political party in the region as illustrated by its share of Members of Parliament (MPs) since 1996 (see Table 4). As mentioned earlier, this political behaviour is particularly important because it has implications for the ruling regime and the appointees who serve in the local state structures.
4.4 The Upper West Region and the Local Self-Government in Wa

It also highlights the factors that motivate incumbent regimes to divert resources to target ruling party sympathizers and localities where patronage provides the most outcomes.\footnote{Note that André and Mesplé-Somps (2010) contest such claims arguing that pro-government districts receive less public investments because of fears over political instability which force them to seek favours from opposition areas by investment in those areas. Another plausible debate is that such investments are meant to make the incumbent government appeal to voters in subsequent elections but not concerns over instability per se. Yet, observations from everyday patterns of behaviour show that pro-government actors are the key beneficiaries.}

The first sign of colonial interest in local state administration occurred when the British signed friendship agreement with the King of Wa, the ruler of the area lying immediately east of the Black Volta, called the Country of the Dagarti (also Dagaba) by the British, in 1894 and protection treaty by 1897.\footnote{The Dagarti extended northwards to Jirapa and Lawra and comprises several local polities which frequently rebelled against their subjugation and rule by the Wala King, the Wa Na from Wa. However, the colonial administration continuously kept the other polities under the influence of the Wala (see Wilks, 1989, p. 10).} This was mainly an attempt to curtail the imminent French interest in the area. In 1901, the area came under the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast and what appears as proper local administrative setup was established in 1907 through the Protectorate of the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast (see Wilks, 1989, pp. 7–10). The system of indirect rule, combining indigenous rule with modern public administration, extended to the Northern Territories in 1932 and the Wala Native Authority (also the Wala State) was established in 1933.

Wa has been the cosmopolitan and major urban center and, thus, was the seat of the colonial administration in the northwestern section of the country. The Wa Na’s Palace and the education infrastructure add to the town’s appeal as a center of culture. Therefore, under successive governments of the Gold Coast and Ghana, it has remained a seat of district and regional administration (Wilks, 1989). The Wa Municipality covers a total land area of 234.74 km² and in 2010 had a population at 107,214 (GSS, 2012, p. 103) but had risen to 127,284 at the time of the study.\footnote{Wa was an urban council before it became a Municipal Assembly. However, as major criterion for the creation of a municipality, it must have only zonal councils and unit committees as substructures since town/urban councils may appear as parallel structures in these ‘one-town’ settlements (see Figure. 6). Yet, it is still referred to as such in daily administration. To avoid confusion, Wa is designated as Urban Council in this study as used by local state actors.} The Municipal Assembly

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4. The Institutional Context and Characteristics of the Study Setting

comprises six Zonal Councils namely: Wa, Nakori-Chansa, Busa, Kperisi, Pongu, and Boli; and has 72 unit committees (see Figure 5).

Figure 5: Map of Wa, Ghana showing the Zonal Councils in the Municipal Assembly. © Author. Design: Cartography Dept., Cape Coast, October 2014.

The Assembly was established by Legislative Instrument (LI) 1800 in 2004. As a municipal authority, this DA is expected in principle to provide the basic public services of physical and economic planning, social welfare and sanitation, health, education and road infrastructure, and security as required of all districts. Yet, it has to negotiate and provide these services to a somewhat cosmopolitan population though not with the rigor of its metropolitan counterpart. In both the municipal and metropolitan local administrations, there are other departments that contribute to the provision of local public goods but who do not feel part of the local state authority.
4.5 ‘Contested’ Departments of the Local State

A general ambiguity that surrounds local state administrative reforms is the arbitrary assignment of legislatively-established structures to the local governments despite clear possibilities of resistance to such changes. While legislative reforms are often anticipated to legally conclude their inclusion that is not always the case. Therefore, tensions and contestations between these departments and the local state are rampant.\(^{55}\) Three of these so-called decentralized departments of the DAs that contest their roles in the local state are the Ghana Education Service, the Ghana Health Service, and the Forestry Department. These departments, set up by different legislation, maintain a vertical relationship with their regional and national ministries. The argument is that until those laws have been reviewed and a new horizontal relationship established between the new offices, ‘Departments of District Assemblies and the DAs’, any attempts to integrate them will be an exercise in futility.

It is as a result of this complex interaction that views of well-informed actors from the agriculture and health directorates in the two study areas were sought. Their opposition, as would be discussed in subsequent chapters, is well-established given that some of those departments have specific perquisites that they are unwilling to let go under the DAs’ rubric. Again, these politico-administrative reforms create a double-tension between actors with local political interests and bureaucrats with professional training and rationalities in addition to own interests. These diverse interests of the actors and the structures give a nuance perspective in understanding local state institutional change.

4.6 Central State Structures for Local State Administration

Two central state institutions are responsible for managing the local state structures. These are the Ministry of Local Government and its under-secretariat, the Local Government Service. The Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development has its origin in the 1992 Constitution of Ghana and the Local Government Act, 1993 (Act 462) in section 158 which mandates

\(^{55}\) See Gilbert et al. (2013, pp. 132–133) for further discussion on these overlapping tasks and tensions.
the ministry, through legislative instruments, to creates District Assemblies and the substructures (sub-metropolitan district councils; urban or zonal councils; town or area councils; and unit committees. The ministry, as the central government unit for local governance, oversees the transfer of functions, powers, responsibilities and resources from the former to the latter. It, thus, promises to establish and develop a ‘vibrant’ and ‘well-resourced’ local political structure in Ghana to ensure good governance and rural development (see Crawford, 2008). It undertakes these tasks, among others, via: formulating, implementing, monitoring, evaluating and coordinating institutional reform policies and programmes aimed at local democracy and development. Its flagship aim, it is argued, is to make the local institutional structures effective in mobilizing and harnessing local resources for development as well as facilitating local development initiatives on sanitation, health, education, etc. through popular participation by local communities (see MLGRD, 2010, pp. 12–15).

The other structure, as an attempt towards a decentralized civil service, is the Local Government Service (LGS) which was established by the Local Government Service Act, 2003 (Act 656) and became operational in 2007 with the stated objective to ensure control, discipline and career development of staff of the service. Through its secretariat, the LGSS, it also promises an ‘effective’ supervision of staff and provides, according to Act 656, technical assistance to the DAs and the RCCs through supervision and provision of managerial support. As an administrative wing of the central government for local state matters, it seeks to motivate local state bureaucrats and provide them with the requisite knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to deliver local public goods (MLGRD, 2010, pp. 14–15). This task is attempted via capacity development and training programmes often with financial support from transnational actors. However, these two institutional structures, by way of their activities as discussed in the empirical chapters, severely curtail the already restricted autonomy of the local state and its administration. The views of four central state actors on their relationship with local state vis-à-vis their roles in the policy process as stated previously were meant to bring out these nuances in local-central state interaction in the local political reforms and promises of local socio-economic transformation.
This chapter has highlighted the institutional contexts and characteristics of the two study locations by situating local administrations and their experiences within historical and contemporary perspectives. The discussion has also revealed, of course, that the general attitude of the colonial administration towards developing the north, both administratively and economically was negative and should bear the brunt of the accusation of underdevelopment in the north. Nonetheless, it is compelling to know, as some scholars point out, that the socio-political formation and some cultural processes of the groups in Ghana during colonial rule played a key role in shaping the north-south socio-economic divide. Thus, the less impressive socio-economic outlook of the Upper West Region vis-à-vis the Ashanti Region must be seen as a consequence of both national and local socio-political processes. In addition, the general political leanings of the two regions suggests that the political structures of the local state might act cooperatively or hinder central-local relations based on the particular political regime which is in power given that the executive of the local state is appointed by the central government. Furthermore, recent contestations by actors providing essential services in the local state add an interesting dynamic to these politico-administrative reforms. Given the socio-economic differences and also the fact that state administrators from the north have shown genuine commitment to the state notwithstanding their obvious challenges to entering the public service, the stage is set for comparing the everyday practices and institutional reforms of the local state and its administration in the two study areas. That begins with the concept of decentralization itself.
This chapter takes a brief look at the discourse and arguments that link local state institutional change processes to socio-economic improvements. While concurring with the position that institutional change does not necessarily reflect socio-economic development (Jütting et al., 2005; Crawford, 2008), the chapter goes further to argue that the so-called ‘weak bureaucracy’ label of the local state should be understood in the context of the very entanglement of local institution-building within the wider frame of transnational-national-local arena of institutional interaction. Against this backdrop, a retrospective view of the multiple interests and preferences in the processes of local political reforms in Ghana is briefly provided. This helps to highlight the point that institution-building processes within the local state are a reflection of the embeddedness of local practices within global development processes and must be analysed as such. It is posited that analysis of institution-building processes that predicate participatory local democracy with poverty reduction expectations should start with a critique of participatory development itself. This should wit the actors who set the goals, those who support the goals, and those who implement those goals. The chapter starts with the general debate on local institution-building and participatory development rhetoric before situating that debate within the Ghanaian institutional context. By so doing, the chapter sets the stage for a discussion on the reality of everyday institutional practices and change within the local state.

5.1 Decentralization Reforms and Change: The General Debate

The concept of decentralization remains an important model in international development discourse and practice as well as for researchers, yet, very little is known about it. The concept remains complex and elusive (Smoke,
5. Local Institution-Building and Development: The Discourse and Practice

The main principle behind decentralization involves broad political processes of “transferring management responsibilities and powers from the central state to local institutions” (Ribot, 2003, p. 53). Thus, local decision-making falls within the purview of an array of actors with local political interests. Local government and decentralization are allied concepts that are often used interchangeably but to appreciate the issues set out in this study, the two must be distinguished. Local government generally reflects the structure that defines the roles and expectations of actors in local public administration while decentralization, as a programme of reform, denotes the policy and processes that give political and administrative authority for managing the activities of the former (see Füeg & Schärer, 2007, pp. 5–6; Olsen, 2007, p. 7; Ayee, 2003, p. 21). In that sense, local governance is broader and goes beyond the narrow legal framework to include actors on the margins: civil society, neo-traditional actors, youth groups, etc. Nonetheless, local governments tend to depend on their given political and administrative authority and, thus, the quality of their goods and service reflect the extent to which they have been decentralized. Given the complexity by which the decentralization process is conceived, different dimensions or aspects of decentralization are distinguished by different researchers and authors from politics, economics, sociology, and administrative science persuasions.

Smoke, for instance, classifies it into financial decentralization, which entails the “assignment of responsibilities” and financial resources in the form of “revenues to sub-national government”; institutional decentralization (or deconcentration) where administrative functions and processes performed by central governments are given to local state bodies; and political decentralization (or devolution) where power and responsibilities are

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56 The notion of decentralization could generally appear equivocal because it could either denote a system (in which power is given to sub-national units) or a process (where patterns are orderly arranged from central state to lower levels of government). Following Prud’homme (2003, p. 17), decentralization is used as a system in this discussion to analyse transfer of authority and responsibility to local governments.

57 Crawford (2009), on his part, sees two major types of decentralization namely devolution (or democratic decentralization) which “entails the transfer of power and resources to sub-national authorities that are representatives of local populations; and deconcentration (or administrative decentralization) which entails the transfer of authority to sub-national branches of the central government” (p. 77).
broadly devolved to elected local and accountable governments (2003, pp. 10–11).\(^{58}\) Despite the various dimensions, it has been generally argued that the true character of decentralization that adequately supports local governance comprises both deconcentration of institutions, and devolution of political and financial authority to sub-national structures (see Crawford, 2009, p. 59; Johnson, 2001, p. 522). Devolution especially fiscal authority, though crucial for autonomous decision making by sub-national governments, remains the most difficult to pursue.\(^{59}\) In spite of the noble commitments often set out in decentralization programmes, the task of devolving autonomous decision mandate to local and communal structures has proved the most arduous in most developing countries (and for their international donors) despite engaging with it since the late 1980s.\(^{60}\) In these settings, the debate on potential gains and shortcomings remain highly unsettled.

### 5.1.1 Perceived benefits from decentralized political institutions

The benefits of decentralization, as advanced by some scholars (see e.g. Smoke, 2003; Johnson, 2001), are certainly numerous with the oft-cited merits of bringing governance to grassroots (i.e. actors at the communal level) and allowing them to participate, influence local decisions, and hold their local state accountable for their actions. Johnson, for instance, attempts to show that democratic decentralization is necessary for poverty reduction. The benefits of democratic decentralization, according him, are contingent on the realization of three conditions namely: “an appropriate balance be-

\(^{58}\) It must be pointed out that the extent of local autonomy is not directly linked to local democracy via decentralization. Even in authoritarian regimes, local units may have considerable autonomy without being elected.

\(^{59}\) Even the degree of devolution in the countries of the Global North varies considerably. The UK, for instance, remains the notable OECD country in recent times to have a relatively less-devolved local authority when compared with Germany (see Prud’homme, 2003, p. 17; Reiter et al., 2010, p. 175). In the UK, the Westminster government retains conservable amount of powers that otherwise may be given to local governments.

\(^{60}\) Although some developing countries have made good progress, others still lag behind and, yet, others seem to retrogress and reverse earlier progress (see Stevens & Teggemann, 2004).
tween autonomy and accountability; constructive support from external actors; and a commitment to democratic deepening” (2001, p. 521). He argues further that decentralization needs to be supported “because democratic activity is not merely an instrumental good; it also has intrinsic benefits for the rural poor” (Johnson, 2001, p. 521). In line with those benefits, Smoke (2003) argues that decentralization may not necessarily be negative, as suggested by some critics on the dangers of decentralization. Smoke holds that problems in decentralized structures such as the sheer size of local government deficits, fiscal indiscipline, and domination by local elite are not inherent flaws of decentralization. Rather, as he argues, they are the result of poor design, and capacity weaknesses that the devolved responsibilities may help address (2003, p. 11). Therefore, according to Smoke, for majority of poor people to see the gains from local democratic institutions, “considerable central government capacity and effort to design and implement” will be required (2003, p. 15) although such gains from decentralization have been challenged by critics.

5.1.2 Shortcomings of local institutional reforms and change

It is even compelling to note that in the general literature and empirical evidence, other scholars tend to paint a somewhat gloomy picture of decentralization and its institutional change merits. Kühl (1998) thinks decentralization does not necessarily address the problem of complexity (i.e. centralization) through simplification of administrative processes, as is always touted in the international development system and by decentralization advocates. Rather, it may even add to the existing complexity because it unwittingly creates much more chaos (p. 218). Empirical evidence shows a weak and contested link between decentralization, democratic practices and local development outcomes (Rocha Menocal, 2007; Jütting et al., 2005). Studies in most developing countries (Jütting et al., 2005) and sub-Saharan

61 It should, however, be pointed out that local democracy does not guarantee equal rights. Local democracy and decentralization could even lead to a sort of micro-nationalism where ‘natives’ will be pitched against ‘settlers’ (i.e. those from other districts). On this topic, see Lentz (2006).
Africa in particular (see Crook, 2003; Crawford, 2008, 2009) show that evidence linking decentralization, democratic practices and poverty reduction is diminutive and still indeterminate. Jütting et al. (2005, p. 643) contend that although decentralization reforms proceed on a pro-poor assumption, it is impossible to find hard measurable evidence of the impact of decentralization on poverty and at the same time concrete examples linking decentralization to improvements in access to public service and general empowerment are difficult to affirm.

Crook, on his part, uses evidence from some African and Asian countries to highlight the fact that despite the keen interests aroused by the promise of devolved authority in the early 1980s (Cook & Manor, 1998), “decentralization has not empowered challenges to local elites who are resistant or indifferent to pro-poor policies” (2003, p. 77). This is partly due to the fact that decisions about impact of local policies on socio-economic well-being are still made by central regimes. In most instances, as Crook argues, there is an “elite capture’ of local power structures facilitated by the desire of ruling elites to create and sustain their power bases” in communal locations (2003, p. 86). Thus, a general perception of benefits from patronage politics together with weak accountability mechanisms in the local state (Crook, 2003, p. 86) tend to reinforce the domination of local political structures by central political actors. From this standpoint therefore, it appears remotely possible to think about pro-poor outcomes from decentralization if local and central regimes remain unaccountable to their constituents.

Romeo (2003) adds a different perspective to the debate by attacking the role of transnational actors in decentralization programmes. He argues that despite so much rhetoric, decentralization has been stifled by donor preferences and interests in macro level outcomes. For Romeo, critical challenges such as the pursuit of parallel programmes, expertise and responsibilities of external actors yield “fragmented and competing interventions” (2003, p. 92) that do not only inhibit but sometimes retard the systemic changes required for achieving the stated objectives of decentralization reforms. He thinks that without robust partnerships between national regimes and their

For an interesting debate on the link between institutions (including decentralization) and socio-economic well-being see Halperin et al. (2010) and Feng (2003) who link democratic institutions to economic development and prosperity. In contrast, Przeworski Alvarez, Cheibub and Limongi (2000) argue that despite the importance of political institutions, regime type does not necessarily influence economic development.
external counterparts linking “‘downstream’ assistance to local governments to ‘upstream’” national institutional change projects, decentralization would most likely remain rhetorical (2003, p. 95).

Prud’homme (2003) introduces a more skeptical view to the decentralization debate. He argues that most local governments in developing countries (especially in sub-Saharan Africa) struggle with fiscal decentralization to back up their devolved authority because they have limited history and experience in that programme. Indeed, Prud’homme highlights the potential dangers of fiscally irresponsible behaviour by empowered and autonomous local government and posits that decentralization may after all not be so attractive to most poor countries. That is, the standard economic argument associated with decentralization cannot be applied universally since local governments in low-income countries tend to be so poorly-equipped and administered that most additional incomes are likely spent on indirect expenditures and over-head costs which may curtail any marginal gains. At the same time, central government transfers to local governments tend to undermine local taxation capacities since the incentive to increase local taxes diminishes with increases in central government remittances (Prud’homme, 2003, p. 25).

In sum, the idea behind the thinking in this section is that decentralization projects are less likely to overcome the challenges posed by a centralized regime. It must, however, be pointed out that although the pros and cons of decentralization are not straightforward, it may appear very normative to assume that developing countries have no prior history of local governance and, thus, may be better served by centralized regimes. That approach will suggest that their local political actors lack the agency to be part of their own governance. On the contrary, it seems more plausible that developing countries may reap the greatest benefit from decentralization programmes since they previously have been poorly-served by centralized regimes. Yet, the contradictions that ensue from decentralization programmes are the direct result of both international and local policy actors who are interested in some macro-level outcomes without any genuine commitment to local accountability and participatory processes. Indeed, the underlying assumption linking political institutions to participation and development is often not criticized (see Crook, 2003, p. 77). This is mostly the case regarding the

63 See also an earlier paper by Prud’homme (1995) on the dangers of decentralization which highlights in detail his skepticism of that programme.
5.2 Political Institutions and Participatory Development

Three concepts viz.: participation, popular participation and participatory development are often used interchangeably. In the discourse, participation implies a process through which local actors influence local policy decisions on their own terms without relying so much on experts from outside (see Mohan & Stokke, 2000, p. 252). The allied concept of popular participation implies persuading many local actors to take part and influence decision-making processes (Nelson & Wright, 1995, p. 7). Critical in the participation literature are the core elements that influence participatory development namely: agents (actors) of participation who are individuals and local organizations; institutions, as we have discussed earlier, are formal rules and informal norms that determine opportunities for actors to participate in decisions and processes that affect their well-being; and structures which are national and local governments that provide the platform for institutions to operate and cause their change. The core principles of participatory development are appealing. They involve bottom-up approaches to change, in contrast to the top-down approaches, in which local people take charge of the entire processes of formulating and implementing policies (Edwards, 1993, p. 86).

Thus, under a centralized regime, what we may find is that constituents are rendered passive recipients of development goods and services; as beneficiaries of development hand-outs, their very problems of poverty and low standards of living remain unresolved. In participatory development, however, the needs and opinions of local residents are argued to gain priority in the change policies and programmes. In particular, participatory development approaches seek “to equip people with skills, confidence, information and opportunities” (Edwards, 1993, p. 86). Hence, these approaches aim at giving project development and implementation skills to local actors with the long term objective of reducing rural poverty.
5.2.1 The concept of participation revisited

It is quite telling, however, that attempts to link participation to actual development outcomes remain contentious given that participatory development itself emerged from an ideological confession that individuals must rightly “participate in matters that affect them” (Broad & Beishon, 1977, p. 17). Indeed, the notion of participation often entails some normative and dogmatic undertones: as “something people believe in as good and rarely questioned” or more precisely a “faith in development” (Cleaver, 2001, p. 36; see also Henkel & Stirrat, 2001, p. 168). Their predominance followed the general disappointments with the entire process of international development and in the 1990s participatory approaches (together with participatory research methods, PRA) were seen as attempts to put people first in the development process (Rauch, 2009). Their aim was to prioritize the concern of local people especially with themes such as: “your situation”, “your problems”, “your potential” which became interesting research topics for analysing processes and initiatives towards improving the living conditions of the poor (Rauch, 2009, p. 73).64

In most of the developing world where decentralization programmes had begun with structural adjustment programmes, participatory development became the focus of policy and practice. This was linked to the assumed potential of participatory development to improve governance and help reduce poverty. Despite its appeal to international development practice and research, several ambiguities still surround the participatory development concept. Even for international development practitioners, the lingering legacy of colonialism, distance and cultural differences produce dilemmas for any meaningful outcomes from participation (Keough, 1998). Indeed, the very goals of participatory development are set within the international development system for local communities and actors despite the rhetoric of locally-determined, grassroots priorities and ownership. That observation highlights further the dominant position of external actors in the development enterprise in the Global South (Keough, 1998, p. 188; Escobar, 1995, p. 9). These notions are reflected in the increasing critique of participatory

64 Translated by M. Sabbi
5.2 Political Institutions and Participatory Development

development especially from the Global South which views the participatory development concept as a continuation of the colonial project.\textsuperscript{65} Thus, the concept has become illusory in itself such that even if when participation was added to the neo-liberal agenda, it somewhat became a new tyranny, as held by Cooke and Kothari (2001). Indeed, it had much to do with what donors and top-ranking state officials wanted than the otherwise persistent rhetoric of a bottom-up process.

Therefore, even though the participatory development approaches still dominate development debates, empirical evidence from general practice and research has shown otherwise. They have generally not lived up to their promise of empowering the poor (see Cleaver, 2004; McGee, 2002; Mohan & Hickey, 2004; Hickey & Mohan, 2004; Cooke & Kothari, 2001) given the gap that exists between the participatory rhetoric and what happens in practice on the ground. In particular, the approaches fail to provide evidence on how the promise of empowerment and well-being of the poor are being addressed (Mohan & Hickey, 2004; Gaventa, 2004b). Despite the obvious limitations, these illusory concepts of participation still find enormous favour in the international development system and in debates on local institution-building especially when participation is linked to local democracy and poverty reduction (see Crook, 2003; Crawford, 2008, 2009).

5.2.2 Participatory development and good governance (de-) linkage

While exact causal relationship is difficult to establish (Jütting et al., 2005; Leftwich, 2005; Rocha Menocal, 2007), the participatory development approaches being pursued in developing countries have sought to link popular participation to the notion of good governance that promote accountable local governments and lead to poverty reduction especially at communal levels (see Crawford, 2008, 2009). Good governance entails democratic principles that value and respect the will of the people. This concept which became popular in the 1990s, generally describes the “manner in which power is exercised in the management of a country’s economic and social

\textsuperscript{65} See Vandana Shiva (1989) and Mies and Shiva (1993) for a comprehensive discussion on the critique of participatory development especially from feminist and ecological perspective from the Global South. That position has been supported by Western writers such as Wolfgang Sachs (1992).
resources for development” (World Bank, 1992, p. 1). Its main elements are transparency, accountable governments, rule of law, and judicial independence (see Kaufman, Kraay & Zoido-Lobatón, 1999, p. 2). Participatory development, as noted earlier, is seen as people-centered development approach emphasizing improvements in the quality of involvement and influence (e.g. skills, decision-making competence, etc.) among local actors in a self-reliant manner.

Despite the bold attempts to connect participatory development with good governance, and which has informed much of the rhetoric in international development debates (see Wunsch, 2001), the general literature and empirical evidence tell us that the relationship remains largely inconclusive and highly contested (Rocha Menocal, 2007, p. 6). Indeed, for advocates of democracy such as Halperin, Siegel and Weinstein (2010, p. 50), economic development benefits from democratic institutions that are participatory and accountable to the citizenry emerge over time when compared with authoritarian ones. The authors posit that the performance of democratic institutions derives from their support for openness in information, and their adaptability compared with autocracies (2005, p. 50). Feng has also found evidence that democratic institutions positively affect economic and social progress of countries in several ways (2003, p. 25). These benefits may come from stable political system, rule of law, adequate property rights regimes, and educational opportunities. More telling, these benefits may arise if, as Leschke (2000, p. 277) argues, the regimes provide adequate institutional frameworks that support socio-economic well-being. A recent addition to this perspective comes from Acemoglu and Robinson who believe that the promise between institutions and economic prosperity occurs only when the political system is very “inclusive” and allows for popular participation vis-à-vis “extractive” ones in which elites make exploitative decisions mainly for themselves (2013, pp. 73–82).

In contrast, Przeworski et al. (2000) present counter evidence that despite the relevance of political institutions and structures, regime type does not have such benefits on countries’ economic growth and well-being. For these

67 There is yet another interesting part of the debate between economists who favour institutional reforms for economic growth (see Sachs, 2005) and those who situate the lack of growth in the development apparatus itself (see Easterly, 2006).
5.3 Central and Local State Settings in Ghana

In principle, the state in Ghana since the 1980s comes in two forms: the central and local states. The central state comprises the executive portfolio of the presidency, the legislature, and the judiciary. Manned daily under the tutelage of the executive, its competence stretches to overall public policy and, therefore, the central state has overwhelming powers in the provision of public authority. The local state, on its part, has a legislature and an appointed executive with an intended aim of being the central regime’s version for communal matters. Most importantly, it must strive to go beyond
the reach of the central state in terms of catering for constituents’ socio-economic well-being. Its executive branch leads the enactment of public policy and provision of daily public goods deemed appropriate for their constituents. The central and local state are served by the civil and local government services respectively in the administration of the mandate of the state. As subgroups of the public service, they enjoy some special legal status of being directly responsible for everyday execution of the policies and programmes of the state with their remuneration paid out of the central state’s consolidated fund. Thus, these are mainly institutions that provide public goods as opposed to those established as commercial ventures (see the 1992 Constitution: Art. 191). Yet, this description presents only an idealized image of the state as one could find in the Global North. This is because unlike other multi-governance arrangements such as in Germany and the US (see e.g. Derlien & Peters, 2008, p. 10), the local state’s autonomy to make policy and financial decisions is severely curtailed.

The above prescriptions describe the principles based on the formal expectations of the state in the Weberian sense with a well-functioning bureaucracy including the ability to control the security and safety of its citizens. Thus, with some of these powers assigned to the local state, its ability to autonomously set out local policies seems promising for a developing country. In practice, however, the local political structures appear as nicely organized institutional arrangements whose execution follows entirely different paths. Indeed, the condescending role of the central state is more pronounced and mostly renders the supposed autonomy of its local counterpart redundant. These range from the central executive’s appointment and domination of its local counterpart to central civil servants’ command and control of their local counterparts. These influences become more evident in the provision of everyday public goods and services as well as in the institution-building processes within the local state. At the same time, the intervention of other non-state actors in the making of state authority gravely limits the very ideal nature of the state in both local and national political

68 These departments contrast with those that pursue profit motives. Even if they undertake income generating activities, revenues accruing from those activities must, in principle, be used in the interest of the public.

69 In Germany, for example, local councils are autonomous in hiring their own staff; national and state institutions are separated from local administration (see Haschke, 1997).
settings. To appreciate the actual enactment of local public authority in Ghana, a brief look at the formation of that state is very helpful.

Local political management and change formed an important part of the independence struggle against British colonial rule (Thomi, 1999, p. 104) so at the inception of self-rule in 1957, the country was administered by five regions: Ashanti, Eastern, Northern, Volta and Western. These regional-local political institutions were assigned local socio-economic development mandate and were led mainly by traditional authorities. This was especially the case in Ashanti where, given the power wielded by the Asantehene, he was the de facto head (see Rathbone, 2000, p. 10). An important facet in the early years of local state development was the competing interests between the regime and neo-traditional leaders; a tense situation that gave impetus to the former’s attempts to consolidate the state’s authority. These tensions led to re-demarcations and creation of new administrative regions in order to stifle the influence wielded by the neo-traditional authorities especially in Ashanti. In that respect, the Brong Ahafo Region was created in 1959 out of the Ashanti Region (see Rathbone, 2000, p. 85).

Through the 1960s, calls for more empowered sub-national governments led to the creation of the Central and Upper regions. The latter carved out of the Northern Region was further divided into two: Upper East and Upper West regions in 1983 while Greater Accra was carved out of its Eastern neighbour in 1982. However, these ten regional bodies composed of politico-administrative actors did not and still do not make autonomous local policy despite occupying the apex of the structure of local government. They play somewhat supervisory role since the so-called autonomous decision-making rests with the DAs. Again, the politico-administrative structures are still manned by few highly-trained public administrators given the dearth in training opportunities and programmes. This is in spite of attempts to ‘Africanize’ the public service by replacing expatriates with Ghanaian administrators in the post-independence era (see Ohemeng, 2014, p. 474).

That situation makes public servants even more susceptible to manipulation and control by political actors. What remains equally striking, as discussed in the empirical chapters, is that despite hesitation to formally include them, chiefs and traditional leaders remain very much part of the making of public authority in the local state (Lund, 2003, 2006; Lentz, 2006). Their contemporary roles in the local state are traced to their privileged status in society prior to colonial rule and the notion of modern nation-state.
5. Local Institution-Building and Development: The Discourse and Practice

5.3.1 Proto-local state in the pre-colonial era

Decentralized local governance in the geo-political precinct called Ghana predates colonial domination and, thus, inadmissible to say that local governance was entirely a colonial creation. Although written accounts are scant, patchy and fragmented, one could still describe the governance arrangements by extrapolating from the socio-political organizations that existed before colonial rule. Prominent socio-political formations including Ashanti, Dagomba, Akyem, Akuapim, Gonja, Anlo, and Denkyira were well-established and stronger nation-states that preceded colonial domination. This era saw kings and chiefs with politico-executive portfolios and competence for decisions ranging from legislative through juridical to religious and defence (see Owusu-Mensah, 2013, p. 34). Though this system operated in a more hierarchically-centralized arrangement, state functions were performed by lower level chiefs and their councils in their respective communities and were, in turn, overseen by the main chiefs or kings of their specific jurisdictions.

Worthy of note herein is that despite allowing for some representation and participation, the pre-colonial state was never democratic as some scholars (e.g. Frempong, 2006, p. 379; Owusu-Mensah, 2013, p. 34; Ratcliff, 1929, p. 82) want us to believe. The idea of democracy discussed herein is a modern concept with roots in the modern state and, based on the tenets of modern bureaucracy, comprises elected representatives in fixed and well-defined positions (see e.g. Eisenstadt, 2000). Indeed, going by our discussion early on, decentralized political institutions need not be democratic and those pre-colonial arrangements could not be any different. In addition, while the practice of representation and popular participation could describe processes of good governance, they do not necessarily translate to democratic institutions. The position of the kings, chiefs and their sub-chiefs was not formally fixed and the power structures were frequently contested. The undemocratic nature of these pre-colonial political structures is well-documented by Berry (1993) who shows how some political elites,

70 Formal education began only during the colonial regime and, therefore, descriptions of these political structures are largely unwritten. Existing accounts of the structure remain in the domain of oral traditions, journals of some travelling Arabic scholars (e.g. Ahmed ibn al Ya’qubi) and early accounts by some colonial anthropologists.
especially in Ashanti, continually manipulated existing customary arrangements and control over resources to specific kinsmen in order to curry favour with the latter and solidify the former’s power-bases (pp. 28–29). In effect even though their subjects could not question it, this political and relational flexibility is what critical observers refer to as corruption. What is important for our present concern is that despite its shortcomings and specific rationalities, the pre-colonial local state held visions of representation and participation which attracted the attention of the colonial structures. And it was upon this that the colonial programme of indirect rule thrived.

5.3.2 The local state in the pre- and post-independence eras

Early attempts to reform the local governance took place when the colonial government adapted and re-organized its own local administration around the existing chieftaincy regimes (Gilbert, Hugouennq & Vaillancourt, 2013, p. 107). The colonial administrative apparatus survived on the pre-existing local political structures: the indirect rule system with the involvement of few European meant the delegation of authority to native chiefs who exacted conformity to colonial directives with very little resistance. This arrangement was informed by the reticent attitude of the colonial regime and its preference for a centralized state as instrument of control instead of a decentralized system with local autonomy. To be sure, this local political arrangement was purposeful because the colonial administrations did not want local political interests to become the basis for independence struggle (Prud’homme, 2003, p. 18). Therefore, with the indirect rule arrangement, the colonial regime established Native Authorities (i.e. local governments) through a series of ordinances that somewhat formalized the pre-colonial political structures and chiefdoms. Yet, these authorities were not democratic since the representatives were handpicked to merely facilitate the tasks of colonial officials. These chiefs, in practice, had no direct involvement in the formal administration of the colony (see McLaughlin & Owusu-Ansah, 1994, p. 20; Rathbone, 2000, p. 11).71

71 Nonetheless, the organization of everyday life in the communities rested largely within the domain of the chiefs and their council of elders. Even so, it was possible for colonial officials to depose chiefs and install new ones based on some preferences by the colonial officials (see McLaughlin & Owusu-Ansah, 1994, pp. 17–19).
That the colonial administration showed no keen interest in developing an appropriate local administration was evident in how the colonial local governments were organized in two different strands. In that arrangement, the municipalities were governed by a set of ‘Municipal Council Ordinances’ while the countryside was administered by some enacted ‘Native Jurisdiction Ordinances’ (Rathbone, 2000, p. 11). Even in towns and cities such as Accra, Kumasi, Sekondi-Takoradi and Cape Coast, members were still appointed to the council until 1943 when the majority of the members were elected to the municipal councils (see Biswal, 1992, p. 34). In general, therefore, the British colonial administration did not change local political arrangements in any fundamental way. Rather, it persisted within the pre-colonial system of local government until the increasingly frustrated educated Africans became vocal and sought more democratic devolution and self-rule. It was at this point that some genuine democratic principles were introduced into the local state system. Thus, the processes leading to independence enabled local political institutions to take on a modern character.

Yet, in the immediate post-independence era, local political institutions and processes of representation aside from their varying degrees of devolved authority did not necessarily become democratic despite all the rhetoric around it. The regime’s preferences for centralized authority and appointment of sympathizers as well as the emergence of micro-nationalistic behaviour were very marked in the local political landscape. Subsequent mix of civilian and military regimes attempted reforms with decrees and Acts together with rhetoric to empower local people and institutions. But these frenetic programmes shrouded with the regimes’ preferences and survival tactics could rarely change the outlook and reach of the local state institutions (Thomi, 1999, p. 108; Couttolenc, 2012, p. 1). Another intriguing observation throughout this period is that while an ambitious 1961 legislation (i.e. the Local Government Act 54) sought to bar chiefs and traditional authorities from local political activities, it was less successful. At the time, Kwame Nkrumah sought to curtail the power wielded by the chiefs in order to consolidate the regime’s control over the cocoa economy which

72 The different actors with political interest had varied agendas in the new political order. Some of them were interested in disestablishing the political structures created by the colonial regime while others had interests in preserving specific aspects. Thus, regime control over the local state became paramount than genuine devolution.
the regime largely relied on (Crook, 1986, p. 100; Rathbone, 2000, p. 68). Conversely, other regimes even attempted to empower the chiefs in local politics because the former derived more support and legitimacy from the latter. 73

Still remarkable even in the current system of local politics is that chiefs and traditional authorities have cemented their roles in quasi-formal and even formal channels despite the existence of some legislative restrictions (as discussed in chapter six). Therefore, the fixation with the notion of local democracy in the present local political arrangement is very restricted because there are several limitations in that sense. These neo-traditional actors, together with central political interests, profoundly shape the making and reforms of the current local state. Another category of actors less emphasized in the political programmes of socio-economic transformation is public servants. Yet, as mentioned early on, these actors execute the everyday business of the state and influence state practice in myriad ways. Crucially, their attitude to work is very crucial to understanding the nature of the state in post-colonial settings.

5.3.3 Ghanaian public servants and their attitude to public work

The underlying rationale for particular attitudes towards the state or the public service especially in Ghana has long been an intriguing topic for scholars interested in public policy and administration. The general attitude of Ghanaian civil servants to work in a public office, as elsewhere in Africa, is often framed by indifference and perceptions of the institution as somewhat ‘alien’ that subsequently informs the lukewarm attitude towards the execution of state tasks (see Woode, 1998, p. 32). Sometimes, this attitude informs public servants’ expropriation of as much benefits as one could ever get from the institution which structure their daily lives (Gyekye, 2013, p. 165). These attitudes equally inform decisions about who enters the public

73 Nkrumah’s regime depended on the cocoa economy held in south-central Ghana where chiefs were powerful political actors. Thus, his policies of barring chiefs from local politics and redefining chieftaincy were attempts to control both the cocoa growing areas and suppress political dissent. In contrast, Busia’s government from 1969 to 1972 was popular in the cocoa growing areas. It was not surprising that his government brought back traditional authorities into local state administration because the regime derived enormous support from the chiefs.
service and the concomitant effect of low productivity; bearing in mind that some of these state actors had entered the public service without requisite skills and expertise needed to do their jobs. This was due in part to the arbitrary replacement of expatriate public servants with African administrators, few of whom had received requisite training (see Ohemeng, 2014, p. 474). A critical look at these patterns of behaviour to public work points radically to an attitude that mainly emerged from the public service of the colonial administration.

The task of the state as well as the behaviour and attitudes of public servants in almost all jurisdictions, necessarily have philosophical underpinnings. To understand this behavioural orientation, the seminal work of German administrative sociologist Lorenz von Stein is particularly helpful.74 Going beyond some of his contemporaries, von Stein provided a more elaborate and comprehensive approach that went beyond legislation and legal enactments of the state and highlighted how the actual practices and success in delivery of the state was contingent on public servants who perform the work of the state (1943, pp. 21–26). For von Stein, the delivery of public goods by the state entails a philosophical orientation by public servants who hold a commitment that goes beyond legislation to performing the actual task of administration (1943, p. 24). Von Stein’s position could broadly be translated into an attitude variable.75 More pointedly, it rehashes that clear distinction between the ideal expectations of the state and its actual practices. Yet, a major criterion for understanding the philosophical basis and underlying attitudes and behaviour of public servants is the type of state bureaucracy being considered. This criterion, thus, calls into question the Weberian ideal-type bureaucracy which underpins most discussions of the state. A brief deviation to a post-Weberian discussion will help us appreciate the philosophical basis of bureaucrats’ attitude to state work. Indeed, a

74 For detailed and apt discussion on the differences between Hegel and von Stein’s conception of the public service and public servants, see Bierschenk and Olivier de Sardan (2014, pp. 9–10). In the analysis of the Ghanaian public service, Von Stein’s philosophical insights on public work is preferred to Hegel’s given the latter’s rather biased, pessimistic and prejudicial views about social change in the Global South and Africa in particular.

75 Indeed, von Stein’s critique of state development in Africa was based on the premise that the character of the state could only emanate from public officials beyond the rules. Thus, until individuals took up the innate duty to act for the state, the tasks of state would not be delivered (1943, p. 17).
5.3 Central and Local State Settings in Ghana

key concern of institutional reforms in much of the Global South is an inherent efficiency requirement which is coterminous with the notion of rational bureaucracy of the modern state. Weber (1978, pp. 956–968) saw modern rationalized institutions as those that aim at ideal-typical characteristics of efficiency and technically superior with calculable outcomes. Thus, formal rules and processes are rather seen as primary.

However, in post-colonial state settings including Ghana, the Weberian notion of the modern state and its institutional requirements is nearly non-existent (see Herbst, 1993, p. 5; Rottenburg, 2009, p. 63). Therefore, these states need qualification to wit their actual practice. Contemporary scholarship has drawn attention to analysis of particular types of state bureaucracy which is helpful in understanding public servants and their work. One such approach is the post-Weberian critique (Migdal & Schlichte, 2005) which helps us to go further to see how even within particular states, there are differences between central and local bureaucrats in their approach to the ideal-typical and everyday actual practices of the state. This post-Weberian approach to the study of the state, therefore, suggests a movement away from Weber’s Eurocentric notion of the state as an entity which claims legitimacy to the monopolistic use of physical force when exerting compliance in its territory (see Migdal & Schlichte, 2005, p. 15). For the authors, states have evolved differently under varied conditions and it may be inappropriate to apply labels based on some mismatch between Weber’s ideal-type and actual practice in different contexts. Such normative labels about what and how the state’s relations to society should be are not very helpful in the analysis of everyday processes of the state in the lives of constituents.76 For Migdal and Schlichte, analysis of the state should go beyond the image to everyday practices that shape the image in order to see the state as:

76 It should, however, be pointed out that concepts such as quasi-states, soft states, and weak states may not be very elegant categories but they have some analytical value. In fact, given that post-colonial states have in principle not provided a different definition to the Weberian model introduced during colonial rule, the use of these concepts may not be out of place. Therefore, going beyond the critical notion of seeing the state as an effect of practice, these concepts help measure deviations from this very definition of state as used in post-colonial situations. What is pertinent to this study is to find out those actors and programmes that support this definitions and how that manifests in everyday life of the state.
“a field of power marked by the use of violence and shaped by 1) the image of a coherent, controlling organization in a territory, which is a representation of people bounded by that territory, and 2) the actual practices involving those staffing its multiple parts and those they engage in their roles as officials” (2005, p. 15).

This approach makes a crucial distinction between the ideal expectations of public officials and citizens about what the state is supposed to be doing on the one hand, and what the state actually does with those expectations as expressed in the numerous interactions between public officials and their constituents in everyday performance of those ideals, on the other. Thus, it is only by conceiving the state this way that one could see its two faces namely: “its unity as a singular state and its diversity in actual boundary construction” (Migdal & Schlichte 2005, p. 14).

The relevance of this conception of the state in relation to analysis of state institution-building is that it helps us to move beyond the image of the state which is already formed by all the actors, whether positive or negative (i.e. seeing the state), to the everyday performance of the state by public officials in relation to the services provided to the populace (i.e. doing the state). This discussion by Migdal and Schlichte (2005) is extremely helpful in relating state actors’ performance with reforms. In particular, there are attitudinal dimensions of the work of bureaucrats (coupled with their self-interests) that may enhance or inhibit institutional development notwithstanding how coherent the development policy in that domain is. More importantly, the attitude of Ghanaian bureaucrats to the state, is very illustrative because it tends to constitute a clear break between public and private actors and subsequently creates a sharp distinction between superior and privileged public bureaucrats and their inferior local clients. It is generally thought that they constructed this superior status from the colonial ad-

77 Although the bureaucrats in terms of hierarchy may comprise “power bureaucrats” (Bierschenk & Olivier de Sardan, 2014, p. 23), street-level bureaucrats or interface bureaucrats to describe the various ranks and degree to which these public officials have contact with their citizens and clients (see Lipsky, 1980; Crook & Ayee, 2006), they are generally conceived as representing the state and are treated as such by their clients.
5.3 Central and Local State Settings in Ghana

ministrators (Olivier de Sardan, 2014, pp. 411–415). This attitude also pertains elsewhere in post-colonial settings (see e.g. Alavi, 1972). This behaviour was deemed necessary because it was always an integral part of the bureaucratic apparatus of any modern state (Max Weber, 1978, p. 959). Though a redefinition of the role of bureaucrats was required in the post-colonial setting, those behaviour patterns did not disappear but rather have perpetuated the enduring perception of people towards the work and actors of the state, both national and local.

As an apparatus of colonial domination, Kwame Gyekye discusses the subsequent behavioural and attitudinal responses towards the Ghanaian public service by referring to the Akan expression called “aban adwuma” which literally translates as “government work” or “public enterprise”; an expression used by people in drawing contrast between private and public concerns (2013, p. 165). In the former, there is emphasis on how the owner pays attention to their enterprise and the staff in order to generate maximum profits compared with the latter with which the workers might be less bothered since the gains or losses may not in any way affect their personal entitlement because such proceeds, it is believed, go to someone else, i.e. the state. Using insights from a well-known novel No Longer at Ease to link the Ghana case to Nigeria’s experience of public service work, Gyekye notes that:

When the hero was asked “Have they given you a job yet?” (…) in Nigeria the government was ‘they’. It had nothing to do with you or me. It was an alien institution and people’s business was to get as much from it as they could without getting into trouble” (2013, p. 165).

78 On the state in post-colonial Pakistan and Bangladesh, Alavi (1972, pp. 59–81) analyses the characteristics and dominant role of bureaucratic elites in national level decision-making. He argues that the post-colonial state took over an overdeveloped bureaucracy that was designed along the need of the colonial regime. Alavi opines that the colonial regime developed a powerful bureaucratic and military apparatus that helped them to subordinate the local people and that structure did not change even after independence.

79 Following Gyekye’s argument, Agbakoba extends the Ghanaian discussion to the Nigerian context especially among the Yoruba where expressions about the public service are quite similar to that of the Akan. Here, the modern state and bureaucrats are seen as alien vis-à-vis traditional African culture. The public service is seen as “white man’s work” re-invoking its alien character as an imposition by an alien colonial power (2010, pp. 3–5).
Gyekye believes that, the Ghanaian and Nigerian experiences emanated from their negative and skeptical relationship that emerged from the colonial administration. The negative perceptions of the colonial regime made the latter appear alien and, thus, referred to as ‘they’; an attitude that was carried into the post-colonial state to the extent that people tend to see public service work as undesirable of their full attention and commitment. This attitude, for Gyekye, contrasts with the public’s conception of neo-traditional authorities, “the chiefs who are seen as us and not they because the chiefs are not considered by their subjects as objects having no reference to themselves personally” (2013, pp. 165–166). Thus, for most people in the Ghanaian setting, as elsewhere in the Global South, the state appears to offer nothing beyond an official job, a fixed salary and the expropriation of the perquisites thereof which stand in stark contrast to how von Stein (1943) saw as the work of the state and bureaucrats.

Those attitudes towards the colonial and the post-colonial public service, further compound the make-up of the state itself; a multi-ethnic nation-state with loyalties resting with their neo-traditional polities instead of the state (Gyekye, 2013, p. 166). Consequently, public officials are frequently caught between a neo-traditional arrangement that is very personal and fluid and a modern state that is based on impersonal application of rules. The challenge with this double allegiance in the provision of state services is fittingly expressed by the concept of the “two publics” within the post-colonial state (Ekeh, 1975, p. 92). Indeed, the dilemmas for public officials is how to confront the demands of neo-traditional interests while attempting to apply the rules of the modern state unequivocally. Beyond its dismal performance,80 the overarching implication is that attempts to build new and reform old institutions of the state are contested by this complex mix of ideals, expectations and attitudes to the work of the state. This is very much reflected in the political programmes mooted by international development agencies.

80 Other work attitudes include staff absenteeism from duty without permission, non-use of sanctions and endemic corruption in the public service. For a discussion on this, see Olivier de Sardan (2014, p. 413).
5.3.4 Local institutional reforms and nomenclature of the current local state

The current local state project was embarked upon in 1988 at the behest of the World Bank and IMF (see Gilbert, et al., 2013, p. 109; Crawford, 2008, p. 242). This project was precipitated by a period of economic stagnation in which institutional reforms were offered as the solution. Although the Rawlings regime’s reluctance to the programme was initially quite obvious (Mohan & Stokke, 2000, p. 254), the ambitious attempt to devolve competence and resources to the local state with major legislation as well as the subsequent creation of 110 DAs—out of an existing 65—were all conceived as the regime’s commitment to honour its promise of grassroots participation in local development.

Going by the 1992 Constitution of the Fourth Republic and the Local Government Act of 1993 (Act 462), public authority in the local state is delivered through three main institutions namely the Regional Coordinating Council (RCC) at the apex, the District Assembly (DA) at the intermediate level, and sub-district structures (i.e. sub-metropolitan district councils, town-zonal-urban-area councils, and unit committees) at the bottom (see Figure 6).


82 Ghana has had four Republics since independence: first (1960-1966); second (1969–1972); third (1979–1981); and fourth (1993 to date). So far, there have been six governments in the Fourth Republic.
In terms of administration and management, the Ministry of Local Government and its under-secretariat (i.e. the Local Government Service) are central bodies mandated to provide technical support and oversight responsibility for the local administrations. The main role of the regional body, RCC based on institutional changes in 2003 and 2009 (see Acts 656 & LI 1961 respectively in Table 5) appears quite redundant. It comprises mainly deconcentrated administrative departments with no direct policy-making competence. Indeed, although found at the apex of the structure, the RCC merely links the central regime to the DAs (Kumi-Kyereme et al., 2006, p. 62).

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### Table 5. Key Reforms of the Ghanaian Local State since 1988

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Reform Type</th>
<th>Key Legislation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>Local Government Reform</td>
<td>Local Government Law (PNDCL 207)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>Civil Service Reform, Local Government Reform</td>
<td>Civil Service Law (PNDCL 327), Local Government Act (Act 462)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>Local Government Reform</td>
<td>Local Government Service Act (Act 656)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Local Government Reform</td>
<td>LG (Est.) (Amend.) Instruments for AMA, LI 1804; KMA, LI 1805; SAEMA, LI 1806</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Local Government Reform</td>
<td>Local Government (Dept. of District Assemblies) (Commence) Inst. (LI 1961)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Local Government Reform</td>
<td>LG (Urban Councils, (Est.) Inst. (LI 1967); LG Creation of New Dist. Inst. (LI 1983)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author’s construct based on selected legislation. *Note.* LG: Local Government.

Again, while it seeks to monitor and supervise planning activities and the general performance of its DAs, that role appears to duplicate the task performed by the local government ministry and the local government service.

In addition, its council is composed mainly by central government appointees including the regional minister and deputies; all chief executives of the DAs in the region; two chiefs appointed from the Regional House of...
5. Local Institution-Building and Development: The Discourse and Practice

Chiefs; presiding members of the DAs and regional heads of the deconcentrated departments. Thus, led mainly by several handpicked actors, this political institution holds no direct democratic legitimacy (see Gilbert et al., 2013, p. 119) while its administrative functions in the local public policy arena appear increasingly unclear. In fact, a curious look at how new local political institutions emerge gives credence to assertions that they are used for patronage demands at the expense of genuine decentralized development policy-making (Gilbert et al., 2013; Green, 2010). Indeed, the DAs promise of poverty reduction and development in rural areas remains only remotely plausible.

Yet, these tactics from the regime have to be put in context. To international development actors, while appreciating the shortcomings of local bureaucracies, the normative ideas of these institutional reforms are often based on questions about what process can be achieved in an optimal manner and how much will be the outcome. With these assumptions, the question of local state and regime interpretations and reactions to the institutional changes do not come up at all or are ignored. These concerns have been articulated by Hirschmann who sees such reform efforts as being overly concerned with “results-oriented” and “process-oriented” approaches to the neglect of local socio-cultural expressions of institutional changes (2011, p. 418).

5.3.5 The District Assembly: composition and actors

Legislatively, autonomous decision-making in the local state rests with the District Assembly (DA). The term district in the Local Government Act, 462 designates a geo-political precinct over which the political institution

83 This persistence of chiefs in the local state points to their enduring legacy as power wielders especially in areas where the state is unable to fully provide public authority. These neo-traditional actors become influential in the co-production of public service (see Lund, 2006).

84 Hirschmann thinks that the challenge of institutional change is more complex than the “hybridity” of traditional versus modern. He suggests “tribidity” as a more appropriate concept in understanding the complexity in institutional reforms in the Global South (2011, p. 418).
called the DA exercises control. The DA is, thus, the highest political authority in a district. Again, since the regional bodies lack policy-making competence, the notion of local government is coterminous with the DA. The DAs in Ghana are classified into three based on demographic and urbanization indicators. Presently, the three types and their populations are given as: four-tier Metropolitan Assembly (6) with population of more than 250,000; three-tier Municipal Assembly (56), and District Assembly (154) with populations of more than 95,000 and up to 75,000 people respectively. Taken together, there were 216 DAs as of 2012 marking a dramatic increase from 110 in 1993, 139 in 2004 and 170 in 2008 (Appendix II gives a summary of the types of DAs). Yet, as will be pointed out later, these changes neither relate to any qualitative improvements in local public goods nor to the participatory development rhetoric.

As an autonomous political institution, the DA has two strands of authority, at least in principle, namely the General Assembly (GA) and the district administration (executive). The GA has a four-year term and it is led by a Presiding Member (PM) who is elected to a renewable two-year term. It is a semi-elected body composed mostly of elected representatives (70%) while the rest (30%) are appointed by the President. These legislators are collectively called Assembly Members or Assemblymen and Assemblywomen. Yet, going by the dominant rhetoric of decentralized local democracy, this institution is still undemocratic even if representative. At best it is quasi-democratic because the President handpicks party loyalists to ward off any resistance to the regime’s programmes and interests. Again, the GA does not present any major formidable alternative to local policy-making. Indeed, this body and its leadership functions largely on honorary and ceremonial basis (Thomi, 2000a, p. 102; Gilbert et al., 2013, p. 121). In fact,

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85 Other eponyms to the DA based on population and degree of urbanization are: Metropolitan Assembly and Municipal Assembly.
86 Sizes of the substructures: sub-metropolitan district councils may have the size of ordinary districts i.e. 75,000 inhabitants or more; urban councils found in ordinary districts are settlements above 15,000 people; town councils found in ordinarily districts assemblies and metropolitan assemblies have populations between 1,500 and 5000; and zonal councils situated in municipal assemblies have 3,000 inhabitants. A unit committee, coterminous with an electoral area, has between 500–1,500 inhabitants.
87 Members of Parliament (MP) are non-voting members in the General Assembly in their respective districts.
although the GA on few occasions presents some contestations, it mostly rubber-stamps policies and programmes designed by the executive strand.

Actual policy-making power within the DAs is rather held by central government and its representatives who run the administration. The everyday executive and administrative duties within the DA are undertaken by the Executive Committee which is chaired by the District Chief Executive (DCE).\(^{88}\) Although the DCE’s position is not elective, he is seen as the most powerful figure in the district with political and executive portfolios. Even the head of the civil service strand in the DA is secretary to the DCE and, thus, pointing to the privileged position of the latter. The Executive Committee is at the helm of affairs in all sub-committees of the DA such as development planning, justice and security, finance and general administration and executes the development plans of the substructures. As representative of the central regime and the automatic chair of the general administration, the DCE wields considerable power over the DA. Indeed, the position of the DCE coupled with the support of the appointee Assembly Members (i.e. 30% of the DA) makes the DA incapable of challenging any decision by the Executive Committee (Crawford, 2008, p. 242). With these resources and support at their disposal, the DCE could strategically co-opt opponents through the allocation of development projects to their wards and win needed support for votes on the regime’s preferred programmes in the local state.

Nonetheless, this unmatched power of the DCE becomes the source of tension between regular Assembly Members and the executive arm of the DA. The regular Assembly Members with their honorary and part-time status tend to feel dominated by the executive (Thomi, 2000a, p. 102) which becomes a source of persistent conflict in the local state. These tensions and struggles feed the negative perceptions held by constituents and actors in central state departments within the districts who view the DA as unnecessarily party-politically charged despite official framing of the structure as an arena for local socio-economic development.\(^{89}\)

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88 Title designating executive head of a district; Metropolitan and Municipal Chief Executives are eponyms for their respective heads. The DCE is appointed for four years by the President but must be approved by two-thirds of the Assembly Members.

89 Attempts to integrate the deconcentrated departments into local state administration have met a resolved opposition from different professional groups in the health, education and forestry services.
5.3.6 Development functions of the District Assembly

The DA together with its substructures is the principal entities for local development as set out in the Local Government Act, 462. Its development planning must wit: regulating infrastructure and certain economic activities, providing local public goods and services, environment and sanitation management. They prepare their own development plans and budgets and submit them to the central government for approval. To perform this development function, the DA receives central government remittance viz. the District Assemblies’ Common Fund (DACF) and more recently, transnational funds. More crucial on paper, the DA’s ability to generate enough revenue internally to meet the development plans and needs of constituents is fundamental to its creation. Yet, it is remarkable to note that this is more an ideal than a reality. Several DAs tend to depend only on the meagre remittances from the DACF (see Ayee, 2012, p. 635). As I will show in the empirical chapters, the regimes strategically create new local institutions without recourse to any viable revenue consideration on their supposed development tasks of the latter.

The role of the central government in setting the local development agenda is also questionable. In principle, the regime through central state departments only provides a legal framework for the local state to express its competence. However, in practice as supported by my empirical evidence, the quality of local decisions and how they should be approached tend to reflect central government preferences. This is facilitated by the leaders of the DA and regional bodies who are handpicked protégés of the regime. Therefore, the notion of autonomously-derived local development goals appears rhetorical. Another crucial point regards the role of the local population in setting the local development agenda. The literature often mixes this role with the overall decentralization project but the two have to be separated. DAs are mandated to delegate any of their functions to the substructures or any other body or person that they may deem fit and despite these substructures lacking independent legal status (see Gilbert et al., 2013, p. 119; Ayee, 2000, p. 138), this does not contradict the idea of decentralization. At least on paper, this process is followed to the letter. However, the exact rationale for these sub-district political institutions to engender local socio-economic development is more problematic.
Despite being analytically separate, the idea underpinning the decentralization project in Ghana was founded on the notion of participatory development starting from the communal structures of the local state. That premise is heralded by the 1992 Constitution and well-articulated by international development agencies. The idea behind this thinking is to deepen local democracy through enhanced local participation. That is expected to render local political institutions accountable and responsive to the needs of their constituents (Crook, 2003, p. 79; Crawford, 2009, p. 60). In that framework, sub-district structures (sub-metro district councils; town-zonal-urban-area councils; and unit committees) and their actors (Assembly Members and their unit committees) primarily lead the agenda setting process. As local arena for popular participation in decision making, these political institutions and their actors undertake communal taxation and source for funds for local development by, for example, contacting philanthropists and well-to-do natives of these communities. What is ultimate, these lower political institutions must make local development plans which inform their district development plans.

In practice, however, that ideal occurs in a more contrived fashion because the selection of the policy actors and the goal setting agenda are manipulated by the regime. Indeed, as the evidence in the empirical chapters show, most of the sub-district political structures are dominated by political appointees. The legislative rationale behind those appointments is to select individuals with specific expertise (e.g. educationists, lawyers, and engineers) that elected DA members may not readily possess. Conversely, only political party youths and those close to the regime and who are known in Ghanaian political parlance as ‘party foot-soldiers’ are rather selected without consideration for expertise. Of course, as mentioned earlier, the idea of local democracy is not directly linked to local autonomy and again, it does not guarantee equal rights; a major issue that is frequently overlooked in most studies. Nonetheless, these appointments go beyond the taken-for-granted notion of local popular participation because they do not
reflect any specific local development priorities apart from helping to sustain existing patronage structures. In fact, the appointments have been designed as avenues for rewarding sympathizers of the regime (Crawford, 2008, p. 252; Ayee, 2012, p. 637). Most importantly, these political institutions have not only become revenue collection units for the DAs, the presence of these carefully selected actors also ensures that the regime’s interests in the local state are met at the expense of the notion of participatory development in the local state.

All in all, a general view on the Ghanaian experience is that despite suggestions from some scholars (e.g. von Braun & Grote, 2002, p. 79) that overall, the aims of decentralization have been achieved notwithstanding some persistent problems, other researchers (e.g. Thomi, 2000b, p. 263; Crawford, 2009, p. 77) have observed that the impact of decentralized political institutions on the quality of local public goods remains generally restricted and local residents believe they are poorly served. Beyond the decentralized political institutions, researchers generally argue that the notion of democratic participation of local actors that may engender socio-economic development still remains very problematic (e.g. Crawford, 2008, p. 255; Jütting et al., 2005, p. 640; Crook, 2003, p. 80). What frequently appears in the extant literature as explanation to these challenges suggests that the local institutional change is embedded in central state preferences and that the regime benefits from that state of affairs by purposefully designing the institutional arrangements in that manner. Yet, this study pushes the domain of analysis further to include the interests and preferences of international development actors in the entire change process and how the local and central are themselves embedded in the international development system. In addition, the agency of actors with local political interests in the entire change process helps to clearly articulate those dynamics.

5.4 Concluding Remarks

In the discussion above, we have pointed out the proclivity for international development actors to initiate institutional change programmes without recourse to the facts and contradictions that confound their very assumptions of those change processes. A critical perspective to the analysis of popular participation in the making of local governments should, therefore, move beyond local level constraints. Popular participation in the DA system is
5. Local Institution-Building and Development: The Discourse and Practice

one pillar upon which the development prospects of Ghana were premised. The fact that decentralized authority and institutional reforms in the local state have not yielded their stated outcomes for nearly three decades suggests that larger political processes and interests are at stake and that there are much wider constraints to those found within the local political structures per se. The changes in local political and administrative structures as well as the actual participatory challenges speak to broader factors including local political interests, the regime’s strategic interests and domination of the DAs, as well as rationalities and preferences of global development actors who frame and support the participatory development goals.

In spite of the skepticism expressed in the empirical findings vis-à-vis local political change and socio-economic development, the international development system and the central regime still promote that connection between local institution-building, local democracy and economic prosperity. This is particularly illustrated by the review report on Ghana’s decentralization project which still asserts that the programme remains critical to the democratization and poverty reduction prospects (see MLGRD, 2010, p. 6). More critically, it appears that the regime uses the very notion of decentralized political institutions, which is possible in any type of unelected regime to restrict the idea of participatory democracy and development. Despite the orthodoxy and rhetoric, there exists a cycle of institution-building shrouded with interests and different rationalities of the actors for local policy and institutional change. These issues are discussed in the empirical chapters that follow.
6. Reforming the Local Public Administration: Actors, Structures and Institutions

Local state institution-building entails policies and programmes that are designed and implemented by several and differentiated actors who have their own interests, orientations and preferences. Some intriguing questions that emerge in the analysis of institutional reforms include: in this complex institutional environment, how do the multiple actors interact? How do the actors employ several strategies to manipulate the structures to accomplish both institutional and individual interests and outcomes? The discussion in this chapter, thus, reflects the issues raised in the theoretical and analytical framework section; the multiplicity of actors refers to the international development system through which institutional ideas diffuse into different domains as argued by John Meyer and Brian Rowan (1991), Meyer (2010) as well as Paul DiMaggio (1988) who uses the concept of “institutional entrepreneurs” to analyse agency of actors in initiating change. This concept is used to explain the behaviour of local political actors in confronting the normative hegemonic structures in their institutional environment. In particular, the chapter’s argument is consonant with the actor-centered institutionalist approach by Renate and Mayntz Fritz Scharpf (1995) and also Fritz Scharpf (1997), which discusses the interests of institutional actors in the context of policy-making and institutional reform.

The aim of this chapter is, therefore, twofold: to shed light on the actors of the local state institution-building processes, and to point out their behavioural preferences and interests in the institutional change enterprise. Thus, first, the chapter briefly introduces the actors involved in the institutional development and reforms of the local public administration namely local bureaucrats and politicians; central bureaucrats and politicians; and transnational actors of the international development system. The institutional structures that guide their activities are also explored. Second, based on the multi-level analytical approach in the conceptual framework, the chapter discusses the policy-making interactions between local policy actors (i.e. bureaucrats and local politicians) in their performance of everyday local state activities and institutional reforms. The relevance of bureaucrats
6. Reforming the Local Public Administration

to the local institutional development is explored in the context of their attitudes to work for the state in general and also with other public officials of higher hierarchical standing in particular. The different sets of competence of these actors, the limits to their influence and their manipulations by higher political actors are analysed to wit the extent to which they shape local institutional changes.

6.1 Actors, Structures and Competence in Local Public Policy and Change

The idea of institution-building and change is not new; in fact, it is often conceived as being “old as the notion of development policy” itself (see Neubert, 2015, p. vii) and institution-building processes remain an indistinguishable part of public policy. Indeed, public policy itself entails series of political projects that are designed and implemented by political and administrative actors with the aim of remedying particular public problems (see Peters, 2013, p. 4). Conceived this way, public policy processes involve interaction between actors with different preferences. Yet, institution-building arguments informed by neo-liberal thinking are often presented as if public policy actors are a homogenous, rational-actor group seeking to bring about desired results with the public interests in mind. This is, however, not the case because public policy actors are numerous and hold varied rationalities (e.g. economic, political, etc.) and they pursue these interests within their domains of influence. To be sure, the actors are local, national and international in character with differentiated interests and competence. The institutional structure for local political change, on its part, is often discussed as entailing three levels: the central ministries comprising experts for policy formation and evaluation; regional coordinating bodies with actors for supervising and providing expertise on district bodies under their jurisdiction; and the local political structure (i.e. the DAs) where some supposedly ‘autonomous’ local policy formation and implementation takes place.

At its very best, neo-liberal thinking assumes a simplified one-dimensional type of agency which roughly describes actors as oriented towards material gain and driven by self-interest and competition between specific individuals and institutions. It does not recognize the existence of different rationalities and how actors construct their own reality based on their way of reasoning.
Not only could one already point out the overlapping issues on policy formation at the first and third levels of that categorization, it also appears very simplified. More conspicuous is that even at this stage, the influential policy actors such as neo-traditional actors and external development actors are overlooked in the discussion as active participants in the policy processes of the local state. Thus, the categories above are not helpful in the analysis of local political reforms and change. Although the local policy environment has clearly defined competence, actors with local political interest are several with different rationalities. They range from DA representatives, bureaucrats with political ambitions through to the central regime’s regional representatives. Also included are members of civil society and media who are often co-opted by specific regimes to defend and represent the latter’s policies. Therefore, there are several subtleties than could easily be discerned. Analytically, four categories of actors with their subcategories are delineated. They include: a) political actors at the local level and neo-traditional authorities; b) bureaucrats at the local state level; c) central and regional bodies comprising bureaucrats and politicians; and d) external development actors. These categories and their specific competence are examined from the bottom of the policy-making structure upwards.92

6.1.1 Local political actors and legislative competence

In the districts where DAs exercise control, local politicians comprise elected and appointed Assembly Members (also Assemblymen or women) including the DCE who has both political and executive powers. Neo-traditional actors also constitute an important part of the appointees because they are barred from contesting elections for political positions. But that appears a contrived legislative provision because they often appoint themselves to the DA as part of the offer from the President. The influence of these neo-traditional actors, who are chiefly groups within the local state, on public policy stems from the power they wield especially in areas where the state’s reach is less profound (see Lund, 2006, p. 690). Beyond co-production of public authority, they retain local political interest and are active participant

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92 Even these categories are for analytical purpose and still not exhaustive. There are other influential actors such as religious authorities and local entrepreneurs who shape the local development agenda to a large extent.
6. Reforming the Local Public Administration

in the formal state administration and the development process in general. What is even more striking is that, although their membership in the local state is organized mostly through direct appointments and thus seen lacking as political skills, these neo-traditional actors sometimes enter the top echelons of the local state decision-making and authority structures:

“(…) you see, when we first went there, by then the former Chief Executive had been there for two years so he had a little experience because he met an experienced PM [Presiding Member] and he was ready to listen to the PM (…) but after two years, the PM was changed and the one who came [took over] was a chief, Nana Owusu Piasah II (…) he did not know the concept of the Assembly. Moreover, instead of him to be in the Main Assembly, he was assigned an office at Prempeh Assembly Hall [far from the Assembly’s premises] so he lost the elections after two years and the previous one [his predecessor] was re-elected (…)”93 (Interviewee #1: Assemblyman, Asokwa Sub-metro Council, Kumasi, 02.10.2013).

Though under constant scrutiny, some of them skillfully combine their traditional privileges with political interest in local administration. In addition, the neo-traditional actors could create parallel institutional structures in the local state institutional reform and development processes:

“(…) I have five elected unit committee members for the electoral area (…) but you see they do not get any incentive, therefore, they are dormant; they do not work because they cannot get funds to move from community to community getting their issues across. The chiefs are also a hindrance to all this (…) when I came [to office], I took them [unit committee members] to the chiefs and the chiefs said they [also] have their own [unit] committee members (…) so what I had to do was to ask them to bring their committee workers to join the [official] unit committee members so that they could work together. So that is how it is now organized but because of that, the unit committee is not active (…)” (Interviewee #1: Assemblyman, Asokwa Sub-metro Council, Kumasi, 02.08.2013).

“(…) chiefs also have their representatives in the Assembly (…) they can contact the paramount chief [that] oh we need a chief for this session this time to advance the issues of the chiefs when we are discussing at the Assembly (…) it is not the Assembly that has to specifically select chiefs to represent other chiefs; it is in the domain of the chiefs themselves to pick (…)” (Interviewee #2: Assemblyman, Busa Zonal Council, Wa, 31.07.2013).

93 Informants hinted that already in 2012, there were plans to unseat the PM based on some perceived incompetence and his manipulation by the executive bureaucracy given that he was a government appointee and that he refused to provide the necessarily checks to the powers of the MCE. Yet, it was remarkable that a neo-traditional actors have permeated the leadership of the districts.
Thus, neo-traditional actors are not just passive observers in the formal state and its administration neither are they alternative actors; they are active participants in its governance and reforms. Their influence is not only expressed through membership of the municipal government but also from the periphery. In formal public gatherings of the DA, neo-traditional actors are often asked to pour libation (a cultural prayer) before the events begins. Again as custodians of land, the DA has to seek their permission before specific development projects could be erected on plots of land within their traditional areas. Most importantly, these neo-traditional actors frequently intervene and influence the leadership of the DA by lobbying the central government. A case in point is when chiefs of the Kumasi Traditional Council in July 2016 petitioned the President to dismiss the chief executive of the KMA over what they termed “gross insubordination” to the traditional council (Awuah, 2016).

The chiefs vehemently rejected an apology from the chief executive and the ensuing confrontation with threats led to the resignation of the latter (see Image 1). These actions have reinvigorated the debate about the relevance of neo-traditional actors in local state administration and the larger development agenda as well as new questions about legitimacy-wielding institutions in the local state.

Image 1: A Depiction of the Kumasi Mayor’s Apology to the Local Chiefs. © StarrFM Online, 09.07.2016.
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As regards local priority setting, the supposed competence of local political actors entails deliberative and legislative powers (see Art. 16–17 of Act 462). They deliberate on policies and programmes of socio-economic importance to constituents. They do this through sub-committees (e.g. justice and security, social welfare, works, etc.) on which DA members with specific expertise serve. By some strategic design, it was anticipated that elected DA members may not readily possess skills needed to serve on these sub-committees. Therefore, their appointed counterparts were expected to make up for this limitation and, together with technical bureaucrats, lead the policy process in the sub-committees. Local policies from the sub-committees are then discussed and put to a vote at the main meeting of the DA—the General Assembly (GA)—before the policies become legally-binding by-laws. More telling for elected Assembly Members is that, depending on the type of DA and the location of their specific wards, they may serve on committees in all or some of the sub-district structures (unit committees; town/zonal councils; and sub-metro district councils hereinafter sub-metro councils) and still join the GA for legally-binding decision-making. Thus, their role in practice is a full-time job than the stipulated honorary status. In principle, the policy competence of these actors should stop after legislating on the policies. However, most of the local politicians often seek to take on executive competence as well.

6.1.2 The executive and local bureaucrats

As unelected public officials, the work of bureaucrats is based on the promise of meritocracy in the general sense. Thus, bureaucrats in the various departments of the DA and the so-called deconcentrated departments influence local public policy primarily when their technical expertise is needed. For action on everyday policies and programmes, bureaucrats found in the administration of the DA are those directly required. They provide technical and specific assistance in planning, budget, finance, sanitation, physical infrastructure, etc. to the various sub-committees of the DA. The competence of these bureaucrats is mainly executive; they implement everyday provision of public goods under the Executive Committee which has both political and executive competence (see Art. 19–25 of Act 462). Its chair, the DCE holds the most important portfolio in the DA and leads implementation of programmes. All sub-committees are subsumed under the Executive Committee which has both political and executive competence.
Committee which reviews all proposed policies before they are sent to the GA to be voted on.

As the main structure for implementing local policies, one-third of the members in the DA is elected to the Executive Committee but the reality is that the DCE is able to maneuver and select those who sit on the committee. Some DA members are co-opted with patronage favours to support the committee with their votes that are required for policies that go to the GA. Even elected vis-à-vis appointed Assembly Members who serve on the Executive Committee tend to have favourable interpretation of policy priorities compared with their regular colleagues. In that sense, while the GA claims to hold excessive legislative powers on local policy, it is rather the Executive Committee that ‘runs the show’ in the DA.

6.1.3 Regional and central actors: politicians and bureaucrats

The actors at the regional level have ambivalent roles which are less cut from their counterparts in central state departments. While resembling the actors in the second category described above with largely unelected appointees including ministers and their deputies, and chiefs, the regional level actors have no policy-making competence. The main competence of this political structure may be to oversee the tasks of their counterparts in the DAs (Art. 140–146 of Act 462). Yet, these representatives of the regime rarely disagree on public policy issues and thereby rendering the role of the regional actors less required. Again, it is also not uncommon for central government politicians to confront and threaten political actors in the DAs without recourse to regional political actors. These disregards are often taken for granted because they both represent the incumbent regime as occurred between a central politician and his local counterpart in 2013.94 Again, it is worth illustrating the importance of neo-traditional actors as influential policy actors at this structure as was pointed out by a senior regional administrator:

“(…) the chieftaincy institutions, etc. they all have a role to play e.g. social mobilization and other things so certainly you should know how to relate with them and

94 In August 2013, a local government minister threatened to sanction the Presiding Member of the KMA who refused to sign a document because it had not be approved by the GA.
bring them on board to participate in every activity that the region or the district is undertaking (...) because they [chieftaincy institutions] are down there with the people and they also serve as a miniature court; they handle cases and the rest so when issues come we don’t leave them out (...). Let me give an example of Obuasi; it is a municipality but there is no paramount seat there so when you are doing any national activity, for example, Farmer’s Day, you go looking for the paramount chief who oversees the area (...) there the paramount chief is at Fomena so we rather go to Fomena (...)” (Interviewee #3: senior administrative officer, RCC Ashanti, Kumasi, 28.07.2014).

From their frontier of control on the margins of the local state, these neo-traditional actors shape the conduct of public administration to a greater extent as, for example, in the land management and conflict issues (Ubink, 2008, p. 176).95 Regional level bureaucrats supposedly supervise the policy, planning and development programmes of the DAs. In addition, the bureaucracy is supposed to regulate the movement of civil servants in the departments of the DAs but it is not uncommon for central bureaucrats in the local government ministry and the secretariat of the local government service to initiate transfers of local civil servants in the districts without any clear recourse to the competence of the regional bodies. This ambiguity and confusion was clearly spelt-out by some of the informants. Thus, while the development policy competence of the regional level actors is unclear and still overlaps with that of central state actors (and the institutions including the local government ministry, the secretariat of the local government service, the National Development Planning Commission (NDPC) and the District Assemblies Common Fund Authority (DACFA)), the two sets of actors shape policy-making processes of the DAs and even decide for the latter what policy is deemed relevant. A case in point is when the local government ministry and the secretariat of the local government service procured bulldozers and other heavy-duty machinery for the DAs in third the quarter of 2013. Although some DAs saw the action as violating their legislative competence, the items had been procured with central government remittance to the DAs.

95 Ubink (2007, 2008) shows how the chiefs of Kumasi especially the Asantehene assume important positions and make land dispute decisions that have far reaching consequences for those of the formal state.
6.1 Actors, Structures and Competence in the Local Political Arena

6.1.4 External actors on local policy and development

External development actors comprise a host of international development NGOs, and intergovernmental organizations including donor organizations, and financial institutions such as the World Bank and IMF who work with regimes (see Barkin, 2006, p. 1). They collectively make up the international development system or what Stiglitz calls the institutions of globalization, (2003, p. 3). These organizations are important actors in shaping the local state in the implementation of change programmes. But in contrast to local policy actors from the state, the specific competence of external development actors is not derived locally because these actors are upwardly accountable to their national governments and financiers so their development agenda is set by the latter and influenced by a host of factors including their voters’ preferences, interests of both the Northern governments and donor agencies, etc. Although their policy competence generally involves providing support to locally-derived policies, the sheer number of external development actors makes their priorities and competence just as fluid as the programmes they support. It is perhaps the OECD countries that have somewhat structured policy guidelines in line with their policy coherence approach to deliver development support without undermining local initiative (see OECD, 2009, p. 15). Empirical evidence from this study as discussed in chapter seven foregrounds the support by external actors particularly the District Development Fund and the Urban Development Grant with feedback loop and effects that are very pervasive on the local state.

In principle, external development actors may express their policy competence through central state policy experts, independent consultants, and implementing agencies. But with both technical and financial support, external actors sometime overlook that standard. In addition, when guidelines are suggested for implementation, they could become a major competence of external actors because these guidelines tend to dictate the various facets of the project from design to implementation and assume a legal status (see Weilenmann, 2009, p. 156). Thus, their competence may appear soft and subtle but very potent and far reaching in the policy arena. The multiple

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96 The influence of new development actors such as China is increasingly visible in the national policy arena. However, as regards the local political reforms, the international organizations and traditional donors are indelibly marked.
actors, their patterns of behaviour and interaction provide both opportunities and constraints for the institutional development of the local state and the political programme of socio-economic transformation. These actions could facilitate change or they could act as structures of institutional preservation. All in all, what joins these actors is an interest in local public policy despite their diverse preferences and rationalities. The expression of their sets of competence in this policy arena offers different outcomes and interpretations from both the local political structures and constituents. These issues are addressed in the sections which follow.

6.2 The Contested Sphere of State Officials: Bureaucrats on Edge

The enduring feature of the public service as ‘government work’ vis-à-vis ‘own business’ and the vilifications associated with its actors shape the context for implementing public policy and institutional reforms. In state settings, there certainly are very committed and dedicated public servants who work for the state, no matter how unimpressive it is perceived to be. To be sure, observations by Lentz (2014, p. 196) point to pledges of allegiance to the state made by some public servants despite the type of political regime they worked for. In spite of such claims, public servants’ work orientation continues to be influenced by factors that lie within the larger political setting much as they do within the local bureaucracies. The association of bureaucrats with the political processes is practically not misplaced since they are very much part of political decision-making especially on the amount of the state’s resources that individuals and agencies receive (see Peters & Pierre, 2005, p. 2; Christensen & Lægreid, 2005, p. 140).

The main difficulty in the case of Ghana concerns the legislative ambiguity and vagueness regarding the extent to which they could politically identify with, and participate in, politics. This situation has spurred a glowing political interest of bureaucrats with the support of regimes that manipulate the legislative ambiguities in favour of their preferred public servants who may even receive shoddy appointments and promotion (see Ayee, 2016).
6.2 Contested Sphere of State Officials: Bureaucrats on Edge

2013, p. 446). Even though bureaucratic political interest itself is not new and is sometimes seen as useful in eliminating bureaucrats with anti-regime attitudes, it often creates a sense of distrust from other actors in the public policy domain and consequently leads to difficult relationships between bureaucrats and other policy actors including local political actors as discussed below. Indeed, as regards institutional change and reforms, bureaucrats have been at the receiving end of a barrage of attacks from political office holders from across the political spectrum, and vilified for their perceived attempts to manipulate public office for personal gains.

The notion that bureaucrats use their office to protect some privileges is only part of a fundamental issue. Their job security, on the other hand, is constantly threatened in the ever-changing politico-administrative environment. Even if there are legal protections against victimization by political office holders, bureaucrats still bear the brunt in any situation of conflicts between them and the former. They could be intimidated with transfers to other departments to make them kowtow to politicians. The situation is made even worse at the local state level where, until recently, public servants were mainly in the middle and junior ranks.98 For fear of their job security, these bureaucrats are cowered and often give in to politicians and their demands. In local state settings, this situation is further blurred when bureaucrats in the executive bureaucracy double as local politicians.99 But this perceived weakness of the bureaucracy vis-à-vis the political executives comes at the displeasure of other local politicians:

“(…) you see, when we mention the Assembly system, technocrats are at the bottom they are like our subordinates; Assembly Members take decisions (…) yesterday we were told by bureaucrats from behind our backs that the LGS has brought some bulldozers, etc. and has deducted the money from source (…) we told them that local government ministry cannot impose anything on us (…) there are some individuals who have gone behind the Assembly to do that connection [scam]. You see, the corruption is so much” (Interviewee #4: Assemblyman, Suame Sub-metro Council, Kumasi, 21.08.2013).

98 Majority of the senior ranks were often found at the national and regional levels of administration but informants argued that the trend is changing given that the new local government service makes it possible for people to hold higher ranks even within the districts without relocating to Accra per se even though the old mentality still persists.

99 While there were several instances of bureaucrats-cum-local politicians in the two study areas, it was particularly striking in Kumasi where one Assembly Member also served under the executive bureaucracy (see appendix III).
“(…) you talk about it every day but it is not working (…) budget that should pass through the structures is not passing through. For the budget, planners plan, it goes to budget from there to F&A, then to Executive Committee then to the General Assembly because some of us are not privy to these committees. I am not part of F&A; I am not part of the Executive Committee because I have served my term already so how can I get the budget to know whether the projects are okay or not? Because it now stops at the Executive Committee [level] but they have no legislative powers; that is for the General Assembly (…) so is it nice and fair that for the next two years, I will not see the budget?” (Interviewee #5: Assemblyman, Kwadaso Sub-metro Council, Kumasi, 12.09.2013).

In the Upper West Region, which is relatively sympathetic to, and votes mostly for, the incumbent regime, the negative perception of bureaucrats as either kowtowing to the executive demands of the incumbent regime or seeking some parochial interests was still dominant as evidenced by remarks by two DA members:

“(…) yeah of course, because the Assembly structure is such that, we don’t implement [projects]; we only advise management, but one thing the management does is they don’t actually take advice from Assembly Members (…) they will just place it [the advice] somewhere and be doing their own thing (…) and when you come back, that same mistake will still be there. It is not that they don’t see the mistakes; they see it but because of parochial interests, they also decide to allow it (…) they allow [connive] with consultants who take their money and, yet, they go scot-free (…) why should it be so?” (Interviewee #6: Assemblyman, Nakori-Chansa Zonal Council, Wa, 28.08.2013).

“(…) and one problem in the Assembly is this revenue leakage (…) you know [these] people are very intelligent if you close this door they will open the other (…). As Assembly and finance committee members, part of our responsibilities is to ensure that the Assembly gets what it share of the this thing (…) and how do we use it but that is what many of the people don’t want because they think that when we get to know about the money then they can’t do what, their selfish thing; so some like this, they only tell you that oh this officer is doing it or very soon is going to be ten years and we don’t have it and who suffers?” (Interviewee #7: Assemblyman, Wa Urban Council, Wa 18.09.2014).

The themes from the interviews above point to one thing: these bureaucrats have to constantly contend with the multiple recriminations on both sides namely local political actors and national level political office holders. On 100 At the time of the study, the Presiding Member in the Wa Municipal Assembly was a government appointee who seemed to enjoy the respect and support of all the members. In contrast, the counterpart in the Kumasi DA was an elected member and was widely perceived to belong to the opposition political party, the NPP.
6.3 Local State Bureaucrats and their Interface with Local Politicians

one hand, they are seen to possess self-interest and lukewarm work attitudes that contribute to the failings of institutional change. On the other hand, their association with the local executive bureaucracy is construed as succumbing to the corrupt practices of the political hegemony. Caught up in the middle of competing political interests, the bureaucrats have to craft a difficult balance between the administration (and the Executive Committee) and the regular local political actors, some of whom are diametrically opposed to the incumbent regime.

6.3 Local State Bureaucrats and their Interface with Local Political Actors

From the multiple accusations and vilification of public servants as described above, the question that arises is how do local bureaucrats undertake their duty of service provision and implementation of institutional reforms? Especially at the level of implementation, these local and mostly “street-level” public officials (Lipsky, 1980, p. 3; Crook & Ayee, 2006, p. 54) who interface with the public have other condescending actors to confront. At the local state level, the local government bureaucrats must confront the local political actors in the form of Assembly Members (both elected and appointed) and their unit committee members. The analyses that follow delve deeper into the tensions and confrontations that ensue between the public servants and local politicians in the provision of everyday local public goods and execution of local institutional reforms.101

The discussion begins with the age structure of the local politicians which shows that the bureaucrats are relatively younger than the political actors with the majority aged between 31 and 40 years. But that should be put in context; bureaucrats ordinarily cannot hold office after the compulsory retirement age of 60 years while local politicians are not bound by age restriction once they have attained the voting age of 18 years. Nonetheless, the local political actors are no less young with age concentration within the

101 The argument and data in parts of this section informed published articles in varied forms by the author including the tensions between local politicians and bureaucrats (Sabbi, 2015) and everyday practices of urban policy actors (Sabbi & Mensah, 2016).
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41–50 years category (see Table 6), an observation that contrast the dominant view that local politicians comprise mainly old and retired individuals.

Table 6. Status and Age Group of Local Politicians and Bureaucrats in the Study Districts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Actors</th>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>KMA (%)</th>
<th>WMA (%)</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Political</td>
<td>31–40</td>
<td>7 (16.3)</td>
<td>3 (33.3)</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n=52)</td>
<td>41–50</td>
<td>26 (60.5)</td>
<td>3 (33.3)</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>51–60</td>
<td>7 (16.3)</td>
<td>3 (33.3)</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>61+</td>
<td>3 (6.9)</td>
<td>– (-)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sub-Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>43 (100)</td>
<td>9 (-100)</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical</td>
<td>31–40</td>
<td>10 (66.7)</td>
<td>5 (83.3)</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n=21)</td>
<td>41–50</td>
<td>3 (20.0)</td>
<td>1 (16.7)</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>51–60</td>
<td>2 (13.3)</td>
<td>– (-)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sub-Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>15 (100)</td>
<td>6 (100)</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>58</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Author’s compilation from field data. Note. Percentages for each sub-group are calculated for within-districts only. KMA=Kumasi Metropolitan Assembly; WMA=Wa Municipal Assembly

It equally contrasts persisting notions that the position of an Assemblyman is unattractive to the highly-educated (see e.g. Fiankor & Akussah, 2012, p. 36). As evidence from this study points out, there are very highly-educated Assembly Members including multiple university degree and polytechnic
6.3 Local State Bureaucrats and their Interface with Local Politicians

diploma holders.\textsuperscript{102} Yet, there were few instances where some Assembly Members lacked basic education. Indeed, two (3.8\%) of the 52 local political actors had approximately no formal education, nine (17.3\%) had finished basic education, while 21 (40.4\%) and 20 (38.5\%) held post-secondary and tertiary qualifications respectively. Again, it appears ‘career Assembly Members’ are uncommon in the two DAs since most of these local politicians in the study were in their first term. Certainly, 41 (78.8\%) of them were first-termers (1–4 years) while eight (15.4\%) were in their second term (5–8 years). Only a handful (5.7\%) had served more than two terms (9–12 years). But their relatively little experience in the DAs does not seem to offset their understanding of the concepts of local administration and politics per se. From interactions with the informants, especially among the highly-educated Assembly Members, a higher level of understanding could already be discerned. These observations somehow confirm the changing patterns of actors with local political interests as highlighted in the discussion that follows.

6.3.1 Competing authority claims and self-interest

The everyday local public service is performed by the bureaucrats (or technocrats) who are civil servants within the administration of the DAs but that task is tainted by serious constraints. Their frenetic attempts to provide public goods are equally characterized by questions about their credibility in the implementation of change programmes. It remains striking that majority of the Assembly Members in both districts (over 71\%), with whom local public policy is conceived before implementation, raised doubts about the trustworthiness of the bureaucrats on policy issues particularly on decisions regarding project implementation (see Table 7). But this negative perception and lack of trust for bureaucrats is not straight forward. It was particularly interesting to note that majority of the appointees (about 64\%) did not trust the bureaucrats. Yet, by their appointment, the appointees are viewed

\textsuperscript{102} It should be borne in mind that with randomly-selected representative sample, one could expect different observations and perspectives on the education and background of the local political actors. Yet, the findings point to a changing trend in the profile of these actors especially with the entry of very young and educated individuals.
by their elected counterparts as cronies of the local Executive which in itself is perceived to dominate and manipulate the bureaucrats.

Table 7. Local Political Actors’ Perceptions on the Trustworthiness of Local Bureaucrats

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District/Actors</th>
<th>Trustworthy (%)</th>
<th>Untrustworthy (%)</th>
<th>Total (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>KMA Elected</td>
<td>8 (22.9)</td>
<td>27 (77.1)</td>
<td>35 (100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KMA Appointed</td>
<td>3 (37.5)</td>
<td>5 (62.5)</td>
<td>8 (100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WMA Elected</td>
<td>3 (50.0)</td>
<td>3 (50.0)</td>
<td>6 (100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WMA Appointed</td>
<td>1 (33.3)</td>
<td>2 (66.7)</td>
<td>3 (100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>15 (28.8)</td>
<td>38 (71.2)</td>
<td>52 (100)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author’s compilation extracted from MAXQDA Quote Matrix. Note. KMA=Kumasi Metropolitan Assembly; WMA=Wa Municipal Assembly

It seems equally paradoxical that despite the different voting preferences of the two DAs as depicted earlier in Table 4, Assembly Members’ distrust of bureaucrats who work with the Executive Committee seems similar, notwithstanding affiliation of most members in the DA in Wa to the incumbent regime. A probable explanation is that local politicians’ positive views about public servants in the local state emerge only when both the former’s and latter’s interests converge. Consequently, the bureaucrats’ attempts to implement decisions locally are met with competing authority claims from their elected counterparts as cronies of the local Executive which in itself is perceived to dominate and manipulate the bureaucrats.

103 The Chi-square test found no significance difference between perceptions of trustworthiness of bureaucrats by Assembly Members from the two DAs ($\chi^2=0.293, df=1, n=52, p>0.05$). Thus, perceptions of the behaviour of bureaucrats persisted among local politicians whether in the north-west or south-central Ghana.
Assembly Members over space and content of the projects being implemented. These contestations strain relations in the already party-politically charged DA structure:104

“The bureaucrats or technocrats do not want the system to work; even in the sub-metro, we are the political leaders and they are supposed to inform us about what is going on but they don’t (…) sometimes they see the Assembly Members as inferior; some think they have higher education and are not willing to submit to Assemblymen (…) they don’t even inform us about the projects going on in the sub-metro because of mischief and their personal interests in the projects” (Interviewee #8: Assemblyman, Suame Sub-metro Council, Kumasi, 19.08.2013).

These claims often center on the perceived disregard of the Assembly Members by the bureaucrats until ‘something goes wrong’ in the implementation of projects and also the inherent distrust that the administrative strand has interest in sending specific projects to certain preferred areas. One source of these competing claims emanates from the prejudice around the caliber of persons who formed the DAs at the start of the local political reforms in 1988. There was a widely held impression that the position of an Assembly Member was unattractive and somewhat reserved for low status individuals. They were considered ‘less intelligent’ at the time and some Assembly Members believe the bureaucrats still hold such stereotypes and do not take the Assembly Members as important actors in the DAs. But the current makeup of Assembly Members is very mixed with some highly-educated and well-established individuals who want to reassert and correct that erroneous impression regarding the position of a local politician:

“You see, when we mention the Assembly system, technocrats are at the bottom they are like our subordinates; Assembly Members take decisions. The problem is that because Assembly Members are not paid salaries and that some are ‘illiterates’, they are not aware of their roles; some Assembly Members cannot even read the laws (…) if the technocrats realize that the Assembly Members do not know the rules and the LIs [legislative Instruments], they take them [Assembly Members] for a ride and decide for them” (Interviewee #4: Assemblyman, Suame Sub-metro Council, Kumasi, 21.08.2013).

Some of the Assembly Members have become vocal against the ‘disrespect’ from the bureaucrats. They contend that although the DA system began with

104 As mentioned earlier, these claims must be situated within the context of increasing involvement of public servants in partisan politics (see Ayee, 2013) and, thus, raising doubts about their neutrality in delivering public goods.
pensioners and less ‘educated individuals’, most people still hold that impression. At the moment, however, many of the Assembly Members are rather young and very well educated with university degrees. Most of them are teachers in primary and elementary schools while others are self-employed in reputable enterprises. Yet, there were others who had not completed basic education and their degree of gullibility appears high since, as mentioned above, technocrats and bureaucrats make assessment of the less-informed DA members and make decisions for them.\(^{105}\) It appears, however, that these tensions over status would likely persist because there is no required educational qualification when one seeks to be elected to that position and, as pointed out earlier, some of these Assembly Members have no formal literacy skills; people contest based on their popularity in their electoral areas. In fact, a critical observation shows that the tensions border on legitimacy and practical policy-making realities. The Assembly Members have legitimate mandate to legislate local public policy while the bureaucrats and technocrats rather consider the everyday realities and implications of policy-making and implementation.

More so, in responding to the institutional reform challenges of the local state, bureaucrats do not only reject claims that they are responsible but also rebuke the Assembly Members for being complicit in the local development challenges. The latter are seen as using such claims to seek their own interests while shirking responsibilities for their actions. Some bureaucrats even believed that claim is insincere because it is rather the Assembly Members who abuse local by-laws and the procedures since they need to please voters and, thus, support and encourage unlawful practices in the communities:

“Sometimes some of these Assembly Members could direct some residents to place containers and other structures at undesignated places. When technocrats then carry out their lawful duties, the Assemblymen will now confront us. The Assembly Members make the policies of the Assembly so they think they have ‘posts’ [power]. Once I went to an electoral area to distribute letters to some rate defaulters and the Assemblyman came forward to say that I should have contacted him before doing that (…) but I have never seen it in any of our regulations that before you go

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105 One Assembly Member pointed to their colleague who could not even write her name and personal observations during my stay in the two districts confirmed that there were some Assembly Members who could barely hold a discussion on policy issues which they were supposed to legislate (Field notes, Kumasi, 20.08.2013). It was not very surprising that even for a group of Assembly Members with the same political affiliation, cliques had already formed in roughly well-informed and outspoken ‘leaders’ versus ‘followers’.
to an electoral area in the sub-metro, the administrator should consult the Assembly Member before doing his lawful duty” (Interviewee #9: administrative official, Suame Sub-metro Council, Kumasi, 22.08.2013).

The observation reveal the fact that some of the Assembly Members harbour personal political interest and quite often, they attempt to project themselves as being in control within their electoral wards. They often use personal aggrandizing rhetoric; promising voters more support than could be delivered and resorting to whatever means available to win more votes. This places them between the twilight of local legislators and project implementers. They equally use the claims for their ‘innovative practices’ as occurs in waste management systems in the substructures of their Assembly. This is the case in the management of public toilets (or KVIP)106 which has increasingly become a lucrative business for some Assembly Members. The policy initiative that sought to contract-out the franchise for building and management of these facilities (i.e. public-private partnership) was quickly hijacked by local political actors (see Crook & Ayee, 2006, p. 57) especially those affiliated to the incumbent regime.107 The intent of the reform was and still is to share the proceeds between the management of the facilities and the district substructures (e.g. the sub-metros councils). But street level bureaucrats were often caught-up in these tensions; a situation which became known locally as “toilet wars” (Ayee & Crook, 2003, p. 21). That is to say, the conflicts that ensue from the management of those facilities.

Because of the pay-off from managing the toilet facilities, many of the ‘powerful’ Assembly Members in an attempt to appear legitimate entrepre-

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106 Kumasi Ventilation Improved Pit is considered the cheapest and acceptable form of public pit latrines which began in Kumasi by the UNDP and the World Bank in the 1990s (Ayee & Crook, 2003, p. 15).

107 Although Crook and Ayee (2006, p. 57) observed that mainly the elected Assembly Members had set up local businesses to appropriate the management of these sanitation facilities, the observations from this study revealed rather that management of the facilities were mainly in the hands of appointees who both dominated the sub-metro councils and held its leadership (as seen in Table 8).
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neurs set up own enterprises to appropriate these sanitation facilities to manage but they radically refuse to account for the proceeds. These competing claims over competence have long been a source of conflict over domination in the DA. Technocrats, as professionals have competence to implement and supervise projects and provide local public goods on a daily basis; as full time bureaucrats (i.e. civil servants), these actors believe they could not be controlled by political actors who serve on part-time and honorary basis (see Thomi, 2000a, pp. 102–103) and now argue to be experts on local policy.

Expropriation of competence is appropriate to explain these tensions (see Figure 7). By this concept, we mean attempts by individuals or a group of actors to wrest policy capability from another group with some stated intent of using that competence to deliver ‘better’ policy outcomes that serve the public’s interest even though their personal interests cannot be ruled out. It will appear that the Assembly Members do not adequately understand their legislative competence as local legislators and diverge into expropriation of the implementation functions of the bureaucrats as well but the latter equally appear to expropriate the legislative mandate of the former, through the executive, by deciding for the local politicians on critical policy priorities. Worth noting is the manner of local policy-making. Although local policies and by-laws must be given executive assent by the minister for local government (Art. 80 of Act 462), that competence was largely exercised by the local executive in everyday situations. Thus, with so much power in hands of the local executive, local politicians were less content with their legislative mandate. These contestations, which are underpinned partly by the actors’ self-interests, subsequently become the basis for various sources of distrust from the Assembly Members against the bureaucrats.

108 It was self-evident from personal observation on 20.08.2014 at the Bantama Sub-metro that a ‘senior’ Assembly Member who had been entrusted with the management of a number of these public toilets vehemently refused to render accounts to the finance department and the ensuing brawl was very aggressive, physical and nearly turned bloody.
6.3 Local State Bureaucrats and their Interface with Local Politicians

6.3.2 Suspicion and distrust of the executive bureaucracy

Trust among policy actors remains a prerequisite to evolving local policy and provision of public goods (Fukuyama, 1995, p. 223). However, as elsewhere in sub-Saharan Africa, this trust is generally lacking among actors in the local public policy arena (Rottenburg, 2009, p. 62). In the two DAs, a tense situation of distrust rather obtains given Assembly Members’ suspicion and perception of being dominated by the administration and the executive in particular. Indeed, any policy initiative by the executive bureaucracy without the involvement of the Assembly Members is perceived as dubious, corrupt, and intended to meet the former’s personal interests and private gains. Some local politicians, who held visions of a well-functioning bureaucracy, said they have lost trust in the executive to the extent of describing the bureaucracy as a façade:

“(…) you see the technocrats when you meet them and they are speaking, you see [that] they know the concept very well but they don’t follow it to the letter (…) because they have stayed there for so long (…). Yesterday, I submitted my project requests to the planning department only for a colleague Assembly Member [in the planning sub-committee] to tell me if I had copies of my letter, he could take it to the Executive Committee so that they will see to it that my projects would be considered. I was very surprised (…) why did they ask us to send the letters to the

Figure 7: Competence and Tension among Actors of the Local State
Source: Author’s Construct
planning unit? That means some people who don’t access the planning unit will not get any projects. So you don’t get projects if you do not belong to their side (...) some of the projects too do not pass through the procurement [process]; all you see is that they [contractors] are working” (Interviewee #1: Assemblyman, Asokwa Sub-metro Council, Kumasi, 02.10.2013).

What seems apparent is the discrepancy between the hopes expressed in the reforms of the local bureaucracy and everyday reality. This distrust was well known by the bureaucrats who attempted to circumvent it by engaging the local political actors in several ways.

Some of the bureaucrats revealed, for instance, that it becomes easier for the conveners of the sub-committees who are Assembly Members to present decisions and plans to the Executive Committee and the General Assembly because it was easily accepted by their colleagues than when bureaucrats had to do that. The Assembly Members felt more convinced than when technocrats had to do the presentation and sometimes the former doubted whether the latter were even telling the truth. For the avoidance of doubts, the conveners were groomed to make a presentation at the Executive Committee. The distrust of the Executive Committee (and the administration) obtained at two levels. First, one finds instances of distrust in situations whereby activities were viewed as dubious because the administrators did not follow the laid-down procedure and they did so to meet their personal interests. That procedure requires the executive bureaucracy to present programmes and projects at the main meeting of the DA for decision to be made on their acceptance or rejection. Afterwards, technocrats have the competence to implement and supervise those programmes but some local politicians thought that procedure was mostly set aside in practice. Some Assembly Members argued that constituents blame politicians instead of the technocrats but it was the latter that consents with people such as developers to put up unauthorized structures at night and also on weekends. Bearing in mind their ‘expropriated’ implementation competence, the local politicians believed that bureaucratic practice was meant to disguise and prevent any scrutiny from DA members or the public in terms of the quality of projects and their appropriateness in the location and so forth.

A corollary to the above is when perceived dubious and corrupt bureaucratic practices, not intended for immediate monetary gains but rather for some personal interests (e.g. streets constructed in specific residential areas) were undertaken. The distrust even deepens when the perceived gains from such practices are skewed in the favour of the bureaucrats:
“Once at Assembly meeting, one member talked harshly to a bureaucrat and we were all annoyed for the disparaging remarks about the bureaucrats accusing him of corrupt practices. Sometimes the Assembly Members are part of the problem but some of the bureaucrats also benefit from the projects and if the Assembly Member thinks they have been overlooked (in terms of benefits) then they become very angry” (Interviewee #10: Assemblywoman, Oforikrom Sub-metro Council, Kumasi, 11.09.2013).

Let us take a specific example that clearly illustrates bureaucrats’ ability to divert local development projects based on their specific personal interests. During fieldwork in 2013, a road project was being constructed between Ohwim-Amanfrom and Krohom-Abuohia electoral areas in the Kumasi metropolis. When the issue came up during interview with one Assemblyman (interviewee #13), it was clear that a top-ranking bureaucrat was influential in pushing for the construction of that road. Even though some local politicians kicked against the project that it was not a priority and argued that the money was rather needed for maintenance of the city’s poor roads, this bureaucrat skillfully used his position and influence and went back to those Assembly Members who would benefit from the project to lend their support. As the interviewee affirmed, the Assemblymen in that area supported bureaucrats and subsequently, the road was constructed despite the enormous objection from other members of the DA.

In fact, in almost all the administrative departments covered in this study, the bureaucrats did not deny knowledge of the distrust from their political counterparts and, despite their professed commitment to working with their professional standards, they expressed several instances of giving in to compromises. Indeed, in some situations in the DAs, bureaucrats rather resorted to co-opting a select group of the local politicians to act on their behalf for purposes of making the task of the administrative strand possible and acceptable to the latter:

“(…) we prefer to make them [Assembly Members] do the presentation to their colleagues (…) that one will be easily accepted; they may be more convinced than us (…). Sometimes they see us as technocrats, they think we are too technical they even feel that we may not even tell them the truth (…) they will think you have intentionally couched things in such a way that they may not see (…). So to avoid

109 There was a handful of local politicians who felt their colleagues were “showing of too much” in their tussle with bureaucrats (Interviewee #54: Assemblywoman, Suame Sub-metro Council, Kumasi, 21.08.2013). But in most cases, such dissenters could not hide their affinity with the incumbent regime and thus making their opposing views less neutral.
all those doubts, we prepare, groom the convener very well, take you through the budget or whatever documents you are to send (…) so that the convener will go to the Executive Committee, we will all sit aside, and he will do a presentation because he is one of their own so (…) it will be accepted easily” (Interviewee #11: budget official, KMA, Kumasi, 11.07.2013).

This observation is quite striking because the bureaucrats seem to have given up their determination to assert their professional standards in their work domain by delegating to Assembly Members who may only work with simplified assumptions about technical details. The mention of the DA as a ‘human institution’ and how bureaucrats were doing what was ‘humanly possible’ kept coming up and echoing in the interviews in quite a surprising manner. It not only showed a sign of awareness but also subtle acceptance of the situation in their everyday performance of their work. However, references to notions of bureaucratic misappropriation of local development funds or more bluntly corruption in the DAs were not without merit. Let us take an example of instances when funds for local development projects end up in individual pockets. One Assemblyman (interviewee #7) for instance pointed out authoritatively that he was part of a team at the Public Accounts Committee of Parliament’s sitting in the town of Bolgatanga where it was revealed that some DA projects that were deemed to have been built were only ‘on paper’ but never constructed on the ground. As the interviewee pointed out, some bureaucrats and executive politicians from a given DA who appeared before the committee could neither offer an explanation nor account for funds that were supposedly spent on the ‘ghost’ Assembly Hall for a local school. Although the question of how local contracts were awarded was not directly posed, insights gleaned from the interviews show that since the local policy process was largely in the hands of the executive and bureaucrats, an open and merit-based process in the award of contracts was far-fetched. Even if contracts procedures were announced, they were theatrically staged as the contract winners may have been chosen in advance.

Another source of distrust, beyond the feeling of short-change and bureaucratic corruption, is where the head of the Executive Committee (i.e. District Chief Executive) attempts to use the appointed Assembly Members as patronage networks to check and balance the influence of their elected counterparts. Some Assemblymen saw this as genuine attempts to create confusion within a group that otherwise has good interpersonal relationships:

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“The Executive tries to force that tension on the Assembly when it does not exist because the appointed and elected members are always together. What happens rather is management always does everything possible to put a ‘crack’ between the Assembly Members. They always want to divide and think they can pass it through the appointed members because they have control over them. Sometimes at meetings, management will call the appointed members and try to convince them so that they will get the appointed members’ support” (Interviewee #6: Assemblyman, Nakori-Chansa Zonal Council, Wa, 28.08.2013).

Yet, the tranquil atmosphere as described above in the councils may rather appear as a consequence of some suppressed dissent and not necessarily an agreement between the Assembly Members per se as was remarked by a DA member:

“you see there is a the saying that if there is always agreement, then it means that one person is not needed (…) but to some extent you see there is a difference between the appointed and the electoral area [representation] because I have been elected by people and they expect us to serve them (…) you have only been appointed; you don’t have constituency, electoral area so you see the difference? So the burden on me is not the same as the burden on that person (…) but what happens here is that we are all one people coming from the same place and most of the appointees are our senior men (…) so that could be the cause but not even that we don’t argue; sometimes when you come to see us, we argue to the point of exchanging blows, insulting, whatever. It is always ‘hot’ but after that we come together (…) it is not even that we don’t; we argue yes, seriously!” (Interviewee #7: Assemblyman, Wa Urban Council, Wa, 18.09.2014).

That the political appointments are largely used for patronage purposes is not far-fetched in terms of policy decision-making processes of the DAs. The appointee Assembly Members held loyalty and commitments values towards the governing party which they extend to the DCEs during negotiations on local policies and projects. Indeed, most of the appointed members were unambiguous on the issue that they try to reciprocate their appointments by being loyal to the government and the DCE who appointed them:

“(…) the government appointees are supposed to complement and help solve some weaknesses in the Assembly (…). You don’t bring in party foot soldiers; such people will always support the position of the government irrespective of what programmes or policies are being developed (…) if this is the position of the Chief Executive, let us go by that; that’s the problem; most of them cannot read and write (…) they are there purposely to raise their hands during voting on the floor of the Assembly (…) we appoint people who know nothing apart from supporting the [central] government (…)” (Interviewee #4: Assemblyman, Suame Sub-metro Council, Kumasi, 21.08.2013).
Despite observations that the appointee Assembly Members are not necessarily “government stooges” (Crook, 1994, p. 358), the members themselves did not deny their intents to reward their appointors with their loyalty but it seems very simplified to assume that all such members can neither read nor write. Indeed, as shown by the case below, support for their appointors is not contingent on the level of literacy or educational attainment. Indeed, the headmistress of an elementary school in the Wa municipality, just like most of her appointed colleagues, is very highly-educated with a reputable professional career but still remained loyal to the government:

“(…) for the work we do in the Assembly, once I am coming from the government’s side, appointed by the MCE on behalf of the President (…), we have to make sure that all policies we are implementing, the government wants to implement, we have to back them so that it will stay. For whatever we want to do, we have to sensitize the people to let them know that this thing they are having is new and it will be good and will be beneficial one day if not to us but to our children. If we have to vote on certain [policy] issues, we side with the government’s position (…)” (Interviewee #12: Appointed Assemblywoman, Wa Municipal Assembly, Wa, 18.09.2014).

What remains unclear is the extent to which the professional and occupational background of the appointees will facilitate their ability to make independent and informed policy decisions. Together with their local political interests, their appointments are already framed in reciprocal terms and that they need to find the difficult balance between expertise and politics in the production of local development policy. The situation appears quite intense in metropolitan DAs with sub-metro councils as is the case with the DA in Kumasi whose leadership is highly contested. In that setting, the distrust is further deepened by perceptions that the chairpersons of the sub-metro councils use their influence to sustain patronage networks in the sub-district councils. Indeed, institutional reforms in the sub-metro councils have been the bone of contention between the General Assembly and the administration (with the Executive Committee). Table 8 illustrates the current vis-à-vis potential compositions of the councils if the stipulated legislation that constitute the councils were adhered to. With most of the sub-metros councils dominated by political appointees, the Assembly Members often argue that the bureaucrats ‘dance to the tune’ of the executive bureaucracy and are unable to implement institutional reforms:

“There is a problem with the sub-metro structure but the appointed NDC [members] are resisting any solution. Thirty percent of the council is to be appointed by the government but this is not followed because there is a problem with the two LIs, 1614 and 1805. The 1805 does not favour them so they have gone for the old one,
6.3 Local State Bureaucrats and their Interface with Local Politicians

1614. At Bantama [sub-metro council], elected members are eight and the appointed members are 22 making up the 30 members so if we go there, we the elected members are ‘nothing’ (…) definitely, a ‘party man’ will become the sub-metro chair and they use that place as party office and it cuts across (…) most of the chairmen [of the sub-metro councils] are NDC constituency chairpersons who use the sub-metro [secretariats] as their offices” (Interviewee #13: Assemblyman, Bantama Sub-metro Council, Kumasi, 18.09.2013).

That most of the sub-metro councils are dominated by political appointees chaired by party constituency chairpersons is factual as revealed by the findings (in Table 8) and observations from the fieldwork (see also The Ghanaian Chronicle, 2011) but the issues regarding the composition of these councils are quite complicated and involve local legislative reforms in 2004 (LI 1805 for the Kumasi Metropolitan Assembly, KMA) under the former, NPP government.\(^\text{110}\) The new LI 1805 meant for 10 sub-metro councils was strongly castigated by the opposition NDC at the time for its lack of clarity (see Ahwoi, 2007, pp. 9–11) and it became obvious that any alterations in government would imply major changes or total rejection of that legislation.

The reluctance to use the appropriate Legislative Instruments is underpinned by two incentives: first, it allows the incumbent regime to satisfy the youth who played vital role in the regime’s election to power through grassroots activism and propaganda. And it also ensures that communally-derived development policies directed towards the main DA (if any) fall within the purview of the incumbent regime (i.e. party-friendly policies). One informant hinted that “we heard that the President came here and constituency chairmen approached him and said, Mr. President, we get our livelihoods from the sub-metro council; what will we eat if you take us away from there? So the President instructed the Chief Executive that they should go back.”\(^\text{111}\)

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\(^\text{110}\) National Democratic Congress (NDC) and New Patriotic Party (NPP) are the two political parties in Ghana which have ruled since the beginning of multi-party democracy in 1992. In 2007, Kwamena Ahwoi, a former minister of local government in the NDC heavily criticized the LI 1805 enacted for 10 sub-metros and made legislative changes obvious once the NDC government gained back power. The ensuing frenetic changes have been spurred further by the elevation of one of the 10 sub-metro district councils to a municipal status.

\(^\text{111}\) Interviewee #36: Assemblyman, Suame Town Council, Kumasi, 30.09.2014.
Table 8. Composition of Selected Sub-Metro Councils in the Kumasi Metropolitan Assembly

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-metro Council</th>
<th>Leg. in use (LI 1614)</th>
<th>Leg. as stated (LI 1805)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Elect (%)</td>
<td>Appt. (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asokwa</td>
<td>12 (40.0)</td>
<td>18 (60.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bantama</td>
<td>8 (26.7)</td>
<td>22 (73.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kwadaso</td>
<td>9 (30.0)</td>
<td>21 (70.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manhyia</td>
<td>13 (43.3)</td>
<td>17 (56.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oforikrom</td>
<td>15 (50.0)</td>
<td>15 (50.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suame</td>
<td>9 (30.0)</td>
<td>21 (70.0)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author’s computation based on information from the secretariats of the sub-metros councils. Note. Leg.: Legislation; Elect: elected members; Appt.: appointed members; UC: unit committee members

Indeed going by the neglect of the new legislation, the regime had effectively succeeded in with using the substructures to reward the appointees most of whom were mere party sympathizers and had no clear views about what local priority setting entailed. Yet, an unbiased analysis should point out that the use of substructures in the local call political arena for party-political gains is not limited to any one political party; it is a common practice adopted by all incumbent regimes. What is intriguing here is the observation that these local political structures are frequently viewed as an ‘occupational field’ for policy making though the outcomes are as vague as the very competence ascribed to them.

It may appear quite odd that this so-called part-time honorary position may be rewarding enough for the purpose stated above given the meagre financial remuneration that accrue mainly from participation in meetings of
6.3 Local State Bureaucrats and their Interface with Local Politicians

the DAs and the substructures. However, interaction with the DA members revealed the possibility to create not only future political connections but also channels offered by these positions to get access to some ‘big men’ are equally rewarding. These everyday institutional practices point to what has been captured as differences and tensions between “norms in form” and “norms in use” (Lowndes & Leach, 2004, p. 561) to describe the movement away from formal rules to some form of norms that govern everyday practices of local state business. But such practices appropriately reflect differences between regime and local political preferences in the everyday local policy-making. In particular, such ambiguities allow central government politicians and bureaucrats to dominate the local state. The ambiguities are designed on purpose for exploitation by whichever regime is in power (Crawford, 2008, p. 254) but they also reflect the principles upon which the local governments were founded. Given the perceived benefits of the local political structures to the regime, preservation of this arrangement despite its ambiguities allows the central government to have a firm hold of the local state. This is especially the case when all channels to be exploited by incumbent governments are constantly being challenged by other local political interests in the current multi-party arrangement.

The general suspicion of domination that engenders the distrust in the DAs is not new and could be traced to the reforms in 1988 which subsumed the hitherto purely bureaucratic entity under an elected authority (Thomi, 2000a, p. 103; Crook, 1994, p. 355). The impact was felt on the formal structures as bureaucrats had to either report to or work in sub-committees with elected officials. However, that impact has been exacerbated by factors such as the numerous local political reforms, Assembly Members’ clamour for own interests and their attempts towards exploiting the administrative structures in order to achieve those interests. In settings with multiple actors, interests may compete and, thus, result in conflicts or what we may refer to as personal conflicting interests. This occurs, for example, in personal relationships and identification with a political party (Hannum, 2009, p. 2; Claxton, 2007, p. 558) even though the DA is supposedly non-partisan. More telling, it reflects competing interests in regimes’ policy preferences and choices; while the strategic blueprint of the DA seeks to empower local institutions, the process is at the same time used as a medium to reward regime sympathizers.

But it is the outcomes from these conflicting interests in local political settings that may engender perceptions of biased actions and preferences in
6. Reforming the Local Public Administration

favour of some actor groups. For example, when bureaucrats are seen to appropriate specific local projects to their preferred locations for some future benefits. If bureaucrats are seen to hold local political interests, they are labelled as competitors and no longer seen as civil servants. The consequences of such perceptions and practices are far-reaching especially on institutional changes and the promise of local development for constituents. On their part, the local political actors, as local policy negotiators, have legislative and deliberative mandate on local development and it is to be expected, from the standpoint of actor-centered institutionalism, that their institutional and collective political interests may influence or stand in conflict with their interaction and negotiations on local public policy decisions (Scharpf, 1997, p. 64, 88; 2008, p. 515). In the present study, however, it is the intersection of local political interests with their personal aggrandizing interests that tends to deprive local politicians and their constituents any meaningful policy debates and, thus, producing sub-optimal institutional changes. As we shall see, it is this belief in individual connections that engenders patronage networks and corruption; the very problems that the local political reforms promise to eliminate.

6.3.3 Self-aggrandizement and communal expectations

Assembly Members quite often project an image of themselves as being the most important actors in the local state arena. At first, one may think their contestations and rivalries with other actors of local public policy are connected to some communal feeling in the constituencies which they represent. However, the contestations are very much connected to individual political interests. These self-aggrandizing and ingratiating tendencies tend to enhance their reputation but also exaggerate their self-worth and reflected in statements such as: ‘we are the board of directors’ and ‘we make laws for the technocrats to implement’ by some of these local political actors. Some of them even compared their worth to Members of Parliament:

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112 Scharpf’s discussion refers broadly to composite actors who collectively represent their local institutions at the state and federal levels and whose actions are informed by ‘institutional’ self-interests although these actors make individual decisions even within the collective (1997, pp. 52–53).
“(...) we are the real agents of development for the communities because we campaigned based on our individual achievements not on inanimate objects. We did not use party symbols to campaign. I used my name to campaign so people respect us more than the MP because even if I have a criminal record and contest in the strong hold of a party, I am certain they will vote for me (...) so who are you more than an Assemblyman who, should he make mistake and flirt with someone’s girlfriend, it could go against him? Even style of dressing, etc. (...) some of the Assembly Members are already well-established people. I studied civil engineering so I do projects (...) the MP will be in Accra, he says he does not do development but he will be given funds for development, ah come on!” (Interviewee #5: Assemblyman, Kwadaso Sub-metro Council, Kumasi, 12.09.2013).

This sense of self-worth influences the Assembly Members’ promises when seeking political authority from their constituents. They spend lots of money and other resources on expensive campaigns and advertisements (mirroring national election practices) for an honorary position that comes with no remuneration apart from allowances for meetings. With their aggrandizing rhetoric, they show why their communities matter and make promises of getting development projects to these communities. Projects such as roads and gutters, public toilets, schools, clean water from boreholes, community information centers and libraries, job opportunities, etc. are all promised against the backdrop of the knowledge that the DAs could not offer and that the rhetoric is empty. Most of the interviewees pointed out that the promises are the only ways to win elections being well aware that they could offer very little in terms of development projects:

“(...) if you contest, this thing I am telling you at the end of the day if you don’t take care even the resources you pump in posters alone and you enter you don’t see anything you can’t ask people not to print posters because everyone wants to make themselves popular (...); the Assembly Member’s position is honorary; some people think it is very lucrative but that is false (…) you see the thing is that when you yourself you are campaigning and before you enter, you don’t know how the Assembly itself works so you make promises and you go to the Assembly and it is

113 See Adema (2009) for a discussion on how individuals use personal and communal aggrandizement to show the worth of their communities (see also Lentz, 2006). The second phase of the field research coincided with preparations for nominations towards the ‘botched’ 2014 local government elections. Yet, some aspiring and incumbent Assembly Members had already launched their campaigns. At first, one may see these processes as part of the taken-for-granted reality of everyday political life, both local and national. However, upon a critical look, their self-enhancing effects even beyond personal abilities and charisma for leadership become apparent.
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different; I promised all these things (…) I will do the drains, etc. and it is difficult for me because if you are outside, the way you look at it, when you get inside is different (…) it is when you enter that you know that the reality is different (…) we make promises; as for that one, it is true but the promises we are not able to implement them because of resources and all those stuff (…)” (Interviewee #14: Assemblyman, Wa Urban Council, Wa, 19.09.2014).

The observation above is compelling because it points out that some of the local politicians do not know how the DA system really works and they have to admit that when elected, they rarely have the power to fulfill promises made during elections.


Though local state elections are very less patronized, the campaigns tend to rival national politics and election processes even though the monetary incentives to the Assembly Members are woefully inadequate for achieving that purpose (see Image 2). Nonetheless, some of the Assembly Members
still make those ambitious promises to seek the mandate of their constitu-
ents:114

“(…) as for campaigning yes, our people are not all that advanced to understand
that the Assembly Members on their own cannot bring development (…) that is why
some people are compelled to say certain things but if people are campaigning say-
ing that I will bring this drain, I will bring this and you are saying nothing, so who
pays attention to you? So sometimes [yes] (…) but some people like me, I believe
that even if I go to the Assembly and I am not able to do it but I can get it somewhere
I can tell them because when I campaigned, I told them that yes, I have realized that
there are many gutters and [the] waste water from our bathrooms [or] whatever was
bad and that was giving us malaria and all those other diseases (…) so I told them
that when I come [to power], I will ensure that I construct many gutters to carry
away this dirty water into the main drains (…) the people voted for me and I am
doing exactly so (…). So many Assembly Members campaigned for this positions
simply because they thought they will come and make money only to be disap-
pointed; (…) anybody who wants to be responsible tomorrow, you want to have the
needed experience because today if I should tell you, [an] MP cannot come near me;
even the Chief Executive cannot come near me in terms of experience” (Inter-

The inherent self-worth, as observed from the quotes above, is obvious even
if the resources to meet the raised expectations are only remotely available.
The reason for self-aggrandizement by these local political actors is intri-
guing. Ordinarily, they would point to altruistic desire to serve their com-
munities given that their position is not full-time. Further probing reveal
personal-political interests more than their rhetoric of civic altruistic values
to serve their communities. Most of them harbour higher political ambitions
and they use the DAs as the ‘launch pad’ for such career dreams.115 It was
even staggering to find that some of them have been sponsored by major

114 A visit to the electoral wards during the preparation for election shows the amount
of effort and resources invested in these local elections. These include different
categories of campaign materials i.e. posters, billboards, etc. together with cam-
paign strategies including house-to-house visits, and local restaurants and the
workplaces of voters. It was a major disappointment for aspirants that the elections
had to be severally postponed till September 2015.

115 It must be noted that most of the local politicians terminate their political careers
at the local level. This is either due to the very design of the local political struc-
ture—used by the central state to maintain its support base—or by their very char-
acter as popular and everyday people best suited for local politics.
political parties to ‘test the waters’ and to see how those parties would perform in national elections and, thus, pointing to the inherent hypocrisy with the so-called ‘non-partisan’ representation system of the local state:

“(…) what happens is that (…) let me tell you, I don’t know maybe you can pick it as part of your research work (...) the concept is supposed to be non-partisan in practice but here in Ghana, it is partisan. It is a fact (…) in practice; [in theory], it is non-partisan but it is partisan; and then we are always there [in the Assembly] with our political inclinations, political ideologies but it is very bad. I will not hide my political affiliation, I am an NPP [member], okay? But in terms of development issues, we don’t do that in order to sabotage the government of the day, no!” (Interviewee #15: Assemblyman, Asokwa Sub-metro Council, Kumasi, 03.10.2013).

“(…) there is some form of politics in it so instead of non-partisan nature of the Assembly, partisan politics has a role in that; the political parties have supported candidates to contest in the Assembly elections so that these people will act as organizers for the political parties. That is why the Assembly elections are getting momentum in recent years” (Interviewee #16: Appointed Assemblyman, Suame Sub-metro Council, Kumasi, 08.10.2013).

Nevertheless, these personal attributes and self-worth heightens, further, the expectations from their electorates who seek development projects, and not necessary policy-making. Most of the Assembly Members thought that they must do everything possible to appear in a positive light to their constituents because, as one Assemblyman pointed out, the electorates see them as truly elected representatives only when “you strive to bring development to your electoral area”.116 The aggrandizing rhetoric of these local political actors is reminiscent of the ‘big man’ phenomenon in African politics (Nugent, 1995, pp. 3–5; Utas, 2012, pp. 6–9). However, only few influential Assemblymen with connections to those in higher positions of power could succeed in getting these patronage resources to their electoral areas. An informant of this category pointed out “his good relationship with the Member of Parliament of his constituency and how he, as campaign coordinator, helped the latter in his bid to enter Parliament”.117 But without such local ‘big men’ most of the local political actors are left to improvisation. In a complex institutional environment of the local state, the behaviour of these local political actors (e.g. becoming managers of the public-private facilities of the

Local state, contesting the mandate of local government bureaucrats, etc.) is reminiscent of ‘local political entrepreneurs’.  

A reflection on DiMaggio’s (1988, p. 14) concept of “institutional entrepreneurs” helps us to shed light on these actors’ behaviour and practices as reactions and counter-actions toward contesting the existing hegemonic structures of the Executive Committee (headed by the protégé of the central government) in their respective DAs. These behaviour patterns from the local political actors, although framed quite often along communal feelings, are counter narratives to the existing institutional order with their own set of inherent institutional practices (see Lounsbury & Crumley, 2007, p. 1003; Levy & Scully, 2007, p. 982) but the material benefits from such ‘innovative’ and ‘enterprising’ approach may accrue mainly to their individual aggrandizing needs and not the needs of their constituents. These local political entrepreneurs tend to have multiple strategies (e.g. their membership of the DAs, friendship with the executive and bureaucrats, etc. provide them with useful inside information) that they seldom change. Again, their meagre resources (both financial and political) do not inhibit their resolve to challenge the hegemonic structures and sometimes they are able to enforce cooperation from the local state. Indeed, within the constraints of resource and realizing they are likely to disappoint and be spurned, they move behind the formal bureaucracy to backstage activities and lobby for a share of patronage resources sometimes from the very bu-

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118 The aggrandizing rhetoric of the elected Assembly Members mirrors Paul Nugent’s discussion of the Big Men phenomenon in Ghanaian politics. The “Big Man”, often a political figure with opulence was accorded such status on their ability to occupy that role set by some social criteria (1995, p. 3). The Big Men sought political favours with the promise to let part of their wealth trickle down to their electors. In contrast to national politicians, local political actors, though behaving as big men, often lack the patronage resources to meet their promises. For detailed case studies on the big man phenomenon in African politics and particularly in post-conflict contexts, see Utas (2012).

119 Following DiMaggio’s (1988) concept of institutional entrepreneurs, some scholars have presented new insights on how these actors could derive new set of institutional practices (Lounsbury & Crumley, 2007) that help them to challenge the dominant hegemonic structures in their everyday work domains (Levy & Scully, 2007). Lawrence et al. in that same vein use the concept of “institutional work” to analyse the various ways in which individuals and organized groups try to maintain and alter the very institutions that structure their everyday activities (2009, p. 1).
reaucrats they so much distrust. This is in reaction to their promise of bringing development projects to the communities and their fear of being voted out of office in future elections, should they contest.

6.3.4 Backstage strategies: cutting corners and maneuvering

With a ‘hipped image’ about their abilities to bring change, constituents come to believe a true Assembly Member is ‘one who brings projects to their communities’ as was frequently mentioned by some of the informants. However, the overwhelming disappointments from the anticipated monetary gains upon campaigning, the precarious nature of available resources and the numerous demands placed on the DAs mean most expectations cannot be realized at least from the formal bureaucracy. The notion of backstage strategy aptly describes the ‘tactics of obscurity’ by which local politicians attempt to address these many expectations from constituents. To meet their demands, the local political actors resort to myriad techniques in order to get development projects to their electoral areas through some backstage techniques termed ‘cutting corners’ in local administrative parlance. But one should bear in mind that not everything that happens behind the scenes of bureaucratic settings is obvious even to the curious public. This approach is even popular among the bureaucrats at the substructures when consulting with their Assembly’s hierarchy. Informants at the sub-structural level pointed out the difficulty in implementing decisions from their sub-metro councils. Therefore, these bureaucrats have to negotiate both their top administrators and the Assembly Members concerned:

“(…) the decisions we take in our council meetings, we take them to the KMA (…) but don’t think whatever we give them they do (…) so it definitely depends on how you negotiate (…) by the administrator (…) definitely some of the issues need to cut corners and then we get it [them] done (…) do you understand? You need to go, you write a letter, but definitely you have to follow up (…) you go and lobby around get your issues and bring them up let them get to the public domain and something will come out (…) can you sit down for it to get to the council meeting for them to debate? (…) you have to weave your way through” (Interviewee #17: administrative official, Kwadaso Sub-metro Council, Kumasi, 12.09.2013).

120 Most of these actors were disappointed by an NDC campaign promise in 2008 to remunerate local politicians and unit committee members on monthly basis (see NDC, 2008, p. 80) but which promise was never kept.
6.3 Local State Bureaucrats and their Interface with Local Politicians

The idea of sub-structural bureaucrats having to ‘cut corners’ is quite striking; on one hand, resource constraints may explain such patterns of behaviour but on the other hand, local political interests that dictate allocation of available resources and implementation processes equally inform those actions. To avert their being labelled as incompetent, however, these local bureaucrats simply oblige to those negotiations; a sort of permissive acquiescence with other state participants (Nugent, 2010, p. 44). It is even more prevalent among Assembly Members who direct their interest towards some other bureaucrats beyond those in the core DAs:

“(…) one cannot rely on the formal structure because the MCE, the administration, and the technocrats could not be trusted. The bureaucrats connive with the MCE to delay and blur things so there is no transparency; one cannot depend solely on the administration. For my electricity project, I had a friend who connected me directly to the one in charge at the electricity company. I did not go to the MCE for street-lights (…) if I need something and I pass it through the sub-metro to the KMA, I know they will abandon it so I make sure I go there directly to the appropriate officer and get the things done” (Interviewee #18: Assembly Member, Kwadaso Sub-metro Council, Kumasi, 13.09.2013).

This idea of ‘cutting corners’ or ‘backdoor’ (literally implies the use of unofficial channels to achieve some end) somewhat yields results but it also provides a telling example of how these semi-periphery actors create and reinforce their description of the bureaucracy as a façade. The lobbying of specific bureaucrats comes with costs; Assembly Members have to give some ‘tips’ (tokens) to public officials to get projects to their electoral areas. It is not surprising that some of these political actors compete with bureaucrats in project implementation apparently to get “tips” from contractors in order to defray their campaign costs and meet the demands they imposed on themselves through their aggrandizing rhetoric. Expectedly, for local politicians who successfully maneuver to obtain some development projects, the aggrandizing rhetoric become particularly pronounced when such projects are unveiled in the full glare of the electorates to showcase their achievements as development-oriented local politicians vis-à-vis their colleagues (see Image 3) and, thus, the need for their loyalty, votes and more development goods.
This practice, however, dissipates the trust people have in public bureaucracies to wit the fact that the structures are there and utilized for purposes other than public interest. It also reflects the general institutional practice of lack of trust in Ghanaian bureaucracies. But that behaviour cannot be seen in isolation from the general uncertainties associated with the position of a local politician; given their paltry resource base that can only help them eke out a living but to the detriment of their ‘over-hyped’ status, they devise crafty patterns of behaviour to meet these ends. These attitudes and patterns of behaviour discussed so far have systemized beliefs about the public service that it could not be trusted and public office holders could devise strategies to expropriate as much as they could from the state whether at the local or central levels.

In spite of these competing individual interests, the promise of participatory development in which stronger and accountable local institutions are paramount is set aside. Apart from mere verbal pronouncements that “the system is not working”, no conscious efforts emanate from both bureaucrats and their political counterparts to seek solutions and remedies for the persistent institutional problems. Let us take two examples to illustrate the institutional challenges and individual interests in the setting of local policy
priorities. First, in interaction with an Assemblyman (interviewee #1), who had visions of a well-functioning local bureaucracy, he pointed out the everyday institutional practice of the planning department of his DA is based on the rationale of individual connections and, thus, implying a patronage structure. ‘If you are not a favourite of the officials and executive class, your concerns are rarely addressed’. Again, one was seldom assigned development projects to their respective electoral wards. Yet, the local politicians stopped short of further course of action to seek remedy for the patronage structure that has been created both implicitly and explicitly. The impression one gets from this and numerous other interactions with local politicians and bureaucrats is that the results obtained from the institutional structures as they are in their current form are paramount. Any other concerns regarding changes in the institutions are of secondary importance.

The second example speaks directly to how the most obvious institutional problems are frequently overlooked in everyday situation. In my interaction with another Assemblyman (interviewee #15), it became clear that his electoral ward was legislatively illegitimate. In the DA’s records, that electoral area did not elect unit committee members during the election which selected the Assembly Member even though candidates for the committee had been nominated for the contest. Therefore, this ward may be described as a ‘quasi-electoral area’ or put bluntly, it is illegal since all electoral wards in the DA selected unit committee members to work with the Assemblyman of their ward. When initial efforts to verify from the Electoral Commission office proved futile, the Assemblyman reverted to some rudimentary solution by setting up ‘self-created’ unit committees in the communities under his watch to work with. However, he quickly admitted the lack of official recognition of the members of those committees has made any attempt to use his committees to derive locally-relevant development policy futile.

What actually happened on the ground was that with no official support or attempt to remedy the situation, the Assemblyman had resorted to everyday politics of getting some projects to the electoral ward based on his individual judgement that the projects may be useful to the communities under his watch, devoid of any participatory undertaking. As he revealed, the DA’s executive could less be bothered by the non-existence of that institutional structure for realizing the persistently promoted rhetoric of local participatory development. The two examples give a clear indication of the decoupling of reform policy from actual practices in everyday situations.

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6.4 Adapting to Multiple Expectations: Bureaucrats between Professionals and Followers

The local bureaucrats navigate a very complex institutional environment; those local political actors who oppose the executive bureaucracy could very well become their allies as soon as the national political landscape shifts. In an institutional environment in constant flux of change, how do public servants provide public goods and implement institutional reforms? Finding answers to balance the demands of administration and the political establishment is a difficult undertaking by the bureaucrats. Addressing this difficulty might entail reneging against the premise that bureaucrats are inherently political actors. Bureaucrats generally felt that attempts to overcome the challenge require some tactfulness on their part to answer that unsettled challenge. Some of them acknowledged the challenges but also saw a melting-pot solution by sometimes remaining politically-neutral and, yet, committed to the cause of administration:

“(…) one thing you should not forget is that the politics and the administration work together; this one does not stand here and the other over there. We are all supposed to meet in the middle that’s why if you are a civil servant you are supposed to play your role very well so my work as an administrator (…) it [politics] makes our work quite difficult because if you do not do your work well with a little bit of maturity, you might side with one person but the politics is here and the administration is there. If you side with one person, the administrator, you have a problem because you need the politics. If you side with the politics alone too you have a problem so you are supposed to blend the two and if you blend it well, you will have a perfect working system (…) so the politician is your boss and your friend, he enters your office and you stand up. Sometimes, you go to some districts and some DCEs cannot even write their names (…) God forgive me but they enter your office and you stand up because he is your boss and even if he cannot write his name, you are supposed to teach him because that is your job. Can you imagine having [an] uneducated DCE whom you are supposed to work with? Who is supposed to answer all these requests? It becomes your job to teach him and it makes your job easier” (Interviewee #19: administrative official, Bantama Sub-metro Council, Kumasi, 16.09.2013).

With these adjustments, the hope expressed in the reforms to create a robust modern bureaucracy for local prosperity is increasingly suspended. Indeed as mentioned previously, despite their avowed resistance not to be dominated by local political actors, bureaucrats under certain situation have to
kowtow to the former without which tensions may prevent them from performing their public service duties. This was evident in the remark of a senior budget officer:

“(…) so if there is no rapport between the budget committee and the Assembly Members particularly the PM and the F&A chairman, there will be trouble (…) we were supposed to do [the budget] and submit in one week but we needed not step-side the approval by the General Assembly so to circumvent it, we brought in the PM, the F&A chairman, to sit in that particular meeting and after taking them through the guidelines, the deadlines, they said yeah (…) under normal circumstance, you people are supposed to go through this thing and submit to the General Assembly for approval. We cannot do that now (…) it worked and we circumvented it (…) the show of respect is very important. You, the technical person have the responsibility to get the things done and you can only do so by giving them their due respect because if F&A is supposed to sign a document and you have not given any explanation and you think that we should walk away with it, no! Definitely it will get kicked back (…) some of them can be troublesome” (Interviewee #20: senior budget official, RCC Upper West, Wa, 27.08.2013).

This curious mix of administrative techniques and political skills described above require education and training for the public administrators to be well-prepared. However, it was quite startling to find that despite the limited opportunities and facilities to train public servants, especially street-level bureaucrats as pointed out early on, a senior public administrator still remarked that those skills are readily provided for the public servants:

“(…) yeah, by our training, we are made to operate with all players in the field (…) if you are in charge of government business and government business entails governing the entire region, it means that you have to work alongside all those institutions and organizations that play in that political milieu. As regards junior bureaucrats, the thing is that it is part of the training; the moment you enter the service, you begin to know who the players are; you begin to know who the stakeholders are (…). So from day one, you begin to identify those organizations (…) governmental, non-governmental, civil society organizations, etc. who are part and parcel of the governance structure (…). So it is by our training you get to know so that if any issue comes up you will already be able to identify who are the stakeholders who must be consulted or if there is a discussion, who are those people we have to bring on board for the discussion to take place” (Interviewee #3: senior administrative officer, RCC Ashanti, Kumasi, 28.07.2014).

121 The few training facilities are located in the capital, Accra and mainly serve those in top management positions. Training for those in lower level positions or so-called ‘street-level’ bureaucrats is often out of the question.
The insights from the quotes above appear to suggest that for bureaucrats to fit well within the frame of local development policy decisions and implementation, their initial professional training may not count much because some form of re-socialization may be required. Their everyday work norms in this context suggest some degree of docility as regards their relationship with local political actors. But it is the same docility and acquiescence with local political interests that make any meaningful policy implementation particularly difficult. It appears, one could surmise, that institutional policy change in the local state resonates with the notion of ‘business as usual’. This reflects the general limitations with the local state institutional changes or why nothing really changes aptly captured by Lowndes as “something old, something new and something borrowed” (2005, p. 291). More succinctly, it is the idea that local state institutional reforms are strategically adopted and planned by state bureaucrats, as informed by central political interests to be implemented in the local state with its dynamic local political and personal interests, which makes the reforms even more problematic. Certainly, the negative views about the administration and its bureaucrats derive from its perceived domination by the local executive which is headed by a chief executive who is protégée of the central government. The latter’s involvement in the local institutional development processes and their concomitant effects on institutional outcomes are the focus of our attention to in the chapters that follow.

These observations compare quite differently to other settings in the Global South especially among Southeast Asian countries that share similar development trajectories with Ghana and other West African countries. In the case of Thailand, for example, there are often alliances between individuals with local political and business interests and bureaucrats (see Riggs, 1966; Painter, 2006; Korff et al., 2007). In that arrangement, the local businessmen and politicians gained protection for their dealings in the local arena while bureaucrats on their part received financial rewards. This arrangement is only reconstituted when there is larger regime change and thus shifting the power differentials such that bureaucrats became stronger and local politicians the clients. Although in both countries, popular participation is very limited, institutional change and local development takes place in Thailand than Ghana although at a higher cost.
6.5 Concluding Remarks

The discussion in this chapter has shown the complex interaction and suspicion that obtain among a group that otherwise should work in harmony to bring development to their local communities. The Assembly Members in both study areas seldom trust their bureaucracy that serves the local political structure to which they (i.e. Assembly Members) belong irrespective of the incumbent regime. And in particular, their attempts to expropriate the competence and activities of the local administration raise questions about the DAs' promise of quality goods and service provision and socio-economic development in the local state. The pursuit of individual interests in conflict with formal institutional rules is properly explicated by institutional and actor perspectives: they help explain the behaviour of the local state actors namely a set of practices enacted by local political interests to challenge the hegemony of the DAs to which they respond. These practices point out the actors’ agency in shaping institutional processes (DiMaggio, 1988, p. 14). At the same time the passive response from bureaucrats tend to reinvent the wheel and show how actual changes remain scant in the institutional development processes by reminding us of the notion of sub-optimality in the local public policy (Scharpf, 1997, p. 76; 2010, p. 12). Indeed, these local political actors advance practices to contest the hegemonic structure of the local state. Even though the political actors are embedded in local institutional domains, which constrain their activities, the institutional structures simultaneously provide these actors, as entrepreneurs, the opportunity to exploit and contest their institutional hegemony.

The activities of the local politicians straddling between the formal bureaucracy as representatives and their private-political interests, under the guise of institutional reforms, produce consequences that affect the bureaucracy itself as well as the local political structure. Motivated by their individual and political interests, these political actors project a ‘big man’ image of themselves despite a clear mismatch between their rhetoric and their resources to fulfill that status. Their subsequent actions tend to stand in the way of an already complex, centrally-dominated and precarious bureaucracy of the local state. These contestations of the competence of bureaucrats derive from the very perception of the state and its actors who have long been perceived as less responsive and representing interests different from those of the constituents. The bureaucrats’ ‘newfound’ enthusiasm towards institutional change seems quite substantial but appears insufficient...
6. Reforming the Local Public Administration

to confront the persistent effect of local and national level politics on the administration and, therefore, making it difficult for them to produce any meaningful institutional changes and service provision in their local settings. Even more important is their own self-interests, both personal and political, which tend to offset any attempts to change the negative perceptions held about them in the performance of their duties.

Surprisingly, in all these tussles between local policy actors, the notion of stronger institutions for participatory development is totally neglected. This happens mostly because the actors are able to cloak behind the reforms to pursue their private and political interests that contradict the very objective of local political reforms (see Selznick, 1980, p. 20; Lieberman, 1997, p. 95–96). As was pointed out, actors with local political interest are numerous: bureaucrats, local political actors (appointed and elected), and neo-traditional actors all with different interests and motivation. Although bureaucrats are often castigated for the shortcomings of the institutional development processes, it is rather this complex mix of institutional processes and context that shapes the outlook of institutional development within the local state. It is, however, pertinent to note that the factors that inhibit the local administration in delivering good and service to the local public lie much outside as they are within the local state setting. Thus, explanations for local institutional changes, which are highly difficult to implement, must be situated within institutional settings in both the local state and outside. Thus, the processes of institutional cloaking within the local political arena must be seen as part of the general process of decoupling of ideas from the international development system. That outside actors are capable of manipulation and exploitation of local state programs in their own favour also suggests that the tenets of good governance often linked to local state institution-building and participatory development may prove difficult to unravel. These are the very concerns addressed in the next chapter.
In the previous chapter, the discussion focused on the complex interaction between actors who make local public policy and constraints to the provision of local public goods and institutional change. The institutional development processes at the local level are not independent but rather very much part of the multi-level processes at both national and international levels. Thus, the local institutional circumstances are a ‘mirror image’ of national and international institutional change programmes. The aim of this chapter, therefore, is to set out and situate the embeddedness of the institution-building and development rhetoric in the national (i.e. central) state and international programmes and preferences. This helps us to dispel the myths that specific development challenges in the Global South are inherently local (see Chang & Grable, 2014). The argument in the chapter is again underpinned by neo-institutional approach on the spread and adoption of institutional ideas (John Meyer, 2010; Paul DiMaggio, 1988; etc.) and taken together with the self-interest component of the actor-centered institutionalism (Fritz Scharpf, 1997, 2008, 2010) to highlight the inherent myths in the idea of change as well as the self-interests of central state and international actors in local state institutional development.

From this line of argument, the chapter explains how local level institutional change processes are strategically designed and pursued from the standpoint of the interplay of central actors and their international counterparts as promoted in the international development system. This design is not only meant for gaining legitimacy from the international development system and practice; it also enables the central government to dominate institutional relations and change processes at the local level despite the rhetoric of devolved authority and autonomy of the local state. This chapter, therefore, discusses the inherent myths and ambiguities in the institutional reform processes in the local state that are often taken for granted. Sub-themes discussed include the actual changes in the institutional reform processes; the illusions associated with the promise of local democracy and participatory development frequently touted in international development spheres; as well as the everyday practices of the DAs as reactions to the
7. Myths and Ambiguities in the Local political Reforms

financial support from the international development system to enhance their capacity and the promise of participatory development. Thus, a critique of the many unquestioned and glamourized beliefs about local state institutional enhancement as well as the remoteness of the mechanisms for their attainment is provided.

7.1 Institutional Changes in the Local State: How Much Difference in Outcomes?

Institutional reforms in the current local state commenced in 1988, almost three decades ago and any analysis of the DA system that may suggest the absence of changes in terms of institutional outcomes or provision of local public goods will be overly simplistic. Indeed, the local institutional and material outcomes go further than the simple debate on the benefits of decentralization and the inherent limitations associated with decentralization in developing countries as were discussed earlier in chapter five. Despite the persistent gaps between the promise and reality, research evidence has neither challenged nor doubted the existence of both qualitative and quantitative outcomes from the local state project. From the legislation that set up and govern the local authorities to fiscal processes that have churned out infrastructural projects including roads, schools, health centers, and sanitation facilities in all geo-political locations in Ghana add to the general belief that local state programmes and institutional changes have had major impact on the local constituents especially the very poor (see Thomi, 2000b, p. 263; von Braun & Grote, 2002, pp. 79–80; Asante, 2003, pp. 105–110; Kumi-Kyereme, et al., 2006, p. 73). Asante, for instance, shows the positive impact of the local state project on health and sanitation outcomes for rural

122 It is appropriate to note that empirical studies have been unable to establish specific causal linkages between local institutions, their reforms and local economic development per se (see Jütting et al., 2005; Leftwich, 2005; Rocha Menocal, 2007). Indeed, some states use democratic reforms to hide their actual practices that inhibit change by acting as structures of stability. Again, some undemocratic regimes, just like the former, do provide similar economic development outcomes (Przeworski et al., 2003). What appears plausible is that local democratic institutions may rather inform development processes but not determine their specific outcomes.
7.1 Institutional Changes and Outcomes in the Local State

people although the same could not be said of the quality education provided in those DAs (2003, pp. 106–107).

However, the core argument herein goes beyond economic gains from the local state project to analyse how the cycle of institutional change, together with its rhetoric, is sustained. The state and its presence, whether local or central, appeals to people in many different ways. More often, the benefits derived from the state as the provider of public goods, constitutes an important incentive to both state actors and the public. However, in some instances, the idea about the local state and its administration is, at first, not a question of material outcomes derived from it by constituents. In fact, some local constituents viewed the changes beyond the immediate economic gains in their localities to some form of identification with the state than when it was remotely present in their localities. Therefore, the sole focus of local state processes from the standpoint of accountability and efficiency (see e.g. Prud’homme, 2003) may not explain the everyday taken-for-granted processes of identification, perceived benefits and engagement with the local state. The discussion that follows delves into what the qualitative and quantitative changes from the state mean to constituents.

7.1.1 When local state institutional reforms matter to constituents

Local constituents, including Assembly Members and bureaucrats, generally tend to hold positive impressions about the local state no matter the content of its services. For some of them, their relationship with the local state was largely a personal attachment than the local state’s everyday provision of goods and services. Unsurprisingly, informants overwhelmingly thought that institutional change within the local state was very important. Indeed, their identification with their local state compared Accra, the capital which for constituents seemed so remote from the Upper West Region, was very meaningful:

“(…) in fact, majority of Ghanaians come from humble homes, rural communities, from areas where illiteracy (…) is high. Majority of us come from communities where people have survived and are coping with all sorts of environmental social and political dynamics using the traditional knowledge, the traditional know how. What does decentralization mean? (…) development at the local level and that presupposes giving a window an opportunity for local level participation; that is my passion, that intrigues (…) immediately I get down and get to the community either to sensitize or to monitor a project and meet these people coming, I feel that life is
The attraction of, and identification with, the local state make it even less surprising that in locations where public services are ideally within the competence of the state, rural folks showed willingness to voluntarily contribute to addressing the state’s ineffective provision of public goods (Walker, 2011, p. 17). But such claims cannot be taken at face value; even if the closeness of the state is appreciated not for material derivations per se, the long term economic gains cannot be underestimated. This is certainly the case when the creation of new districts has formed the basis of tension and conflicts among some indigenous populations and migrant groups and, thus, creating a sort of micro-nationalism. Lentz (2006) draws attention to the situation in the Upper West Region where the creation of new districts, an attempt to bring the state closer, became the basis of claims of origins and entitlement to locations. Inherent in those claims was the fact that the new districts and their locations were connected to which group or actors had the rights to determine and enforce local tax regimes (p. 902). In addition, the degree of communitarianism with, and support for, the local state appears to depend on the level of exposure to the local state and its presence. Those informants in Ashanti and the Kumasi metropolis in particular did not openly express such communitarian feeling, despite appreciating the role of the local state as crucial for local development. Perhaps, voluntary contributions to local public goods which were very well supported in rural communities (Walker, 2011) might rather be difficult to find in the Kumasi metropolis. One official pointed out:

“(…) these days if you have to do any community projects in town, it is very difficult to mobilize the people because it has become more of individuals pursuing their own thing; they think the government does not care about them and they have no part to play in the governance system (…). I should have been possible to organize durbars, meetings, etc. but if you announce and organize it, you will be surprised to know that nobody will attend especially in urban areas nobody will attend (…) maybe in the villages, some few people will attend (…). These days, people are building their knowledge and people are developing resistance to certain things (…)” (Interviewee #22: senior administrative official, Manhyia Sub-metro Council, Kumasi, 19.09.2013).

123 This is used in the sense of constituents’ identification with the local state as a responsive community.
That attitudes to the local state in urban locations were largely devoid of communitarian feeling became glaring during the field research and participation in public events organized by the local state authorities; forums where constituents could articulate their concerns. At these events in the two study locations, attendance by constituents was near-empty. These patterns of behaviour as reactions to the activities of the local state are discussed in later chapters. It is, probably, the reason why the focus of the local state and its reforms is mostly on less urbanized and rural localities than their urbanized counterparts; a reference quite often made in official development rhetoric of using participatory decision-making to reduce rural poverty (see Crawford, 2008, p. 255). Yet, processes in urban local governments are used for much of the local state institutional change rhetoric.

A recurring theme in the interviews was informants’ particular emphasis on local state institution-building to promote local level participation. As illustrated in Table 9, the overwhelming majority of informants (almost 80%) in both regions held notions that attempts at institutional change in the local state were aimed at increased local level participation. The rest even held closely related ideas about the outcomes from the institutional change attempts such as providing rooms for them to maneuver (over 18%) and autonomy in local state activities i.e. accountability that addressed corruption (over 4%). These views are not new because the official vocabulary on local government since 1988 has been to enhance participatory democracy and poverty reduction at the grassroots. Interesting is the fact that the idea continues to dominate the development rhetoric even in recent years (see MLGRD, 2010, p. 1; Crawford, 2009, p. 60). That persistent rhetoric of participatory development by both international actors and their local counterparts may partly explain why some constituents still repeat, in a rhythmic fashion, the notion of participation. Yet, as we shall see in subsequent sections, neither the local people, the regime, nor transnational actors could link that rhetoric to the reality on the ground.

124 Out of a number of public events, two are worth-mentioning here: the mid-year review of DAs activities organized by the Regional Coordinating Council in Wa, 29.08.2013 as well as a social accountability forum organized by the Kumasi Metropolitan Assembly (KMA) together with some civil society groups in Kumasi, 26.09.2013. The meetings were very less-patronized and one got the impression that those in attendance had being given some material incentive to be present at those forums.
7. Myths and Ambiguities in the Local political Reforms

Table 9. Respondents’ Views on Local State Institutional Reforms in the Two Regions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Participation</th>
<th>Maneuvering</th>
<th>Autonomy</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ashanti</td>
<td>60 (77.9)</td>
<td>14 (18.2)</td>
<td>3 (3.9)</td>
<td>77 (100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upp. West</td>
<td>16 (76.2)</td>
<td>4 (19.0)</td>
<td>1 (4.8)</td>
<td>21 (100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>76 (77.5)</td>
<td>18 (18.4)</td>
<td>4 (4.1)</td>
<td>98 (100)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author’s Compilation from MAXQDA Quote Matrix. Note. N=98

7.1.2 The proximate state: seeing the central through the local state

For some constituents, the local state remains the viable alternative to demand the central state of which they are part. This view is based on previous regimes’ practices under which they seldom ‘felt the arms of the state’ because it was never there or, at best, remotely present. The local state then becomes a medium for seeing and expressing their statehood and its products no matter how insufficient the products are. This was the case of one bureaucrat and constituent of Upper West:

“(…) the reason is that you know this whole local government concept is based on decentralization (…) now the Local Government Act itself, was meant to put out decision-making in the hands of the people themselves and which is good because you have come up north. I don’t know whether you had come up north 20 years ago; if you had come to this region 20 years ago, you would have seen the level of deprivation and you would have also seen that decisions, for example, to get a road in say Sisala District worked upon, you need to go and defend it in parliament. That was the old order (…) everything was centered at the top, but with decentralization,

125 The Chi-square test found no significance difference between the interviewees’ views on the local institutional outcomes for participation and maneuvering in the two study regions ($\chi^2=0.0314, df=1 n=98, p>.05$). Thus, the interviewees’ views on the role of local state institutions were not different in both study locations.
and the creation of the District Assemblies Act, the districts now take part of the government revenue and they describe it as their governments’ share” [Interviewee #23: senior regional agricultural official, Wa, 16.09.2014: #00:16:13–2#].

Coming from a bureaucrat with more than three decades of work experience in the civil service, the above quotation sums up the views, feelings and expectations of constituents located in areas where the state under the hitherto centralized regime appeared very remote to them. In effect, the presence of the local state provides an avenue for articulating local concerns even if immediate answers or solutions are not available. Thus, by its very presence, the state whether central or local with its staff, apparatus and processes, appears to construct a positive impression and, therefore, enhance its image among constituents (Migdal & Schlichte, 2005, p. 24).

Nonetheless, the preposition “but” (implying a negation) constantly echoed in discussions on efforts towards institutional change. In fact, although there was no suggestion to reject the local state, its practices of change and service provision were constantly questioned and contested. The major gaps between the promises set out in the institutional development processes and empirical reality (cf. von Braun & Grote 2002, p. 79) underpins the contestations in these institutional changes because the link to local development remains problematic (Crawford, 2008, p. 255; Crook, 2003, p. 80). This dissatisfaction is occasioned by instances when the state ‘shoots itself in the foot’. That is to say, state officials do create patronage networks which survive on state resources; local public goods are delivered to some designated ‘special clients’, and the promises of making the state present in the local arena appear farther than ever. These practices, therefore, dissipate the enhanced image the state has created in the minds of local constituents. Advancing the views and preferences of the regime speaks to a different logic but not popular participation. Of course, as was mentioned early on, the local political project does not have to be democratic in order to deliver the socio-economic prosperity. However, when both international and state actors promote a version of local political reforms in which the notion of participation takes on a sacrosanct character, a critical analysis of the concept becomes crucial.
7. Myths and Ambiguities in the Local political Reforms

7.2 ‘Unfulfilling Expectations’: Rhetoric of Participation and Change in the Local State

Probing the specific nature of what constitutes popular participation is a daunting task especially when constituents have varied interpretation of the concept. Again, the concept is often shrouded in some mirage of a carefully crafted bureaucratic apparatus that disguises its real character in everyday situations. It is precisely for this reason that our answer lies with elected representatives and bureaucrats. Following the numerous reforms, elected representatives must ordinarily know the unique concerns and everyday needs of their constituents. Together with their bureaucratic counterparts, they supposedly work at the local councils to articulate such concerns in a participatory manner. Thus, matching everyday processes in administration with rhetoric of participation is apt for our present undertaking. The general and sweeping assumption that reforms of the local state institutional structures would lead to popular participation and local development (see e.g. MLGRD, 2010, p. 1; World Bank, 2001, p. 108) appears hollow and largely mythical in the face of empirical reality. The lack or absence of genuine participation by popular process is borne out of the fact that most of the informants in this study pointed to instances where participation which is espoused as emanating from bottom-up has rather been top-down or, at its best, a sort of hybridized process of central regime’s ideas interspersed with some local insights.

7.2.1 Competing perspectives on local level participation and development

As pointed out earlier, it will be inadequate to argue that institutional changes and outcomes have not occurred in the local state reform enterprise. In fact, there are several ways to analyse the patterns and dynamics of institutional changes taking place in local settings; some could either attempt it from a historical approach or through a goal-oriented analysis (see Thomi, 2000b, p. 264). In this study, the approach is to match rhetoric with reality as captured by informants’ own experiences of local institutional changes. Attempts at local state institution-building are numerous but most recent reforms with Act 656 in 2003 and LI 1961 in 2009 seem to have given impetus to the structures to operate and bring about change. These legislation
7.2 Rhetoric of Participation and Change in the Local State

created a distinct service (independent of the national civil service) and departments of the DAs which have whipped up strong enthusiasm among some bureaucrats that the participatory promise of the local government is on course. Some planning officials appeared convinced with the changes in the local political structures. A remark from one official captured this enthusiasm:

“(…) a lot has changed with the reforms of the local government process in the sense that decisions are taken at the local level instead of centralized decision-making (…) and what I really like is the participation by the area councils and unit committees which means that planning emanates from the community level. Again, I appreciate very much the participation and decision making processes and implementation with the involvement of the people. Now if you award a project, the community that is awarded this project must be informed; when you write a letter to say you are the contractor who is supposed to work in the community, the community is informed of whoever is working there” (Interviewee #24: senior planning official, RCC Ashanti, Kumasi, 16.08.2013).

This official erroneously equated notification of constituents about predetermined projects with participation. The views presented above by that official appears to show that actors in the regional units might have ‘lost touch’ with local reality of involvement since some planning officials seemed somewhat unimpressed that participatory decision-making, which is the raison d’être of the local governments, rarely obtains at the local level. The latter’s argument is that local development plans tend to be a ‘mirror image’ of national ones as regulated by the National Development Planning Systems Act, 480. The fact that national guidelines strictly regulate locally-evolved development plans by the DAs creates the impression of unnecessary centralization of the latter’s task. Some planning officials were unimpressed with the national guidelines which, to them, reflected promises in the manifesto of the ruling party in power. Therefore, no specific locally-evolved policies exist in reality. However, since regulations are required to bring into harmony the development plans of all DAs, one could talk about hybridization of the development policy. This view was shared by a senior planning official in Wa:

“(…) you know the type of planning we do now, they say bottom-up but it is not really bottom-up. It is a mixture of the bottom-up and top-down because if planning guidelines emanate from the top, then naturally some people are dictating to you so you cannot be talking about bottom-up. The communities have action plans which could be galvanized and harmonized at the district levels into district plans but now the NDPC evolves guidelines such that district plans must be in consonance with
7. Myths and Ambiguities in the Local Political Reforms

the national level” (Interviewee #24: senior planning official, RCC, Upper West, Wa, 28.08.2013).

While guidelines are useful to keep track of events and changes, they may also inhibit the setting of specific local priorities especially if the blueprints become the benchmark for ‘ticking’ what model or predetermined goal has been met without recourse to whether or not it is a local priority. It was, therefore, less surprising that one planning official saw the changes only in the form of administrative modifications rather than practical, action-oriented activities that engender the involvement of local level actors in pursuit of development:

“(…) has there been any change at all? The changes that have come one, is bringing on board some of the decentralized departments under the main Assembly and, two redefining the functions of some of the departments (…) the budget unit is now budget and rating, and community development and social welfare coming under one common umbrella and here there is a challenge about ‘who is who’ in that office. The coming on board with other decentralized departments under the Assembly is a good thing because (…) now that they are directly under the Assembly, whatever the Assembly does: management meetings, everything, they are supposed to submit their action plans to the Assembly. They are supposed to submit quarterly progress reports to the Assembly so in effect it has improved the relationship between the Assembly and the previously decentralized departments” (Interviewee #26: planning official, Kumasi Metropolitan Assembly, Kumasi, 12.07.2013).

These contradictory positions held by personnel in planning departments who design local development plans in tandem with local political actors in the regions and districts follow closely from the seemingly (re-) centralization of the local governments (Awortwi, 2011, pp. 364–365; Wunsch, 2001, p. 279) through the persistent manipulation of their structures and tasks by central government despite rhetoric to change that behaviour. This further confirms local actors’ belief that their development plans are pre-designed for them. More critically, since the very notion of decentralized political institutions vis-à-vis local policy autonomy has not been clearly articulated, it is less surprising that local policy actors especially planning authorities still hold varying notions of local autonomy and their policy competence. Nonetheless, the official rhetoric which consistently follows the bottom-up mantra, even if the realities of participation suggest otherwise, was still dominant. Officials in central state ministries persistently put up arguments suggesting that participation in development planning and decisions evolves from the local communities themselves as remarked by an official in the local government ministry:
“(...) in our recent review of the decentralization and local government system, we started from the district level; town council meetings, then we went to the regional capitals. You know the planning process is bottom-up approach (...) it is not as if those days we just sit up here and push it down there (...) it emanates from the District Assembly level including the town councils, the urban councils and the zonal councils. They all make their inputs through the Assembly system to the national level. What we usually do is to issue to them the guidelines as a standard for our planning process so their inputs and priorities are incorporated into the national plan” (Interviewee #27: senior administrative official, Ministry of Local Government, Accra, 14.10.2013).

Ultimately, official rhetoric does not avail itself to critical questions of what sort of participation local people should engage in and how that process should be organized. That is why its own promise of participation that should be popular and locally-driven, in fact, implies that local people should follow a set of predetermined priorities. Beyond such rhetoric, which one often encounters, the illusions of participation is witnessed even more so at the substructural levels where participatory decision-making processes are supposed to take on the topmost priority as enshrined in their legislation. Indeed, these substructures exhibit clear evidence of departure of formal-official norms from everyday operative norms. In spite of the political reforms promising to build these local institutions, their activities rather create the impression that they serve patronage purposes instead of being avenues for local participatory development.

Let us take an example of daily institutional life at the planning departments to help illustrate this point. Despite the officials’ disparate narratives on institutional changes and participatory planning, they disregarded some basic and fundamental planning requisites. From personal observation during the field research at the regional and district bodies as well as the subdistrict structures of local government, several institutional shortcomings were very visible. The planning departments constitute the authority for physical planning in their respective DAs. Yet, they were quite obsessed with the official notion of participation to the detriment of the basic processes and institutional requirement needed for everyday physical and development planning. The situation was quite intriguing at the physical planning desks in the DAs’ substructures for two reasons. First, the non-convening of meetings for local development plans at the substructures implies that no particular use is made of the officials at the planning desks. Second, everyday physical planning activities and supervision requires appropriate
records keeping. Even if office computers and other administrative equipment appear enormous to ask of a sub-district structure, basic file-keeping practices may be sufficient for their tasks. This will help them to match their activities with their imagined vision of a well-functioning bureaucracy to which they constantly referred. Nonetheless, in nearly all the planning desks, these records on their daily routines were hard to come by. This was not very surprising because most of the bureaucrats did not even have desks of their own and their tasks were mostly joined with those of general administration.

In fact, it is this lack of institutionally-robust arrangement that made it possible for superiors in the main DA to reverse decisions made at the sub-district levels only through “word of mouth” or simply through a telephone call. Ironically, the junior bureaucrats at the sub-district levels had relapsed to a general acceptance of the institutional arrangement as it were. The payoff from the loose institutional arrangement had eroded any incentive for solutions by superiors and their subordinates. Yet, it is this false impression of ‘functional planning units’ that later feeds official rhetoric on participatory development and change. This appeared to be a clear case of intentional design by senior bureaucrats to keep the disjoint as it was. Thus, the hope and vision of a well-functioning local planning institution are expressed by all these policy actors but are capably decoupled from everyday planning processes and practices in the local state.

7.2.2 Illusions of local democratic institutions and participatory development

Key to explaining the challenge with local participatory development is the very design upon which the notion of decentralized local political institutions was premised. That thinking was based on a populist political process devoid of partisan politics (Crook, 1999, p. 115); an idea which in itself is an illusion because party political interests in the local government process has become increasingly overt under multi-party democratic governance. Underscoring that fact was the regime’s initial resistance to cede some political control to sub-national units. Indeed, most critics from the onset of the District Assembly system contended that the latter were “mere public relations ploy designed to give political legitimacy to a PNDC regime that had come to power unconstitutionally” (McLaughlin & Owusu-Ansah,
7.2 Rhetoric of Participation and Change in the Local State

1994, p. 57). Yet, that view has to be put in proper perspective. Given the political instability and the economic crises that hit the country in the 1980s, the idea of local political reforms that brought prosperity was quite easy to sell to the populace. Therefore, the development rhetoric based on the DA system was seen as the appropriate strategy to address the persistent problems of governance and poverty.

Table 10. Local State Actors’ Dislikes about Local Institutional Change in the Two Regions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disfavoured Aspects of Local State Reforms (%)</th>
<th>Actors</th>
<th>Lack of Expertise</th>
<th>Re-centralization</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Political Actors</td>
<td>17 (32.7)</td>
<td>35 (67.3)</td>
<td>52 (100)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bureaucrats</td>
<td>28 (60.9)</td>
<td>18 (39.1)</td>
<td>46 (100)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>45 (54.9)</td>
<td>53 (54.1)</td>
<td>98 (100)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author’s Compilation from MAXQDA Quote Matrix. Note. N=98

Thus the DAs, right from the outset, have always been viewed as avenues for local participation and economic development. Since then the idea of

126 Those illusions of the past were also part of the dilemmas of Rawlings’ PNDC which had envisaged some form of local democracy that would lead to economic prosperity but also one that allowed participation only for the revolutionary elements namely the Committee for the Defence of the Revolution (CDR) which represented the PNDC regime in all the districts (see Crook, 1994). These competing regime types and local state institutional processes consequently continue to shape the content of the current local state system.

127 The Chi-square test performed to check for difference in opinions between local political actors and bureaucrats on the perceived limitations of the local state institutional change was significant ($\chi^2=7.855, df=1, n=98, p<.05$). However, the test disaggregating the data into regions to check for difference in informants’ perceptions regarding the limitations to local institutional change processes did not achieve significance ($\chi^2=0.569, df=1, n=98, p>.05$). Thus, whereas there were no regional differences, political actors and bureaucrats did differ quite widely in opinions on the inherent limitations of local political reforms.
participation, for which reason new political structures for that purpose are created, remains dominant but practically untenable and variously contested in reforms of the local state. As evidence from this study shows, informants did not oppose local state institutional reforms in any significant way (see Table 10). Therefore, the institutional change processes were viewed in somewhat positive light. However, their views on aspects of local institutional change processes were no less negative. These less impressive views were informed not only by the perceived recentralizing tendencies of the regime but also the dearth of expertise for the activities of the local state as held by both bureaucrats and political actors.

Some insights offered by informants for the persistent domination of the local state included the use of the DA structure for promoting individual and incumbent regime’s interests, and the creation of some departments that are redundant in the entire change process. In the end, most of these substructures have become something like “rubber stamps” incapable of implementing any independent, locally-derived policy (Field Notes, 2013). On the issue of expertise, the interviewees frequently mentioned that the DAs comprised less literate individuals and those with specific skills to conduct the business of the local state. Interestingly however, while the majority of the bureaucrats held the view that expertise was lacking in the DAs, a critique usually reserved for the political actors, the latter rather thought that there were attempts from the regime and bureaucrats to centralize and dominate the local state and its institutional practices. These concerns are addressed in the other sub-sections.

Participation, in particular, is often linked to socio-economic development in the local institution-building processes (Crawford, 2009, p. 60; Ayee, 2003 p.19; World Bank, 2001, p. 108) but that linkage remains largely rhetorical. The official rhetoric about local participation is captured as: local development decisions are ‘not made for them’ but rather ‘made by them’. The hope often expressed in this official narrative is that through participation at the very basic unit of local political institutions, local socio-economic progress may be realized. But that ideal is empirically not true. As pointed out early on, there are some in-built normativity in the linkage including actors who sets the participatory goals and those who support such goals, and who implement those goals in local communities. Yet, these ideas are frequently taken at face-value. These ideals, developed in the Global North and transferred through the international development system, with preconceived project effectiveness and outcomes, are enticingly
handed to national governments (Keough, 1998, pp. 187–188). But quite often, they are accepted uncritically (see Crook, 2003, p. 77; Crawford, 2008, p. 57) and passed on for implementation in their respective local structures. Quite predictably, their outcomes present the unique challenge of that wholesale adoption.

Indeed, there were bureaucrats from the Upper West Region, where the creation of new districts is pervasive, who tended to question the rationale for the creation new of DAs if the pursuit of participatory decision-making was not attainable. Again, in most of the new DAs, the basic economic activities for raising internally generated funds were not present making them entirely dependent on remittance from central government; a dependency that further fuels the recentralization of devolved powers. The challenges of patronage-like structures which are very widespread across DAs in the country were hinted by one planning official:

“(…) you are creating an Assembly at Nandom, the people [officials] commute from here [Wa] and when there is no vehicle they cannot go; there is no accommodation over there (…) it is even not possible to have official accommodation; there has never been any structure and at the end of the day (…) you give them some amount which cannot even construct one office accommodation. Wa has suffered like that for a long time (…) office accommodation now is a big problem, a big challenge; residential accommodation is a big challenge (…) so what sort of district have we created? Because of politics, they rather create districts before thinking of infrastructure (…)” (Interviewee #21: planning official, Wa Municipal Assembly, Wa, 31.07.2013).

It was less startling that some informants voiced their distaste for the arbitrary creation of districts that cannot generate any funds internally to support local development. For them, all that those new structures could do was to depend on the insufficient remittance from the central government. These politico-administrative practices and technical changes, as previously pointed out by Thomi (1999, p. 103), in the Ghanaian local state and its reform in which responsibility were created without resources for participants to match their new roles, still persist. Such practices question the rationale for the new structures if what it takes for them to operate as local

128 A meagre start-up capital is often given to the new DAs and in 2012 the amount was set at GHC1 million (c.a. US$ 512,820). This amount is aimed at setting up infrastructure for administration to run (Ayee, 2012, p. 635). This lack of adequate consideration shows that the institutional changes prioritize the form over the content of what the local political structures do.

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administrations is not readily available. In fact, as informants pointed out, not much seems to have changed; rather more responsibilities have been added while resources have been woefully inadequate and in some instances diminished. As crucial as legislation establishing local administrations and their sub-units are, space and logistics for performing the task of delivering local public goods remains equally vital. It makes not much difference when legislation are passed but remain only as an appendage of the old structure. The consequence of the absence of space and logistics on the local bureaucracy was evident in the remark by one official:

“(…) the administrative aspect is rather well organized because all the activities of the sectional heads are controlled by the administrator (…) quarterly reports and annual reports, etc. (…) the major administrative challenge is accommodation; because we cannot accommodate all the various departments, we do not receive the right information and reports from the field (…) some of the heads complain that they have no place to sit (…)” (Interviewee #9: administrative official, Suame Sub-metro Council, Kumasi, 22.08.2013).

A self-cognizance observation made within the Bantama Sub-metro district in Kumasi, looking for the secretariat of the Town Council was equally intriguing. After combing the area for several days, it turned out that such premises did not exist at all although its Sub-metro council had been described by bureaucrats in other sub-metro councils as one of the ‘well-functioning’ substructures in the metropolis.129 It was quite striking that the administrative secretary who was working as part-time employee at the secretariat of the Sub-metro Council informed me that he was “comfortable working from here” (Field notes, 23.09.2014). The possibility for the councillors and their bureaucrats to meet, get information and produce town-level policies was out of the question. This is in addition to how constituents could access the services provided by these entities. This and numerous other institutional shortcomings crucially contest the persistent notion of stronger and participatory local-level institutions for poverty reduction.

It was compelling to observe that throughout the interaction with the interview partners, no specific locally-derived development policy was mentioned. Even upon prompting, local state bureaucrats and politicians in gen-

129 Ironically, bureaucrats in many of the substructures covered in the study expressed admiration for this sub-metro council especially its financial position. It did not come very surprising when other substructures in less-endowed Sub-metro councils were either missing or locked-up.
eral inadvertently misconstrued local development policies for local taxation initiatives. Therefore, their core focus on local taxation seemed to imply their commitment to ‘local development work’. Local taxation policy is, of course, embedded in the local development policy but it is not the other way round. However, this way of thinking among local state actors follows the rhythmic expression of the regime’s rhetoric on local policy formulation; repeated over time, local policy-makers come to take for granted local policy as one narrated by the central state without critique. Viewing the new structures from the larger political setting, there exists a subtle but persistent tendency towards fulfilling political promises for electoral favours. Incumbent regimes’ strive to create structures for patronage resources in order to curry favour with voters (see Green, 2010, p. 99; Gilbert et al., 2013, p. 125) even if bureaucrats only see the structures as non-viable and less capable to produce any genuine participatory development policy.

Political actors create expectations to shore up support from their local constituents when demanding their loyalty (via votes) to represent them and in return, the former promise to deliver development goods to the constituents. Such expectations and the desire to meet them often compel political office holders to create new institutional structures despite the obvious absence of the basic mechanisms for such structures to work and bring development to their localities.130 It is, therefore, apt in Ayee’s (2012) position that those who gain from the creation of new districts are “politicians, traditional leaders and youth groups” because their leaders are members of the regime. Even the choice of local administrative capitals is framed within traditional authority and autochthonous narratives, and the young unemployed party members are awarded local political and civil positions (pp. 637–638). Based on the national political system, new district structures are created with little resistance because incumbent governments often have parliamentary majority to their advantage to do so.

130 The debate on this claim remains unsettled. André and Mesplé-Somps (2010, p. 25), for example, contest such claims by arguing that pro-government districts tend to receive less public investments because of fears over political instability which force the regimes to seek favours from opposition districts by investing in those areas. Ayee (2012, p. 638), on his part, shows that the creation of new local state structures tends to favour central governments via local political interests, and traditional actors sympathetic to the incumbent regime.
7. Myths and Ambiguities in the Local Political Reforms

As stated earlier, the substructures at the local level are supposed to be the arena for participation. Yet, despite the numerous changes from 1988 to date, local actors feel distanced from the participatory promises set out in the DA system, casting further doubts on official rhetoric which argues to the contrary. In general, the concept of participatory development remains largely “spurious” (Ayee, 2000, p. 138) as different regimes in the post-independence era have used the communal structures for their own political mobilization and patronage networks. Subsequently, the dysfunction of the substructures has been a bone of contention between Assembly Members and the administration of the DAs as was discussed in the previous chapter. The Assembly Members generally tend to attribute the weaknesses of the substructures to the ineptitude of the bureaucrats who are unable to implement any decisions but rather pursue their interests. But that outlook could very well be situated within the central-local relations as regards institutional change in the local state. That is, perhaps, why Crawford concludes that the concept of participatory development is “illusory” because, as he explains, “control over resources remains in the hands of others both inside and outside local government” (2009, p. 76).

7.2.3 Local-central relations and blueprints for local institutional reforms

The everyday institutional practices at the local state present a vivid picture of how interested the central state is in the activities of its local counterpart despite the everyday rhetoric of putting local decisions in the hand of local constituents. Some critics have pointed out how the central state uses such tactics to constrict the autonomy of the local state. Control over local fiscal decisions by central bureaucrats (Wunsch, 2001, p. 279), an infraction on administrative competence and autonomy of the local state (Awortwi, 2011, p. 365) are among numerous attempts to subject the latter to central government control. These tendencies towards re-centralizing the local state under the central state work to the benefit of central government politicians and bureaucrats, and turns out to weaken the local political structures. Yet, it is very much the case with current institutional practices despite attempts and
7.2 Rhetoric of Participation and Change in the Local State

rhetoric of changing that behaviour. That the central government and bureaucrats hold so much discretion on decisions at the local level and its impact on local decision making was pointed out by one budget official:

“(…) I talked about these conservatives; those who are saying that the districts do not have capacity, those are the conservatives (…) imagine everybody has to chase certain documents and what not. Imagine 216 districts offices competing in terms of preference; it promotes dubious activities and now me being over there and enjoying these privileges you think that when they decentralize and it comes down here and I don’t see you again, what will I be doing there? You will say that no, no! they don’t have the capacity to do it; let’s hold it there (…) conflicting interests in one breath, they want to say they are decentralizing but the will to do that is not there. It is hypocritical. I mean the question is how would you get the experience? You must get the experience by putting your hands on the thing at the district level (…) you know it had to take its serious political will whether they will try it so that issue of no experience does not work at all” (Interviewee #20: senior budget official, RCC Upper West, Wa, 27.08.2013).

Nonetheless, these narratives about capacity are frequently used by the central state not only to retain hold of the local administration but also to decide for them on the kind of skills local policy actors need and how it should be undertaken. Even within the local state, the main DA structure also assumes a strong centralizing character by making almost all the decisions about administration and policy for their substructures. However, this happens much to the detriment of the function ceded by the DAs to their substructures:

“(…) actually, the decentralization is supposed to bring governance to the grassroots but I don’t see it as working (…) because most of our activities are being controlled by our [main] department which should not be so (…). So many other things and the sub-metro is unable to undertake autonomous decisions (…) there are still several restrictions on decision that the sub-metro should be mandated to undertake but you will be there and then ‘order from above’: do this, don’t do that, etc.; there is some form of ‘dictatorship’ so the sub-metro is unable to operate in its own capacity as it should have done” (Interviewee #9: interview with an administrative official, Suame Sub-metro Council, Kumasi, 22.08.2013).

Thus, in contrast to previous discussions, making a distinction between decentralized local institutions and the degree of autonomy to sub-district

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131 At the time of the study, there were some financial reforms to give more autonomy on fiscal decisions to the local state which has so far been in the purview of central bureaucrats. The composite budget system was part of these changes. Yet, informants pointed out the apparent resistance to the ongoing changes by central state actors.
structures is analytically helpful. The domination of sub-district structures is further strengthened by the position of the DCE who is central government acolyte and at the same time heads the DA’s administration with executive functions. It has been pointed out that the appointment of the DCE by the President provides the channel for central domination of the local state. Crawford, for instance, sees the process as countervailing because “executive power is concentrated in the hands of a political appointee, the DCE, rather than in a civil servant” (2009, p. 69). These practices, in the end, tend to undermine the local state legislature which was the case as alluded to by one local legislator:

“(…) when you write [want] a project and you take to the MCE, if they are not doing politics with it, he will send that letter to the planning unit and then to the various sub-committees (…) but we don’t. Everybody wants to send it to the MCE and he sometimes thinks that this is my party issue and they will implement it right away (…). Most of the time the budget is thrown overboard (…) that is why when we are about to have [elect] conveners, the Chief Executive wants to make sure his people get the nod (…)” (Interviewee #28: Assembly Member, Manhyia Sub-metro Council, Kumasi, 20.09.2013).

That ability to undermine the local legislature is made possible by the fact that the most important resources of the DA are held by the DCE and with these resources, the DCE could quickly and capably attract even the most obstinate opposition members to their camp. In fact, by ensuring that these local politicians get the nod on specific committees, the DCE could count on them to return a favour when needed most:

“(…) most of the elected members belong to the other side, [opposition in national politics] but it is not [supposed to be] like that in the Assembly (…) but you know most Assembly Members too, they want their part of [the booty] to ‘chop’ so some will be on the Chief Executive’s side and others will be on the side of the PM (…). Because of that after Assembly meetings, they go to have further discussions with the MCE and twist all that were discussed (…)” (Interviewee #1: Assemblyman, Asokwa Sub-metro Council, Kumasi, 02.10.2013).

Let us take an example of how the position of the DCE is expressed. On July 8 2013, I had gone to the Kumasi Metropolitan Assembly (KMA) to see the chief director of the DA but he together with the chief executive (i.e. MCE) was in meeting so I joined other people, who had come to see the MCE, at the reception to wait. When the meeting was over, the MCE came to the reception and informed those wanting to see him that it was not possible that day without a clue when they should come back. In his words: “those of you waiting for me, today it is not possible. You know when I say...
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I want to see you, I do but today, I can’t see anybody”. And that was it; those people accepted the situation without any protest and began leaving the premises. Although initially startled, I still assumed that behaviour was part of daily institutional life in Ghana in which public officials could become the ‘public institutions’ by determining the rules. However, it became even clearer when I encountered, on a daily basis, similar queues in front of the regional minister’s office. Listening to their conversation, it was obvious that most of them were party sympathizers who had come there in expectation of some job or financial assistance. Impliedly, the power and prestige of these regime protégées within the local state depended on having followers surrounding them in expectation and return of favours.

Intervention programmes that end up in centralized political structures enhance patronage since some constituents tend to see the elites as their patrons (see Korff et al., 2007, p. 377). In that sense, the intentional design of the DAs and their substructures to facilitate the decoupling of the promise of participation from everyday practices is an attempt to centralize local state funds and resources in the hands of the DAs’ executive to create a patronage structure. In that way, the clients of these patrons could easily be addressed along ‘loyalty-favour’ exchange terms. Nonetheless, the so-called powerful position of DCEs deserves a second and critical look. Despite being in charge of the executive bureaucracy, decisions by DCEs are dictated to them by the central regime. That practice in reality makes them the weakest members of the DA bereft of individual initiatives, just as the saying ‘who pays the piper calls the tune’ goes. Again, as a gesture from their mentors for political loyalty, some DCEs are appointed to oversee districts which they have never lived in and, therefore, may not know the lived realities of their constituents. This local political behaviour in itself is an affront on the oft-cited rhetoric of local political reforms that address locally-specific development reality. As the most powerful member of the DA, the lack of familiarity with locally-specific needs implies they will only rubber-stamp the regime’s preferences without reference to the actual concerns of constituents.

It has to be pointed out that while the position of the DCE is legislatively legal, it is at best semi-democratic and mimics the appointment of district commissioners during the colonial administration. The practice reflects the notion of selective appropriation of modernity: the reflexive selection, adaptation and reinterpretation of the Weberian notion of a well-functioning
bureaucracy in the modern state (Eisenstadt, 2000, p. 14). Given this un-ending influence, the intriguing question that arises is why would the central state pursue interests and practices to dominate the local state and its policy choices when the former consistently presents an alternative discourse? Several explanations abound but what, perhaps, appears most plausible is the mechanism for sustaining the interest of the central; what we could refer to as a ‘strategic design’ of the local state and its administrative units by central political interests for the latter’s own benefit. Indeed, the regime most capably uses local political reforms to enhance its credibility of pursuing institutional change and development despite the intentional and subtle attempts to preserving existing institutional practices (Crawford, 2009, p. 75).

True, the domineering position of the central state over the local is paramount but there are other variables that affect local policy beyond the strategic interest of central state at the local level. Legitimacy concerns appear the most attractive interest for both central state actors and international experts who make local development policies. As an “epistemic community” with expertise in local public policy (Haas, 1992, p. 2–3; Rottenburg, 2009, p. 78), the demeanour and strategies of this group greatly shapes the direction of local institutional change. They construct legitimacy narratives that help them to appear credible in the field of international development and attract development funds via rhetoric on how indispensable they and their activities are, and how their practices meet some internationally set standards. Excerpts from their operations are then presented as evidence of success. These multi-level legitimacy concerns and how they influence local institutional practices are addressed in more details in the sections which follow.

7.3 Institutional Reforms and Everyday Practices of the Local State

The possibilities, challenges and limitation involved in the local state’s provision of local public goods have already been mentioned but a recap of those goods and services is necessary herein. They include among others infrastructure and maintenance of sanitation, health, education facilities, and certification of birth and death. In addition, the DAs and their substructure are supposed to derive and support local development programmes
7.3 Institutional Reforms and Everyday Practices of the Local State

through a set of processes including quarterly meetings by the various councils of the substructures to derive development policies, generating taxes to support those programmes, etc. These goods and services, no matter how inadequate they may be, are still provided by the DAs to their constituents. Therefore, the question that arises at the outset is how do they perform these functions? In the discussions that follow, the everyday practices, the resources and the various interests that come to play in shaping the local institutions, and their goods and service provision are critically analysed.

7.3.1 Financial resources for daily public goods in the local state

The local state provides local public goods and services generally with two levels of funding: internally-generated funds and the constitutional provisions allowing the central state to remit financial resources to the DAs through the District Assemblies Common Fund (DACF). The DACF constitutes five percent of the national revenue (i.e. GDP). Therefore, the DACF remains the major source of local revenue to the DAs as seen from Table 11. However, given the surge in development expectations placed on the DAs vis-à-vis their limited financial resources, a third and supplementary financial resources from external sources remain imperative to their everyday service provision. This especially the case when the size of the local economy remains marginal. As mentioned earlier, the DAs generate their own funds internally with the hope that they would become financially self-reliant to deliver the promise of local socio-economic transformation. However, the local governments are often limited to a list of items that could be taxed. They ordinarily do not generate income from large companies and businesses that operate in their jurisdiction because the central state manages those taxes. The DAs rely rather on tolls from local commerce, basic rates and fines as their internally-generated funds. These include market tolls, property rates, building permits and other physical structures, public toilet revenues, and advertising space.
7. Myths and Ambiguities in the Local political Reforms

Table 11. District Assemblies Common Fund Disbursed to the Two Study DAs, 2010–2013

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Year 2010</th>
<th>Year 2011</th>
<th>Year 2012</th>
<th>Year 2013</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kumasi Metro</td>
<td>1,021,978.63</td>
<td>1,071,119.66</td>
<td>845,371.10</td>
<td>1,136,288.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wa Municipal</td>
<td>213,688.71</td>
<td>411,600.26</td>
<td>316,906.61</td>
<td>640,583.56</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: DACF, 2014. Note. Some figures were given in the local currency, Ghana Cedi (GH¢). 2012 exchange rate: US$ 1 = GH¢ 2.2

Thus, with a meagre local economy (see Table 12), the DAs have to constantly count on external support to provide public goods and services.

In the Ghanaian local state, as elsewhere in the developing world, inadequate financial resources account for their ‘weakness’ and perpetual dependence on the central state. This institutional weakness also serves the basis for international actors to intervene and provide the requisite financial and technical support for the tasks of the local state (Romeo, 2003, p. 92). Indeed, the external financial resources that flow to the Assemblies remain very substantial and in some instances above the remits from the DACF.133

132 The Fund, governed by the District Assemblies Common Fund Act, 1993 (Act 455), is distributed to the 216 DAs based on some need criteria determined by a number of factors. The formula is not fixed but approved by parliament after suggestions by the Fund Administrator. The core characteristics include a need factor (i.e., health, education, water and roads) and calculated with some location quotient; seed money for newly created districts; allocations to Members of Parliament to undertake projects in their constituency; and overhead expenses made by the RCCs in their supervisory duties. The DACF’s share of national incomes was to be set at 7.5 percent in 2014.

133 Parts of this section appear in an article on everyday strategic responses to external development funds given to the DAs (see Sabbi, 2016).
Table 12. Funds Generated from the Internal Economy of the Two Study DAs, 2011–2014

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Kumasi Metro/Year</th>
<th>Wa Municipal/Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Amount (US$)</strong></td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Kumasi Metro/Year</strong></td>
<td>6,278,670.16</td>
<td>5,466,192.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Wa Municipal/Year</strong></td>
<td>114,664.99</td>
<td>149,283.53</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Despite the acknowledgment that international development funds come with a ‘baggage’ of interests and influence, it is really not surprising when political actors and bureaucrats in public bureaucracies quickly rebuff any suggestion that international development intervention has inherent influence on local policy initiatives. In fact, the idea behind this thinking evolves from the very critique of these transnational organizations that they sometimes act as “dinosaurs at work” and impede local initiatives based on their interests and biases (Lingnau & Thavrak, 2009, p. 456). A prominent critique was that they were working contrary to their own principal goal of supporting self-determined development by attempting to impress upon their own normative notions of change in the Global South (see Weilenmann, 2009, p. 156).

Given that much institutional reform in these contexts are initiated and supported by external development actors, a self-assessment of these international actors became necessary and in a way, partnership with local actors became the new rhetoric for supporting local initiatives and change. Presently, it is remarkable to observe that policy-making and prescription of policy solutions to local institutional challenges between transnational actors and local counterparts works quite well in coherent manner. This new thinking along partnership lines, despite its obscurity, has fed official rhetoric of the central government as well to the extent that bureaucrats in the
ministries and local government structures easily downplay any influence from transnational actors. A senior bureaucrat in the local government ministry hinted:

“(…) for donors, they normally buy into our policies but they don’t form part of our policy formulation, no! We form our policy and they look at it if it suits them, then they buy into it (…) they have their guidelines from their own countries (…) they may go into water, sanitation, education, health, etc. They then look at our plans and policies and say we are interested in this area. Then we sit down and we negotiate (…) they do not inform any changes, no way; those days are gone! oh yes!, those days are gone. Seriously speaking, we don’t allow donors to now come and dictate to us” (Interviewee #27: senior administrative official, Ministry of Local Government, Accra, 14.10.2013).

This position is less striking because these central, top-ranking bureaucrats often enjoy praises from their transnational counterparts (Janus, 2014, p. 20) and, thus, share the latter’s rhetoric of promoting only endogenously-derived development. This enhances further the perpetuation of the influence of external actors in the formulation and implementation of intervention programmes in the developing world. However, there is more to this enthusiasm with which local development experts conceive their partnership with transnational actors. Indeed, within the local institutional settings where the actual effect of this partnership is felt, there is a genuine belief that the influence persists even if it remains covert. A senior planning official in the RCC in Ashanti was unequivocal on this point:

“(…) actually, the influence comes with some of the proposals that we submit (…) you have to send them to the donors for them to determine whether they are also prepared to support and so always you need the ‘no objection’ from them and most often this ‘no objection’ has strings; the processes are so cumbersome to the extent that you always follow it and delay the projects and sometimes implementation becomes a problem (…) the guideline are good for us to know exactly what we are supposed to do but it is the determination of how the money should be used; they will tell you this can be used for this particular project when that is not your priority” (Interviewee #24: senior planning official, RCC Ashanti, Kumasi, 16.08.2013).

Similar notions of intervention in local policy were espoused by informants especially on the accounting and reporting styles that come along with international development funds. Finance officials in the DAs cautiously pointed especially to the World Bank and its reporting formats. The Bank rejected the local reporting standards and was, in fact, influential in changing the local reporting system to the Ghana Integrated Financial Management Information System (GIFMIS) in order to meet international standards. As the informants pointed out, the Bank was emphatic that without it,
7.3 Institutional Reforms and Everyday Practices of the Local State

no development funds would be released to the DAs. These practices show the undying influence of these external development actors in the task of local bureaucracies.

Despite the benefits of simplifications and standardization of the international reporting formats for the practices of local bureaucracies and their provision of public goods, the unspoken reality is that, these standards are used to hide the impact of their development work in the institutional change processes (Rottenburg, 2009, p. 72) and any attempt to rebuff that fact must be done with caution. In particular, such practices reflect how powerful these actors still are in the formulation and implementation of programmes in developing countries. The influence is even more pronounced, albeit covertly, within the local political units and their bureaucracies where most of the funds and support from transnational actors are sent. The influence persists because transnational actors find rhetors among their local counterparts who help the former to carry their message through. Discussed in the next section are the subtle influences of transnational organizations on the operations of local government structures through the funds they provide to induce the performance of the DAs.

Capacity-building is an ideal highly expressed by local politicians, bureaucrats and transnational actors; it is often seen as something inherently good and worth pursuing. Frequently conceived as performance improvement techniques, capacity-building programmes and resources are used to express the vision and hopes of local development. Although fundamental questions on the nature of skills required and who should provide those skills are often vague, the international development system strongly supports capacity development programmes. Two major external funding sources that aim at whipping up the performance of DAs in Ghana are the District Development Facility (DDF) and Urban Development Grant (UDG).134 Interestingly, however, the local governments tend to preoccupy themselves with qualification for these funds at the expense of their so-called task of promoting participatory development in their localities. The DDF is a multi-donor special fund set up in 2008 to induce all local governments to undertake their mandated tasks of locally-evolved development.

134 Enormous financial resources continue to flow to the District Assemblies on individual and bilateral basis including Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and the UK’s DFID. However, the DDF and UDG are funds that focus specifically on capacity development.
7. Myths and Ambiguities in the Local Political Reforms

Although the Government of Ghana (GoG) makes a contribution to the basket, the bulk of the fund (over 70%) is currently contributed by a collective of four of its international development partners namely: France’s Agence Française de Développement (AFD), Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA), and Germany’s Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau (KfW).135

The DDF as an additional financial resource, ideally, is to enhance the institutional capacity and induce the performance of the DAs in service provision and augment their local development programmes (MLGRD, 2012b, p. 18). The preoccupation by the DAs with funds from transnational organizations is not very surprising since that add greatly to their resource pool, and which they urgently need, to undertake development projects in their local communities. Indeed, of the US$ 54,510,655 disbursed to various DAs as of 2011, the Kumasi Metropolitan and Wa Municipal Assemblies received US$ 4.8 million (about 9%) and US$ 1.8 million (about 3%) respectively (see Table 13).

Table 13. External Funds via the District Development Facility to the Study DAs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Kumasi Metro/Assessment</th>
<th>Wa Municipal/Assessment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amount (US$)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006–2009</td>
<td>2,539,450.60</td>
<td>910,824.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010–2011</td>
<td>2,356,416.82</td>
<td>679,514.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>4,895,867.42</td>
<td>1,590,338.63</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: MLGRD, 2014. Note. There was always a delay between allocation and actual transfer of funds.

135 Agence Française de Développement: French Agency for Development; Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau: German Development Bank. Given the uncertainty as regards the future of this multi-donor fund, a letter of intent was signed in 2014 by the development partners and the GoG to continue funding the DAs under the DDF until 2018 with funding commitment set at US$ 230 million. Switzerland was committing nearly US$ 34 million to the fund between 2014 and 2018 upon the withdrawal of CIDA in 2014.
In 2011, only six out of the 216 DAs did not qualify for the DDF which points to the importance attached to the fund. The DAs are not the only entities preoccupied with these funds; the local government ministry is also very keen on the fund as well, using it as its flagship project to develop local institutions in enhancing the provision of quality local services. By implication, the fund is used to address the political commitments made by the regime. This was hinted by one senior official:

“(…) as for the capacity problems they are there and that is the more reason why even the LGS was set up with the foremost function to actually handle the human resource and management issues of the MMDAs so the onus as regards capacity-building lies with the Local Government Service and so they have been doing some routine capacity-building programmes (...) with regard to the support for the capacity of Assemblies we do a lot (...) we have an intervention called the DDF which is basically a grant from donors; it is a pool in which donors put their resources together and we disburse the funds to the MMDAs based on their performance” (Interviewee #27: a senior administrative official, Ministry of Local Government, Accra, 14.10.2013).

Even more preoccupied are the Metropolitan and Municipal Assemblies (MMAs), the only category of DAs entitled to access the Urban Development Fund (UDG). This funding stream provided by the World Bank is important because it provides additional financial resources for these districts. With these international funds, the DAs can undertake several physical development projects that their internally-generated funds and governmental transfers alone cannot accomplish. Indeed, between 2011 and 2012 over US$31 Million had been released to the various MMAs with about US$ 8.4 million and US$ 370,000 flowing to the Kumasi Metropolitan and Wa Municipal Assemblies respectively as shown in Table 14.

Some series of activities and processes facilitate patterns of behaviour that are later enacted by the DAs to receive these funds. The award of the DDF to the DAs is based on an evaluation of their performance with the Functional and Organizational Assessment Tool (FOAT) based on a set of indicators. These indicators are categorized into minimum conditions and performance measures.

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136 This is funded under the Ghana Local Government Capacity Support Project of the World Bank from 2011 to 2017. It aims at improving urban institutional management, improve their delivery of decentralized urban service, and strengthening their fiscal capacity.
Table 14. The Flow of Urban Development Grant to the Study Local Governments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kumasi Metro/ Phase</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2011</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amount (US$)</td>
<td>4,611,986.18</td>
<td>3,783,784.66</td>
<td>8,395,770.54</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wa Municipal/ Phase</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2011</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amount (US$)</td>
<td>368,381.31</td>
<td>(–) –*</td>
<td>368,381.31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The minimum conditions are the basic tasks that the DAs must perform in order to qualify for this fund (MLGRD, 2012a, pp. 1–3, annex 2). The activities include: having an active district planning coordinating unit; formulating annual action plans; preparation of annual statement of accounts; having no adverse audit comments on dishonesty; preparation of annual procurement plan; holding the minimum number of General Assembly Meetings per year; and showing evidence that progress reports on the implementation of annual action plans have been submitted.

7.3.2 External financial inducement and local state institutional expectations

DAs are expected to possess the capacity to provide services to their residents and the benefits of the DDF to the various DAs cannot be underestimated. Indeed, it supplements their internally generated funds as well as the financial inflow from central government, the DACF. DAs are able to undertake so many development projects, within the fund’s prescription, in their localities. Nonetheless, the fund tends to act as double-edged sword; despite its support of extra funds to the DAs, the latter tends to be structurally concerned with qualifying for the grants than its promise of participatory development that would involve local actors. The reason behind this thinking seems to suggest that qualification for the funds can compensate for lack of actual participation of local level actors. As long as the everyday

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practices of the local governments bring funds for local development projects, does it matter if local level participation is neglected? But this question rather reveals a contradictory position here; transnational actors as agents of local institution-building ideally support participatory decision-making that addresses context-specific needs and project ownership. Therefore, a de-emphasis of substructure participation will be an indictment on their core principle of local institutional-building for change.

Particularly interesting is how the assessment criteria perceive the substructures. The planning system and management/organization (see Appendix I) are areas that attract higher assessment scores but very rarely do they highlight the connection between the DAs and their substructures. Yet, the DAs’ planning systems are supposed to comprise substructure-level plans which are subsequently composed into district level plan. The assessment criteria do not give so much attention to DAs’ involvement of their substructures in daily decisions compared with, for instance, their financial management or planning system. However, one realizes that the latter is supposed to be derived from the task of the substructures (e.g. the town/zonal and sub-metro councils). The financial inducement could, therefore, be seen as a structural deficiency towards the participation of the grassroots in the various communal structures.

The performance measures, on the other hand, show the relative performance of each DA. Just like other rational management tools such as the logframe (see Wallace et al., 2007, p. 107), these performance measures constitute a major component in the allocation of the DDF to each DA. The nine indicators which assess the performance of a DA in specific tasks are shown in Appendix I and categorized into administration and task with their respective maximum scores. Following a successful evaluative assessment with the FOAT, the fund is allocated as follows: all DAs that fulfill the minimum conditions receive a basic grant (20% of the overall pool) and a performance grant (68% of the overall pool).137 A capacity-building grant (12% of the overall pool) is allocated equally to all DAs to address their capacity gaps as identified by the assessors (MLGRD, 2012b, p. 4). DAs receive different allocations because they record different levels of performance in successive years, and among themselves. Since their performance

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137 The quotas for the various dimensions are not fixed and new quotas may be set by the MLGRD before the start of new assessment sessions.
is not fixed, a DA can even receive less than what it received in previous years.

Even so, DAs that do not achieve the minimum DDF qualification mark are entitled to the DDF capacity development fund. Urban districts, the MMAs, tend to occupy themselves with qualifying for the extra funding from the UDG, funds that are solely provided by the World Bank, since they are the only DAs that could access the grant.¹³⁸ After meeting the minimum criteria for the FOAT assessment, MMAs should have a score equal to or above the national average of the DDF performance measure in order to receive the UDG. This qualification score was set at 82 points in 2011. Some DAs who qualify for the UDG also enjoy other benefits; urban districts, the MMAs are eligible to access a capacity support fund of US$40,000 and the Kumasi Metropolitan Assembly, for instance, received a grant of $4.2 million in 2012 from the World Bank as the ‘best managed’ metropolis in the country. Nonetheless, these funds’ connection with qualitative changes especially in the quality of local public goods remains problematic.

7.3.3 Myths of funding assessments and everyday ‘tactical responses’ from the local state

The background to the assessment for the external funds provides a context to understand how the DAs react in the direction of the funds. Very typical of complex organizations, the DAs are very sensitive to external evaluations, both internally and externally (see Meyer & Rowan, 1991, p. 51), and they devise means to confront these ‘unpleasant necessities’ even more so when it involves the inflow of financial resources. As pointed out earlier, the meagre remittance from the central government relative to the needs of the DAs and the challenges of generating funds internally lead them to become heavily reliant on external development assistance. Without such funds, most of the tasks of the DAs would never commence at all:

¹³⁸ The categorization of this fund appears misleading. A coordinator at the local government ministry hinted that the fund is a grant to the urban DAs but a ‘soft loan’ (i.e. concessional loan) to the Government of Ghana (Field notes, Accra, 01.02.2016).
“(…) now with the coming into being of the District Development Facility (DDF) and the Urban Grant (UG), Assemblies do get a lot of money from these areas (…). To be frank, for instance, if it were not the UG and DDF, for the past four years we wouldn’t have done much because we get a lot of money from the UG and the DDF. So that is the main source (…) the UG and DDF are based on performance because if the assessment is done and you perform, then it means that you have capacity. In fact, that is what the donors have done (…) if you want to support Assemblies to grow, then why shouldn’t you give the money to them to finance the plan they have developed themselves? So all the donors decided to put their money into one basket (…) they don’t want to give their monies to any Assembly to misuse it so they come to the Assemblies and assess whether the Assemblies are doing what is expected of them (…) if the Assembly passes, then they give you the money” (Interviewee #26: planning official, Kumasi Metropolitan Assembly, Kumasi, 12.07.2013).

Similar to views expressed by other bureaucrats, the notion of support for locally-evolved plans and policies is often taken for granted while processes to qualify for the funds become the everyday administrative norm. There is rarely an attempt to relate the performance of the DAs to actual participatory priority setting on the ground although the funding rhetoric often refers to this linkage. With its objective as a performance-based fund, the DDF enhances competition among the DAs to qualify. Yet, it is this dependence on external financial assistance that leads the DAs to put up the most dramatic appearance because failure to qualify for the funds brings recriminations from both local and central political actors. After ‘independent’ consultants has been appointed to conduct the assessment, the various districts are informed of the timing, specific documents and indicators re-

139 See Odoi-Larbi (2014), Jalulah (2014) and “Bolgatanga Municipal Assembly loses out on fund” (2014) for details on central state political actors’ attacks on DAs which do not manage to qualify for the DDF and UDG with a call for sanctions to be applied on members of the DAs. A regional minister openly attacked members of a DA that although other DAs were preoccupied with preparation to meet the DDF and UDG qualification scores, others were rather engaged in internal squabbles which caused them to lose the external funds (Jalulah, 2014). This rebuke appears to perhaps tell the DAs that these funds will not be available forever so ‘do whatever it takes’ to qualify.

140 Consultants may be foreign, local or both and must have expertise in evaluation of development projects. Their independence is curious because, as Rottenburg points out, there is often a subtle understanding between them and the implementing experts in order to exact maximum benefits from consulting services (2009, p. 20). Therefore, specific critiques that may undermine the entire programme are more likely to be softened.

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quired for the assessment. The assessment lasts three days in each DA during which the consultants meet top DA officials to set the agenda and timelines for the assessment but it is during the pre-assessment phase that the drama of qualification for the funds truly unfolds.

Ostensibly, these substructures have worked harder in the previous year to improve the development needs of local constituents and now invite external financial resources that will help them to do even more. Meetings and the associated minutes (see functional capacity of the DAs in Appendix I) constitute important components in the assessment criteria and higher scores accrue to DAs that have provided reports of the various (sub-) committee meetings and made them available to the assessors as well as progress reports on the implementation of DA’s activities. Despite the relatively lower performance score assigned to how DAs interact with their substructures, the DAs at the same time depend on the substructures to qualify for these external funds. The DAs persistently put pressure on their substructures to arrange the required documentations in order for the former to achieve the maximum scores necessary from the assessment by, for example, organizing ‘shabby’ and sometimes ‘cooked-up’ meetings and writing of reports required for assessment. DAs’ focus on revenue requirements (which enhances their position to receive higher scores on fiscal capacity) and council meetings at the substructures especially at the sub-metro and zonal councils were very instructive. This was evident in the remarks by one administrative official in Kumasi:

“(…) in the sub-metro we have all the structures [rules] (…) but not the authority to implement any decision; it has to go to the MCD for approval and until it is approved, we do not get to do anything (…). So we are supposed to meet four times in a year but over here even if you call meetings, nobody wants to come (…) because they think the meetings at the sub-metro are not effective and do not produce results (…). As for the meetings we do, if we do not, KMA will lose points in the

141 In contrast to the substructures, meetings at the General Assembly (GA) level are very frequently organized and patronized at least by their attendance list. The motivation behind this, however, appears to be the sitting (per diem) and transportation allowances paid to DA members. The DAs are mandated to set their own allowances for meetings (MLGRD, 1994, p. 23) and the expenditure on these allowances from a DA’s income could be very substantial. An interesting observation is that Assembly Members usually do not miss GA meetings because they were sure that their allowances would be paid promptly and some Assembly Members could even write the names of their absent colleagues on the attendance list to receive these allowances.
7.3 Institutional Reforms and Everyday Practices of the Local State

FOAT assessment so the MCD will insist we do the meetings. So we manage to do the meetings anyways and write the minutes but as to whether the content will be implemented is another thing” (Interviewee #29: administrative official, Oforikrom Sub-metro Council, Kumasi, 09.09.2013).

Apparently, the major preoccupation of the DAs and the funding agencies appears to be the provision of some smart statistics that help them project some evidence of achievements while simultaneously concealing the real impact of the funds on empowerment of local communities (see Rottenburg, 2009, p. 72). More specifically as observed from the interview below, with the passive acquiescence from their transnational counterparts, the DAs have become adept at doing everything possible to qualify for the funds even if it involves fabricating evaluation documents that help them access these external funds. Aside from assigning lower scores to DAs and their relationship with their substructures, any indirect reference to the latter has to do with funds or revenue and renders the substructures to mere ‘revenue collection centers’ despite having set them up with their administrative and political arms, to participate in the development process.

The interest in revenue is very important to the DAs because a stronger fiscal position increases their chances of qualifying for the funds. This was particularly revealing given that in almost all the substructures studied, revenue collection was prioritized over development goals. Even for non-operational secretariats under lock and key, there were toll collectors on the ground collecting revenue for the DAs. Remarks by one Assemblywoman summed up the revenue issue:

“(…) the sub-metro has no authority so we do not get anything from there. Almost all revenue items have been awarded to contractors but the KMA does not support the sub-metros in anyway so how can the sub-metro be able to support community projects? Even for meetings so far this year, we have met only once even though the sub-metro council is supposed to meet at least four times i.e. once in every quarter (…) that is for the council then for the sub-committees in the sub-metro. We have set up these [sub-] committees but we have not had even a single meeting; the sub-committees just do not work because the chairman always says there is no money for meeting allowance so meetings are not called (…)” (Interviewee #11: Assemblywoman, Oforikrom Sub-metro Council, Kumasi, 11.09.2013).

Assembly Members generally complained about the neglect of the task of the substructures and pointed to a weak revenue base since part of the rev-
7. Myths and Ambiguities in the Local political Reforms

Revenue items have been awarded to contractors while the substructures retained the rest.\textsuperscript{142} The revenue generation challenge accounted for their inability to hold meetings and make policies for their respective areas because they lacked the funds to pay allowances to participants. But they were still doubtful whether the meetings could influence the district development plans at all. The local structures’ ‘production of documents’ to qualify for donor funds held much importance to the DAs than local actors’ participation in development decisions.

![Secretariat of the Wa Urban Council, Wa. Photo taken: 19.09.2014 © Author.](image)

Even in the so-called ‘well-functioning sub-structures’, with some acceptable forms of secretariats and offices to undertake discussions on local development priorities, the notion of participatory development decision-making was largely missed. Even if the idea came up at all, actors merely discussed local taxation which could not readily be connected to specific development projects. The case of the urban council in the Wa Municipality (see Image 4) provides a useful insight into local participatory processes. The Wa Urban Council, as it is known administratively, is also supposed to

\textsuperscript{142} The revenue concerns at the substructures were glaring; even though numerous town councils in Kumasi and zonal councils in Wa remained ‘non-operational’ throughout the duration of field research, revenue collectors were busily taking tolls for the main Assemblies despite having delegated that competence to the substructures.
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derive urban-specific development policy. But discussion with officials at the secretariat revealed that, although council meetings were somewhat regular, their main task had become revenue collection namely, housing and settlement permits, market tolls, property rates, etc.:

“(…) the Assembly allows us to think about any development project on our own. Then we draw their attention on this particular project (…) but it is mostly revenue collection delegated to the Urban Council by the Assembly. What we do in terms of revenue [is that] we take out market revenue. If you have a structure (…) say your work place, supermarket, NGO, etc. (…) the Urban Council is supposed to give you a business certificate before you can operate (…) we go and collect the money from you and then we send the money to the Assembly then will give you the business certificate. If you also put up a structure, let say you have a building out there, supermarket; you have to pay a building permit, temporal structure permit and renewals (…) they are all done from the Urban Council and we also do business operation permit before you operate your business (…). There is a sanitation [policy] general cleaning of Wa but that policy did not come from here, it is a directive from the Municipal Assembly (…)” (Interviewee #30: administrative official, Wa Urban Council, Wa, 17.09.2014).

Yet, a clarification is needed herein. The notion of urban DAs often gives a false impression because these DAs have competence over a wide range of peri-urban and rural communities and given the interest of the local elites in the more urbanized areas, the peri-urban and rural locations remain the most impoverished. Thus, for urban locations within metropolitan and municipal districts, the proceeds from local state taxes may bring in enough financial resources for local development initiatives and also strengthen DAs’ position to qualify for external financial resources. Therefore, these DAs keenly focus attention on those substructures. But this preoccupation, which happens within the arteries of the local state (i.e. the district capitals), serves one major purpose: it enhances the concentration of development projects in the local commercial hubs to the detriment of the communities and wards in the hinterlands of the respective districts. Paradoxically, discussions on local socio-economic transformation in these DAs present cases from the local commercial hubs to describe their overall progress.143 Thus, in practice, transnational institution-building programmes are strategically (mis)construed as urban transformation policies (see Berner & Korff, 1999,

143 This focus on the major hubs as if they are representative of all the other communities and wards in the DAs was very much evident in peri-urban and rural communities in zonal councils such as Kperisi and Busa within the Wa municipality. The case of Busa discussed in section 8.2 is very illustrative.
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p. 208) to the neglect of rural areas whether in terms of communal development policy or taxation decisions.

In general, the realization of the funding goals via the substructures appears important to the DAs than the promise of participation by the local actors in development decision-making. In fact, these pretentious claims about the activities of the substructures to earn donor funds reflect daily organizational realities contrary to the formal and official rhetoric on reform and participatory development. The official rhetoric is unsurprisingly betrayed by any curious examination of everyday practices at the communal levels of local policy. Given that the challenges within the substructures deprive their actors of any genuine participation, these structures may be reoriented towards other latent ends, the most plausible being legitimacy and credibility concerns.

Compellingly in 2011 and 2012, neither DA type: whether rural (i.e. ordinary district) or urban (i.e. municipal and metropolitan), nor location (coastal, forest, and savannah) mattered as regards the flow of DDF resources to the DAs (see Table 15) and the impression one gets is that the few DAs that did not qualify were those who could not ‘skillfully’ and perfectly play around the assessment rules. Indeed, if the DAs were performing well based on the assessment results that should also reflect their development outlook both in terms of stated objectives and constituents’ perceptions. In fact, if the DAs impressively achieve the minimum conditions and pass the performance evaluation, then ideally that must correspond with the goods and services they provide for the well-being of residents. Indices that assess the performance of the DAs is helpful. The District League Table (DLT) gives an ideal assessment of public goods and services provided by the DAs in education, health, and sanitation.

144 Location is based on the general ecological classification of the country into coastal, forest and savannah climatic regions. In Table 15, the chi-square test for difference between location or DA type (urban and rural) in the allocation of US$ 54,510,665 DDF fund was not significant in 2011 ($\chi^2=5.02$, $df=2$, $n=120$, $p>.05$) and again in 2012 when an amount of US$ 78,929,456 was disbursed ($\chi^2=5.39$, $df=2$, $n=174$, $p>.05$). Thus, each DA received their share of DDF irrespective of their location or size.
### 7.3 Institutional Reforms and Everyday Practices of the Local State

Table 15. The Flow of District Development Funds to the DAs by Ecological Location in 2011–2012

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>District</th>
<th>Municipal</th>
<th>Metropolitan</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Savannah</td>
<td>13,646,787.27</td>
<td>2,122,325.45</td>
<td>351,648.64</td>
<td>16,120,761.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forest</td>
<td>13,741,725.45</td>
<td>5,484,930.91</td>
<td>1,091,615.45</td>
<td>20,381,271.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coastal</td>
<td>10,782,242.73</td>
<td>5,252,334.10</td>
<td>2,037,054.45</td>
<td>18,071,631.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>38,170,755.45</td>
<td>12,859,590.46</td>
<td>3,480,318.54</td>
<td>54,510,664.45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Assessment Year: 2011*

| Savannah  | 16,988,448.18 | 3,300,384.55 | 529,710.91  | 20,818,543.64 |
| Forest    | 18,616,286.82 | 9,078,935.46 | 1,823,750.00 | 29,518,972.28 |
| Coastal   | 17,437,161.82 | 7,805,093.18 | 3,349,685.46 | 28,591,940.46 |
| Total     | 53,041,896.82 | 20,184,413.19 | 5,703,146.37 | 78,929,456.38 |

*Assessment Year: 2012*

Yet, a statistical check between the DAs’ performance scores and the DLT scores shows that the two variables do not correlate. These patterns of behaviour of donors, assessors and recipients of the funds draw attention to the influence wielded by development agencies who are overly concerned with accounting and reporting standards than core development outputs (see Weilenmann, 2009, p. 156). While the influence may no longer appear to be an overt practice, it still persists as observed herein. This is so because most of the local governments receiving funding from international development organizations put up patterns of behaviour worthy of the funding stream. It also draws attention to the outcomes from the coordination between the two groups of policy experts in the international development system. Specifically, donor partners on one hand, and high-ranking civil servants and politicians on the other mutually conceive their policy cooperation as positive and progressive, as it is the case described above even though the impact of such cooperation does not yield the intended qualitative changes in the lives of constituents. This is especially so when the external actors are reluctant to adapt their assessment criteria to service delivery in local settings (Janus, 2014, p. 21). It appears that assigning the DDF automatically to the DAs, just like the DACF, will be very helpful because the time spent on preparing for the drama could be channeled into other productive efforts on institutional shortcomings in the local state.

More compelling, benefits from these transnational resources are often expended along party-patronage structures such that their genuine linkage to constituents’ well-being is difficult to establish. Indeed, despite the rhetoric, the everyday allocation and use of external development resources by local political elites is first and foremost based on the DCE’s interests to seek higher political office, in which case the projects derived from these funds will help curry favour in terms of votes. By implications, such practices also help the central regime to consolidate its hold on to power through its support base from the local state. More often, Assembly Members who were perceived to be political opponents were neglected with no projects to their electoral wards. An Assembly Member reflected exactly in that sense:

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145 The DLT evaluates DAs’ performance in education, security, water and sanitation, health and governance. The DLT 2014 index was based on the FOAT 2012 assessment which was published in 2013. Analysis of the two metrics shows a nearly absent correlation between the two variables (\(r=.11, n=216; p >.05\)).
7.3 Institutional Reforms and Everyday Practices of the Local State

“(….) Assembly election is supposed not to be partisan but it is in a way. [Political] parties go to sponsor people to stand and win and come and serve their interest (…). So if they go to lobby for something and [an] Assembly Member is perceived not to be in their camp, they will prefer to give it to the other Assembly Member who belongs to them. Some projects do not pass through the Assembly for a debate (…) all that we hear is that they are being implemented in your area. There are certain projects that are awarded from Accra [the capital]; go and do this, go and do that in your districts (…) all that you hear is it is awarded to this community and it is there that the politics come in; they decide to look at areas that voted for which party to satisfy them for next votes (…). You cannot prevent that (…) you want to satisfy people who belong to your camp” (Interviewee #2: Assemblyman, Busa Zonal Council, Wa, 31.07.2013).

The above quotation, like many others, gives a telling exemplar of the qualitative impact of capacity-building programmes within the local political reforms. These are hijacked by powerful national and local political elites based on their preferences although the rhetoric gives a different impression of un-skewed local participatory development and change.

7.3.4 Local state institutional change and legitimacy practices

Attempts to understand the mismatch between efforts towards local institutional change and practical implementation realities ultimately lead back to the policy experts who hold specific knowledge on local development and also offer probable solutions for implementation of new ideas. Because of their knowledge and expertise which give them a privileged status, their activities are easily legitimized (Haas, 1992, p. 17). Yet, inherent in the set of practices and policy solutions is their self-interest. The interest of international actors is built on: transmitting globally the economic and cultural policies of their national governments through “professional and nongovernmental organizations” (Meyer, 2010, p. 11; Boli & Thomas, 1999, p. 14). Packenham’s famous study unravels the inherent political interests of Northern governments in the Global South. As it were, US political development programmes largely reflected “anti-communist, pro-American political stability” (1966, p. 213) despite their claim to support locally-derived priorities. The IMF, for instance, is criticized for pursuing the foreign and economic policy interest of the United States (Barro & Lee, 2005, p.
In addition and though less emphasized, these experts just like the staff of other international organizations, are keen to keeping their jobs and might do everything possible not to lose them. When the interests of the policy experts become identical, the actors tend to have little interest in what actual practices and impact their policy suggestions have at the level of the local state. This is the case of external assessment employed in the DDF and UDG programmes.

Thus, in this setting, the main task of these policy experts is achieved when they provide funds for local capacity and they appoint external consultants to assess ‘best’ performing DAs with some set criteria. What the DAs are adept at doing is to strategically focus on techniques to meeting those criteria while somehow keeping formal norms and those strategies away from actual practices. The effect of such practices and the ‘strategic reaction’ by local state actors to appear legitimate is illustrated by one local bureaucrat:

“(…) I experienced that; they have their modus operandi regarding how their funds should be managed (…) at the district level. They also want a particular format of reporting that will conform to their reporting styles so that is where we have challenges because sometimes it doesn’t conform with the local government system of reporting (…) that is what we do. For example, there was an EU project that they brought their own software; they brought their own financial reporting format so we had to report by that format to them (…) they will not accept the local standard of reporting and they will not release the fund; they were emphatic (…). They now want Ghana to report in a manner that will meet international standards so they are bringing it down to us as one of the financial reforms that are still going on. So they dictate in actual fact, our style of reporting (…)” (Interviewee #31: finance official, Wa Municipal Assembly, Wa, 01.08.2013).

The effects of such peripheral assessment and project management practices on local institutional change are far-reaching. They go beyond the selective and strategic utilization of change ideas (Wallace et al., 2007, p. 102) or the set-up of the assessment procedure in ritualized manner to present “fact and figures” on accomplishments to financiers (Rottenburg, 2009, p. 72). In fact, focused mainly on some performance metrics, the evaluations deflect attention from the development problems that warrant genuine efforts to

146 Easterly refers to the IMF and other donors as gangsters in the development arena (2006, pp. 112–162). They are also seen as brokers and translators of development aid (Lewis & Mosse, 2006, p. 11–17).
7.4 Policy Outcomes and Sub-Optimality in the Local Institutional Reforms

confront in the Global South. The assessments blur the fundamental problem of no or limited impacts of these development programmes on both local institutions and on the lives of constituents. In particular, these everyday institutional practices highlight not only responses to the change ideas but also how development funds tie down DAs to strategies that inhibit change. These practices, therefore, reflect the in-built normative expectations underneath programmes offered by the international development system. And by drawing attention to contingencies associated with aid, they point out the in-built rationalities often attached to development assistance for local political reforms.

7.4 Policy Outcomes and Sub-Optimality in the Local Institutional Reforms

As mentioned early on, there are persistent notions linking local state institutional development to local economic development especially in reducing rural poverty (Crawford, 2008). Yet, the assertion that institutional changes and local economic development are inherently linked can hardly match the facts on the ground. The prevalence of poverty in rural locations is, of course, not new and that precisely underlies the rationale for mandating local institutions to help address same. However, if the very practices of central and local state actors, no matter the intent, are strategically designed to benefit personal and ‘special’ political interests, then whatever reform attempted may not be enough to offset the limits to poverty reduction in the local state.

Earlier sub-sections have discussed how attitudes to local public goods and institution-building programmes are intertwined with personal and local political interests together with the interests of the incumbent regime. The persistent attempts by local political interests to challenge the hegemonic structure of the local state, central state’s double position of maintaining control over the DAs while still attempting to use them to appear ‘credible’ in front of its international audience all produce but one unique outcome: the tendency is for these local policy actors, acting on behalf of constituents, to produce policies without any genuine intent to create change while bureaucrats implement short-sighted institutional blue-prints. In fact, comparable instances regarding the challenge of multi-tier levels of governance and the production of sub-optimal policy outcomes in the Global North
7. Myths and Ambiguities in the Local political Reforms

abound especially in the EU region (see e.g. Scharpf, 1997, p. 76; 2010, p. 12 on the Federal Republic of Germany). However, it is in the Global South where such practices tend to be expansive and, thus, producing the most sub-optimal local development outcomes that are less capable of achieving the oft-cited poverty reduction goals.

Indeed, if one compares the assumption and rhetoric under which the local administrations were established (i.e. participatory policy-making to reduce poverty) with on-the-ground reality, the picture that emerges does not look impressive at all. The World Bank (1995, p. 27), based on the first ever Ghana Living Standard Survey in 1988 when the current local government system was established, reported that the overall incidence of poverty stood at 36.9 percent with a poverty gap of just about 12 percent. While the share of the population living in rural areas stood at nearly 66 percent of the total population, incidence of poverty among them was around 42 percent although they made the largest contribution of nearly 75 percent to the total poverty gap. That compared less favourably with the urban population of 34 percent of the national but which contributed just about 25.3 percent to the total poverty gap (see Table 16). Therefore, it was only appropriate that the hopes expressed in the decentralized local governance project, to address the persistent rural poverty, were received by most people with much enthusiasm. It was widely held that decentralization would strengthen weak local state institutions in order to deliver appropriate local public goods, which by implication, will help hold them to account in reducing rural poverty. Nonetheless, as pointed out early on in chapter five, empirical evidence relating these institutional changes to poverty reduction has failed to establish such link.
7.4 Policy Outcomes and Sub-Optimality in the Local Institutional Reforms


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year/Location</th>
<th>Incidence ((P_0))</th>
<th>Contribution to poverty ((C_0))</th>
<th>Poverty gap ((P_1))</th>
<th>Contribution to total gap ((C_1))</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>1987/1988</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Urban (%)</td>
<td>27.4</td>
<td>– ((-))*</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>25.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rural (%)</td>
<td>41.9</td>
<td>– ((-))*</td>
<td>13.8</td>
<td>74.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>2005/2006</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Urban (%)</td>
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<td>39.0</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>33.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rural (%)</td>
<td>43.7</td>
<td>136.9</td>
<td>15.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>2012/2013</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>10.6</td>
<td>22.0</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>15.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural (%)</td>
<td>37.9</td>
<td>78.0</td>
<td>13.1</td>
<td>84.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Adapted from the GSS (2014) and World Bank (1995) Reports.\(^{147}\) *Values not calculated/available. Notes on the poverty indices: \(P_0\) is the headcount of the population with total incomes below the poverty line; \(C_0\) is each group’s (rural versus urban) contribution to those living in poverty; \(P_1\) is the average poverty gap in the population expressed as a fraction of the poverty line i.e. the extent to which people fall below the poverty line; \(C_1\) is the extent contributed by each group (rural versus urban) to make up those living below the poverty line.

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\(^{147}\) Poverty line in 2012: GH₵1,314 p.a. (c.a. US$400). Poverty line in 1988: ₡32,981 p.a. (c.a. US$200). Note that in 2007 the old currency, Cedi (₵) was redenominated to Ghana Cedi (GH₵) at 10,000 equal to GH₵1. World Bank’s (2005) data used the GLSS 1 survey conducted in 1987/88. This first ever survey provided comprehensive data on incidence and gap in poverty analysis in Ghana but contribution to poverty was not included.
As a result, making the claims of institutional change and socio-economic well-being appear only as development rhetoric. In fact, it is no coincidence that poverty levels in the local state are predominately high despite reform efforts for nearly three decades. In particular, the incidence of poverty in Ghana continues to be largely a rural phenomenon with an overwhelming majority of rural folks in abject poverty. As Figure 8 pictorially illustrates, the incidence of poverty still persists to a greater extent. Indeed, recent official statistics and national surveys conducted between 2005 and 2013 have pointed out that despite forming just about 50 percent of the total population, rural folks still contributed over 78 percent compared with urban folks who added just over 20 percent to the incidence of poverty in the

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148 The population in 1987 was 13,602,301 with 65.8 percent rural dwellers and 34.2 percent urban residents. In 2010, the figures for rural and urban dwellers were 49.1 percent and 50.9 percent respectively. The figures differed quite widely at the regional level. In Ashanti, more than half (60.6%) lived in urban areas with the rest (39.4%) in rural locations. In contrast, the Upper West had very few urban dwellers (16.3%) with an overwhelming majority (83.7%) living in rural areas (GSS, 2012, pp. 3–4).
7.5 Concluding Remarks

The discussion in this chapter has highlighted the inherent myths in the debate that decentralized local governance leads to participatory development.

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149 Although there are some doubts about the accuracy of official statistics in the Global South (Jerven, 2015), they are used herein to gauge the regimes’ own promises of local political change and economic prosperity.

150 It is interesting to note that Thomi’s (2000a/b) study was extensive; eight out of 110 districts with mixed characteristics namely urban and rural. Crawford’s (2009) study was conducted almost a decade later to compare changes overtime in the context of decentralization and perceived outcomes. That study used two deprived districts in the middle belt (in Ashanti and Brong Ahafo regions).
7. Myths and Ambiguities in the Local political Reforms

Although the pros and cons of this debate are not new, the evidence presented in this chapter shows how attempts towards local political reforms that should supposedly trickle down to economic prosperity are hijacked by powerful political and organized bureaucratic interests. These features of contemporary institutional reforms are difficult to evade but their persistence accounts for much of the disjoint between the promise and reality of participatory local development. The findings support existing notions that attempts to link local political reforms to participatory development and economic well-being do not only appear problematic but also improbable giving the reality of institutional changes and everyday service provision in the local state. Consequently, they make local residents lose interest in the very idea of local government, its reform as well as its products. Indeed, even though the reforms in the DAs have had some structural and administrative effects, local people are not really interested in such changes. The idea of local government, after all, is to bring governance for development to the local people.

More compelling is the strategic approach to the adoption of change ideas; there is a careful withdrawal from the stated norms to existing practices that work in the interests of hegemonic actors despite the rhetoric of local participation for change. Indeed, regardless of the myths inherent in the new institutional ideas, local policy actors accept them in order to gain credibility for the accompanying benefits. But they are quick to incorporate their own interests. The findings, therefore, point to how interests of different actors intersect to produce specific outcomes in local political reforms. A caveat here is that the challenge with local institution-building is not necessarily based on ‘bad public policy’ but an intersection of multiple actors and interests from both local and transnational settings. In view of these observations, therefore, two important questions emerge. First, are the actions of the DAs deceitful by preparing for evaluation but strategically decoupling the new ideas from their daily tasks? The answer must, of course, relate to the assistance and its attraction from the international development system as well as the multiple embedded interests of the actors involved in the change processes. What should concern us is whether the benefits that accrue from the qualification drama are used for well-focused local development purposes. That does not seem to be case at the moment.

Second, could the transnational support and assessment be provided differently? Certainly, it could. Indeed, if the goal is towards institution-build-
7.5 Concluding Remarks

In essence, there should be a shift in perspective from the ‘efficient’ means of allocating development funds and assistance by the international development community as regards a more genuine commitment to the stated goal of participatory development. It is true that the interests of taxpayers and governments, on how effective and honest donor funds have been used, influence the tasks of international organizations but building institutions to address development needs that are context-specific will require time and patience for new approaches to emerge. At the same time, the danger of falling into the trap of unending institution-building overtime must be kept in mind. Following von Stein’s (1943) argument, if the change does not emanate from genuinely committed public officials, the numerous rules and institutional changes may not be enough for the state-building project. The argument presented in this chapter is not an expression of pessimism that institutional change may not occur at all. Local political changes that engender economic well-being may take place not so much from the rhetoric of reforms but somewhat at its own course and pace. With hindsight, we know that the very call for democratic reforms was largely a product of popular pressure from urban residents and intellectual demand for change more than the reform programmes offered by the international development system (Abrahamsen, 2000, pp. 95–96).
8. Perceptions and Reactions to Local State Institutional Reforms

This chapter proceeds with the assumption that local state institutional change processes have both visible and implied outcomes for local constituents who respond to them in varied ways. The chapter uses a beneficially-assessment, or better still, an actor-evaluative approach, to explore the services provided by the local state and its administrative structures and the perspective and preferences of the actors who utilize these goods and services. Thus, the chapter follows the actor perspective as offered by Norman Long (2001); an approach which helps to analyse behaviour and preferences between local state institutions and actors providing services, and constituents outside the local administration who are the recipients of those services. It should be pointed out at the outset that it would be extremely difficult, if not impossible, to match the preferences of local state actors against those of constituents. However, as Long (2001) points out, the constituents who are the recipients of goods and services which come with the institutional reforms, are not passive but rather active evaluators of these products from the local state. These institutional changes are potentially considered as helping to make local state services ‘better’. Therefore, the recipient actors’ reactions tend to give a verdict on the goods and services brought about via the changes in the local political structures.

Following these evaluations from the actors’ perspectives, the sub-themes discussed in this chapter include peer perception and reactions between local state bureaucrats and other civil servants in the districts; constituents’ negative reactions to local state institutional changes and services provision in terms of involvement in local state public activities; and the effects of these negative perceptions on the local state’s policies and their everyday regulatory activities. These mutual evaluations take numerous forms including participation in public forums organized by the local state, partaking in local state elections to select representatives of their electoral wards; and local civil servants’ resistance to integration into the institutional structure of the local governments in order to protect their institutional self-interests (Scharpf, 997, 2010) against those of the local government ministry. The chapter concludes that these mutual evaluations of the goods and
8. Perceptions and Reactions to Local State Institutional Reforms

services associated with those institutional changes may have the potential to bring about improvements in the local state and its services. However, they also run the risk of trapping the local state into a perpetual cycle of institution-building in pursuit of that ideal.

8.1 The Provision of Local Public Goods and Public Opinion

Political institutions could positively influence the perception of constituents with the rhetoric they offer. The state’s administrative apparatus, personnel, and rules all help it to project its self and autonomy (Migdal & Schlichte, 2005, p. 24). Central regimes in particular use development rhetoric to whip up, and positively shape, public opinions on the public goods and service the state offers even in times of socio-economic uncertainties (see Marsh, 2005, pp. 206–210). In newly decentralized political systems, a version of the rhetoric that promises popular participation and economic prosperity may be enticing and readily acceptable to constituents as the hope for a better life. However, this tendency to influence public opinion is not always positive and static; it changes when development promises could not be delivered. This is especially the case when outcomes from local political reforms linked to economic prosperity seem very remote. Admittedly, local institutional development is not an event but a social process. However, that social process cannot remain open-ended forever as citizens frequently expect results. Yet, it is the acquiescence with which public officials approach the disjoint between the promise of reforms and reality of local institutional changes that appears quite telling. This acquiescence is evident in remarks by two bureaucrats:

“(…) I am not sure there is any human aspect which does not have a challenge (…) decentralization, whether we like it or not, is a human institution so definitely there will be challenges. I don’t know, I will be funny enough to say there are no challenges; every aspect, the main Assembly system where you have the Assembly Members, the unit committee system, the administrative system, the pure civil service, we have challenges with all of them. To me, none of the various segments is perfect (…)” (Interviewee #19: administrative official, Bantama Sub-metro Council, Kumasi, 16.09.2013).

“(…) even for the personnel, they should have done what we call change management (…) but I think it just came like a big bang; by the stroke of a pen, you have been transferred to the local government service (…) so these are some of the challenges we face but overtime, the people will settle down and look at where they are
as a matter of change but it is business as usual; government business (…)” (Interviewee #32: senior official, Local Government Service Secretariat, Accra, 14.10.2013).

Other related notions describing these practices as part of Ghanaian institutional life were equally dominant which give weight to the idea of ‘making do with what we have’ as reflected in the quotes above and point critically to their acceptance by central and local state actors in the local institutional change processes. This ‘improvisation’ reflects what Nugent (2010) refers to as “permissive contract” in which the state shirks its responsibilities by loosely giving up its autonomy to exact compliance of a sort (p. 44). By so doing, constituents may come to appreciate the state’s intent and commitment to providing services to improve their living conditions. In particular, it helps set in motion a constant scheme for re-building and institutional improvisations.

However, given the discrepancy between what the state promises to do and what it actually does, local constituents have somewhat come to question this permissiveness on their own terms and right as users of local state services; a situation very well illustrated by the changing perception of local constituents towards the local state, its institutional reforms and the link to local economic development. Indeed, the dominant argument framing local participatory processes often holds that: citizens participate through elections and revocation of the mandate of Assembly Members; they also take part in self-help projects in their communities; and through the substructures, they make inputs in development programmes that affect their lives, businesses, etc. However, this argument is not only taken up less critically but also informs the politics of development to a large extent. But the everyday interaction between local state and its constituents presents a gloomy outlook when gauged from the standpoint of the ideals set out in the rhetoric. Constituents expect a sort of external accountability from their local institutions (Crook, 2003, p. 79) and without that, these constituents have generally taken up withdrawal attitudes towards the local state in terms of its programmes and activities. A curious observation and insights from study informants showed that during DA elections, there are electoral wards where no potential candidate emerges to contest for the position of local representative whiles many others are elected unopposed. That is, they are

151 Migdal and Schlichte make a point about “seeing the state and doing the state” (2005, p. 14). It is aptly implied herein.
8. Perceptions and Reactions to Local State Institutional Reforms

merely confirmed as representatives. This low level of participation in local state activities goes well beyond ordinary residents through to public officials who work in some capacity for the state, whether in local or central bureaucracies.

8.1.1 Civil servants’ attitudes towards the local state bureaucracy

The perception of the local state is often ambivalent. Some public officials frequently viewed the local political structure as carrying the hopes of a well-functioning bureaucracy that would deliver adequate public goods and services including health, education and sanitation. These hopes were expressed through local institutional reforms that would eventually transform the local political institutions to perform efficiently. Very often, references were made to advanced bureaucracies in the Global North. At the same time, there were many public servants and constituents who were more skeptical about the local state and its reforms. Beyond the distrust from local political actors towards local state bureaucrats, as discussed in chapter six, the latter encountered mixed perceptions and biases from even among bureaucrats in the decentralized (and deconcentrated) departments in the districts. Some degree of apathy was expressed by the public towards the local governments, perhaps, in reaction to the way it conducts itself among local residents. Local residents often appeared disillusioned upon finding out that the departments of the DAs cannot provide any help. This situation provides a channel for their dissatisfaction and disinterest in the activities of the DAs (Thomi, 2000a; Crook, 2003). Informants frequently pointed to this frustration as expressed in local residents’ apathy towards forums and durbar especially in urban centers; residents tended to think that the DAs do not address their basic needs and have developed patterns of evasive behaviour towards property tax and other obligations. The disenchantment with the DAs finds expression in several dimensions of local state tasks.

152 Interviewee #46 expressed the hope that within two years, the local bureaucracy would be transformed into an efficient structure like its German counterpart, 14.06.2013.

153 Other dimensions include participation in public events of the local state, and their willingness to pay local rates and taxes. As already alluded to, participation in public events remains low and those who are present often appear to have been given incentive to be there.
8.1 Provision of Local Public Goods and Public Opinion

One important dimension is the enthusiasm or apathy in district level elections compared with national election trends. This lack of interest in DA activities goes further to express constituents’ disappointment with the pace at which the promise of development occurs in their localities. Even beyond the political structure, bureaucrats within the local administration were perceived with weaknesses and ineptitude by their counterparts in the decentralized and deconcentrated departments. Some of the informants revealed how denigrating that perception of local state bureaucrats could be:

“(…) the issue is that people have a kind of mentality that anything about local government is local (…) so this thing is also reaching out to the bureaucrats; I was talking to some guys that when all these coordinating directors were with the civil service, they were very competent by all standards but as soon as they were transferred to the Local Government Service, people started thinking that they are not competent (…) but these were the same people who ran the Assemblies once they were under the civil service (…) it is a kind of mentality that once you are under the local government service, they think that you are a never-to-do-well intellectual” (Interviewee #32: senior official, Local Government Service Secretariat, Accra, 14.10.2013).

Nonetheless, technocrats at the decentralized directorates were not convinced with the administrative restructuring of the local governments and preferred to work with their parent departments. Some of their staff continued to receive their promotion from the central ministries and some transfers were approved from the center unabated. Most of them claimed the local governments as political structures, could not provide any technical support for specialized departments. For public servants in deconcentrated departments resisting full integration into the local state structure, these perceived ineptitude provided even stronger arguments for resistance. Based on their professional and technical needs, one senior technocrat in a regional health directorate hinted that:

“(…) we have been told the districts [health departments] will be going under the District Assemblies but our fear is that there may be problems because you know the districts are not so organized to be able to supervise these organizations. They may not even have the personnel and then even the heads of these [deconcentrated] organizations may even be more educated and trained than those in the District Assemblies (…) so how can they supervise? If the health service budget should go through the District Assembly, how sure are they to get their money to do the work on time?” (Interviewee #33: senior health administrator, Ashanti, Kumasi, 10.06.2013).
Although there were some informants from the deconcentrated departments who thought closer working relations with their local government was mutually beneficial, they were quick to add that full integration carried many challenges than benefits and they would prefer to respond to their central ministries instead of the DCE. They, thus, preferred to stay with the Ghana Health Service and Teaching Hospitals Act, 1996 (Act 525). This service, they believed, properly articulated the concerns of their profession than a DA structure that ordinarily undertakes political more than technical tasks.

Even for departments already under the rubric of the DAs such as environmental health and agriculture, there were already disquiet to highlight their frustration of being subsumed under the DAs. The hope of making their activities better has turned rather to be a disappointment. The case of environmental health department is particularly illustrative. Having been integrated into the DA system for over two decades, the environment health officers (also sanitary inspectors appeared) dissatisfied with the reforms that integrated them into the local state. Indeed, observations from the field especially in the Bantama and Oforikrom sub-metro councils revealed the inherent dejection held by the most of the sanitary inspectors given the party-politically charged leadership of the councils particularly as their tasks depended on the mercy of the councils’ leadership. A comment by one sanitary inspector at the Oforikrom sub-metro council summed up this frustration: “they have decentralized without resources and when we attempt to punish those who violate environmental and sanitation laws, the politicians come to tell you they are their relatives and in any attempt to be firm, these same politicians will turn back again and accuse you that you are not doing your work well which discourages you from doing your job, they are doing the same with the sanitary conditions and the management of the public toilets that they are in charge of.”

Similar to other street-level bureaucrats, these public officials have to bear the brunt of both senior bureaucrats and local politicians any time the former attempt to strictly enforce municipal rules and by-laws.

Perhaps these frustrations from the local political elites underlie the numerous attempts by the environmental and sanitation officials in asking the health ministry to re-integrate them into the latter to work under civil service leadership instead of one that is directly political (Crook & Ayee, 2006, 154).

p. 59). Beyond the political interference, other civil servants in the decentralized departments seemed rather concerned with the order of communication and chain of command in the administrative reorganizations of their departments. Some of these disgruntled officials felt they have been made to respond to authority from offices that are very well subordinate to theirs:

“(…) the whole system is confused; in fact, if you go to the District Assembly there is somebody who is far your junior but because he is an administrator he thinks you are junior and you have to work under him. How can you work? So that one too the hierarchy has to be streamlined (…) the DCE is supposed to be the head then we work to the coordinating director but he is far my junior (…). I finished university before he even came (…) previously [our] director did not report to the [Metro] Coordinating Director because they were all directors equal in status but if you ask [our] director to report to the MCD, then that is why I am saying that it becomes a dynamite (…) it will explode” (Interviewee #34: senior agricultural administrator, Kumasi, 18.06.2013).

As a researcher, I experienced an instance of these disgruntled feelings in October 2013 at a regional hospital in Kumasi. The administrator felt disrespected because my introductory letter was penned by a metropolitan health director. In the past, the latter was subordinate to the regional health office but given the ongoing institutional reforms, the metro director summarily assumed to have that competence. After trying for a couple of days to get an appointment, the hospital administrator made it clear to me he did not take kindly to receiving instructions from the metropolitan directorate of health. Indeed, his utterances and references to holding a PhD and being a consultant surgeon among others were all attempts to tell me in the face that he disregarded the authority behind my letter. Therefore, he refused to grant my interview request.

These contestations inherent in the concerns from the disgruntled civil servants appear to focus on the job at hand and not the political interests held by the political actors. Despite the concerns from the deconcentrated departments, some senior bureaucrats from the core local government rebuffed those sentiments regarding them as a defensive mechanism for guarding against the so-called domain of influence and privileges enjoyed under a separate line of authority. Indeed, there have been no assurances for preserving those privileges and perquisites under the unified local state administration as was hinted by one senior bureaucrat:

“(…) there is some misunderstanding from the establishment of the Local Government Service; some ministers have not taken the trouble to study the law and the transfer of staff from their ministries to the Local Government Service so they don’t
8. Perceptions and Reactions to Local State Institutional Reforms

know. I also think that there is something like a ‘territorial jealousy’ because a lot of the ministers and civil servants think that they are losing their staff and so their area of influence is becoming very limited (…) because they get ‘fat’ budgets from international donors and that if they come under the Local Government Service they may not have them anymore (…)” (Interviewee #3: senior administrative official, RCC, Ashanti, Kumasi, 28.07.2014).

It is true that interests shape the narratives of resistance and are intrinsically linked to particular influence and perquisites. But the same interests equally shape the outlook of the bureaucratic-cum-executive body of the local state, which the local public views as ineptitude and excessively politically-dominated. In fact, it is appropriate to point out that there is some in-built tension within the local government system that could be easily discerned from this interface of local government bureaucrats and general civil servants: the structure of the local government itself creates internal tensions; the service departments de facto are linked to their ministries and to the local government in some way which creates a double-tension between the different policies of national and local governments. Again, it brings tensions between technocratic planning and local political preferences. A case in point was the passage in 2003 of the Local Government Service Act, 656. This Act sought to bring all civil servants working in a district under the political authority of their respective DAs. Implementation of this policy has been severally affected by resistance in what some public officials perceived as forcing them to succumb to a political authority they hardly identified with. The enactment of this Act has been described by Awortwi (2011, p. 365) as an attempt to impose central political preferences on, and to dominate, the local state.

Even so, the DAs’ outlook is better understood from the local circumstances and global entanglements in its creation and reform. The adoption of global ideas on local politics and fusion into a patronage-like political system makes the decoupling in their reforms and specific outlook less surprising. Although the central government is viewed with some skepticism, the general apathy towards the local state is enormous and in fact well-known by the local state actors. While the enthusiasm that followed the introduction of the DA system was quite high and hopeful, that appeal appears to have waned over the years given the unimpressive degree of participation in local state activities. This could be inferred from voting trends in local state elections (as will be discussed shortly). In terms of local public goods, residents accessing the DAs’ services quite often find out that the local structures are less helpful and they become disillusioned with the DAs.
structures. This provides the basis for even more disinterest in the services and activities of the DAs as was expressed by one bureaucrat:

“(…) sometimes people come with genuine issues but the sub-metro cannot take decisions and if you refer them to the main Assembly, the issue is no longer pursued and the people become frustrated. If you should organize a durbar, it will surprise you nobody will turn up especially in urban centers. People think that the Assembly does not care about them and they are developing resistance to certain things like property rates because they do not benefit from it; they tell you that they won’t pay and you can take them to court (…). Some community members mock the secretariat by asking what we do here” (Interviewee #22: administrative official, Manhyia Sub-metro Council, Kumasi, 19.09.2013).

These observations do not only point to an honest admission of shortcomings of local political reforms from bureaucrats in the local state especially those within the local bureaucracy. They also provide a basis for more institutional reforms (as discussed in chapter nine).

8.1.2 Local politicians’ responses to reforms and provision of local public goods

There were some local politicians who embraced the local political reforms and even called for more institutional changes to improve the delivery of local public goods and services. Nevertheless, most of the local political actors shared the aversion held by the local constituents towards local state institutional reforms and the provision of local public goods. This abhorrence was often premised on the issue of accountability which most local politicians still found problematic:

“(…) some of the residents also do not see the developments in their communities even though they pay so much tax. Therefore, they complain a lot about the ways in which the money is used (…). Today you heard the woman in the SPEFA workshop saying that we should be accountable for the monies we take from residents and how it is used but me as Assemblyman, I don’t know how these funds are spent so how do my people get to know? I don’t have the facts and figures about that (…) if you dig too much in the Assembly, they label you ‘inquisitive’ (…)” (Interviewee #35: Assembly Member, Manhyia Sub-metro Council, Kumasi, 26.09.2013).

It was even striking that some of the local political actors, in apparent opposition to, and disillusion with, the domination of the DA by the executive, preferred the dissolution of the local political structures. Yet, by calling for the DAs to be disbanded, they did not in any way reject the very idea of the
local state. Rather, they asked for more reforms to create new institutions and, thus, perpetuation of the cycle of local institutional changes. Again, they persistently link these local institutional reforms to efficiency although the empirical reality hardly bears that out:

“(…) I mean if you ask me, this is my personal opinion, the appointee [issue] should be cancelled because you know, why don’t you appoint people to the national parliament if they think that’s so perfect? If the appointment is perfect, then they should appoint people [over there] (…). Go and see the caliber of people that they appoint because the appointees are doing things the electorates do not know but they will hold the elected member responsible meanwhile the elected member may not be responsible for some of those actions (…). And even if you ask me, I will go further, the KMA [Kumasi Metropolitan Assembly] should be abolished (…) it is too big! Every sub-metro should be turned into district so that there is no KMA (…) supposing every sub-metro is turned into a district. What do you think? It will be very effective (…)” (Interviewee #28: Assembly Member, Manhyia Sub-metro Council, Kumasi, 20.09.2013).

However and like many other local politicians who favour the persistence of the current local state arrangements, the major weaknesses in the decentralized local political structures come from the dominant position of the local state bureaucracy. For them, it is mainly the executive bureaucracy that restricts the functions of the DA in providing quality local public goods:

“(…) my general impression with the DA and its substructure is that it is good in the sense that opportunity is given to the very people to develop themselves (…) government will add [sic] you some monies so that you do what you want (…) it is just that sometimes, some few technocrats will come [and] want to manipulate the system for their personal gains otherwise the local government system is wonderful! Yes, you are given the opportunity to develop yourself the way you want to develop yourself. You are given the support so I don’t think there is anything wrong. People were mentioning that the MCE is appointed by the President because sometimes it is also a challenge. Yes, if the people themselves were to vote for somebody to rule them (…) somebody who understands the system; who understands them then generally it is good” (Interviewee #7: Assemblyman, Wa Urban Council, Wa, 18.09.2014).

An apparent contradiction is that local politicians help to create that negative image of the DAs and, while whisking away their own complicity, still castigate the bureaucracy for being inefficient. This behaviour enables them to achieve their interests from the local bureaucracy and still appear credible to their electorates. These views relate quite well with the notion discussed previously that the DA is dominated by the executive and that the former appears to be helpless in confronting the latter given the dominant position
of the DCE. But, even if the executive committee is dissolved, it does not nullify the strong position of the DCE. Indeed, article 23:2 of Act 462 stipulates that “the dissolution of an executive committee of an Assembly shall not operate as a revocation of the appointment of the District Chief Executive”. Therefore, calls for the DA to be split into smaller structures with equal legislative mandate are only verbal attempts to bypass the DCE and put power in the hands of the local political actors who have made promises of development projects and face a verdict on those promises in their electoral wards.

All in all, it is less compelling to observe that local state bureaucrats’ enthusiasm of their own bureaucratic structure within the local state was not very favourable just as those in deconcentrated departments within the jurisdiction of the local state.

Table 17. Local State and Decentralized Bureaucrats’ Views on the Local State and its Reforms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Department</th>
<th>Positive (%)</th>
<th>Negative (%)</th>
<th>Total (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local state bureaucracy</td>
<td>16 (55.2)</td>
<td>13 (44.81)</td>
<td>29 (100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decentralized depts.</td>
<td>5 (29.4)</td>
<td>12 (70.6)</td>
<td>17 (100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>21 (45.7)</td>
<td>25 (54.3)</td>
<td>46 (100)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author’s compilation extracted from MAXQDA Quote Matrix. Note: Decentralized departments include deconcentrated departments.

Indeed, despite most of the dissatisfaction with the local political structure coming from people outside the local administrative structure, there were many others within the local state bureaucracy who still held negative perception of their administrative structures and its provision of goods and service to the local constituents (see Table 17). The fact that there were no
differences in opinions between local state bureaucrats and their counterparts from the decentralized departments in the districts regarding the promise of change and development in the local state as given by the Chi-square analysis\textsuperscript{155} shows the bureaucrats’ own doubts about the local state and the possibility of delivering quality local development goods.

### 8.2 A Tale of Two Institutional Ideas: Competing Views on District Substructures

Given the realities of political reforms and how they affect local development, local political institutions are constantly being questioned. This is especially the case with the local political structures which are frequently described as the basis of participation and local development. It is, therefore, not surprising that different strands of narratives emerge in critiquing and defending these local institutions. Two divergent views are current on the institutional changes in the substructures of the DAs namely town and urban councils and unit committees. These views are the official rhetoric and empirical reality in everyday situations. Although the substructures appear virtually moribund, it was interesting to learn of the persistent rhetoric of the government and central state departments on these lower structures especially when the substructures are still conceived as avenues for local development. Indeed, in a series of newspaper publications in June, 2013, a senior official of the local government service was forcefully making the case for refocusing the institutions of the local state especially the sub-district structures which had recently been trimmed down (e.g. the number of unit committees had come down from 16,000 to 6,000). The argument put forward was to show how actively the substructures have been empowered to deliver local level participation and development goods (see Mahama, 2013a/b/c).

However, the reality became apparent even to the untrained mind if one made only a curious observation to uncover the everyday practices of those

\textsuperscript{155} The Chi-square test from Table 17 exploring differences in perception between regular civil servants and bureaucrats from main bureaucracy (i.e. executive and supervisory bureaucrats) towards the local state was not significant ($\chi^2=2.95$, $df=1$, $n=46$, $p<.05$). Thus, the views about the local political structure did not differ among bureaucrats in the local administration and their counterparts in the decentralized departments.
substructures by themselves. Some informants pointed out that because the town councils and unit committees are, de jure, ‘non-party’ elected structures, the central state and its sympathizers showed no genuine intention in getting them to function. One explanation was that the structures could not readily serve any patronage purposes for the central government hence the reluctance to engage with the substructures. Especially in Metropolitan Assemblies, there appeared to be deliberate and lukewarm attempts to undermine the functions of the lower district structures under the sub-metro councils so that their functions could ultimately be performed by the sub-metro councils:

“(…) nobody will contest you till your time is over that’s why when I decided I don’t want another term, nobody wants to come. I think it is over a year since we last met. Yes, it is almost two years since we had our last meeting (…) the town council to me, does not exist when it comes to Suame because a council that has not held meetings for over two years you don’t call that thing a council (…). In a way, the people in the sub-metro think that we are undermining them and they will do everything possible to make the town council dysfunctional (…). I think that in our local government system, let’s do away with the town council that is my candid opinion. The town council is not necessary especially in areas where we have sub-metros (…). The town councils may be relevant in the Districts and Municipal Assemblies so they can get some substructures but in Metropolitan Assemblies, town councils are not necessary (…) because it brings conflicts time and again. The sub-metros and town councils struggle for power in their functions because their tasks are almost the same; they overlap (…)” (Interviewee #36: Assemblyman, Suame Town Council, Kumasi, 30.09.2014).

The above concerns were severally echoed by other councillors from elsewhere in the metropolitan area:

“(…) I add that the town councils and area and zonal councils do not work; the structure has been beautifully designed but they do not work! I can say that our town council has collapsed because we do not attend meetings; Krofrom Town Council is dysfunctional (…) we don’t attend meetings even though the chairman’s time is up and re-election is required (…). For the elections, the main Assembly should command the sub-metro to come and hold the elections but nobody cares (…) the metropolis is too big and the Assembly Members do not get any salary, so I think it would be better to dissolve the town councils and empower the sub-metros to work (…) there is no pay for the job so who would kill themselves to serve on all those levels? (…). For districts, the town councils are good because people have to travel from rural locations to district capitals and it takes about 20–30 kilometers but in Kumasi the distance is very short so in Metropolitan Assemblies, I think it is not very useful anymore” (Interviewee #37: Assembly Member, Krofrom Town Council, Kumasi, 10.10.2014).
8. Perceptions and Reactions to Local State Institutional Reforms

Despite suggestions that the town and zonal councils may serve some purpose for Municipal and District Assemblies instead of their Metropolitan counterparts, self-reconnaissance observations and discussions with informants in some zonal councils gave a rather bleak picture of their raison d’être even in those districts. One zonal council official in the Wa Municipality pointed out “the ambivalent position of the Municipal Assembly towards the zonal councils and the differential treatment of staff and councilors by the former vis-à-vis the urban council” perhaps based on the revenue generation differential between the two substructures.\(^{156}\) Indeed, the DA gave attention to substructures that generated the most revenue. It appears, therefore, that the dysfunction of the substructures is independent of size of the DA.

Let us take some examples on the everyday institutional processes of these sub-district structures. The Town Council at Suame in Kumasi, unlike numerous others, had a physical structure that houses its secretariat; a place designated for meetings and everyday administration of communal needs, taxation and information. However, throughout the whole duration of the study, no such administrative activities took place there. As one of the local politicians (interviewee #36) pointed out, no meeting had taken place there for more than a year during our interaction. Again, the administrative assistants were away for further studies. Less surprisingly, the secretariat office space had been ‘rented’ out to marketeers who had turned it into their warehouse (see image 5). In addition, a check from the Suame Sub-metro Council secretariat revealed that revenue collectors were on the ground collecting Town Council taxes and reported to a desk assigned to the Town Council. With the revenue coming in, the impression that is created outside the on-the-ground reality is that the Town Council is a viable local structure setting out local development priorities and generating their own revenue. Subsequently, this false impression would go on to feed official rhetoric on participatory development and change.

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156 Field notes interview with an administrative official, Busa Zonal Council, Wa, 19.09.2014.
8.2 Competing Views on District Substructures

A related observation was made at the Town Council at Asokwa, Kumasi on October 8 2014. Both the chairperson’s office and the secretariat were locked on a number of visits. When I enquired from personnel in other offices within the complex about the officials of the Council, I was informed that the chairperson had travelled overseas, apparently for greener pastures, for more than three years and since then the office had not been opened. A check from the secretariat of the Asokwa Sub-metro Council revealed they were aware of the situation at the town council yet, they were unsure of any attempts or measures to get the latter back to work.

A similar but quite interesting example comes from the Zonal Council at Busa in the Wa municipality. The secretariat of this local political structure was housed in a building provided by the community; a clear expression of communal willingness to support the development of local institutions. However, the office block was rarely used for that purpose and at the time of the study, the office was always locked-up. In interaction with one of the administrative officials of the Council in the main town of Wa, over 15 kilometers away from Busa, he pointed out how the dilapidation of the secretariat structure (see image 6) and the absence of furniture prevented any meetings from taking place.
Given the lukewarm attitude of the DA to the activities of the Zonal Council, the officials had relocated to the main towns to make ends meet since they were treated differently from their counterparts in the main DA. Nonetheless, the collection of local taxes had been taken over by the DA’s central administration and although the revenue score board displayed at the DA’s premises painted a gloomy picture of the function of the Zonal Council, that information in itself did not appear to be an adequate incentive for the DA’s leadership to remedy the problem on the ground. These examples in effect, illustrate how the preoccupation with qualification for funds undermine local institutional structures and the so-called participatory processes.

Nevertheless, for those local state actors who have served in leadership positions and on the Executive Committee of the DA for some time, their sense of optimism for the local state and its substructures had not dissipated yet. But these individuals often tended to be the successful entrepreneurs who manage to successfully match their expectations with their skills in the local state business. A remark by one local political actor who serves on a number of committees in the DA as well as in the substructures very clearly illustrated this point:

“(…) yes, it [town council] is useful because that is where locally, the people get closer to the Assembly because that is where the people expect that whatever happens at the main Assembly gets down to them to know whatever happens at the top; in a Metropolitan Assembly, the functions sometimes overlap with the sub-metro
8.2 Competing Views on District Substructures

council but you know the laws are there for it [town council] to work except somebody who doesn’t want it to work. You have the laws, the city by-laws that back you to do whatever you want to do within the jurisdiction of the town council (...). People don’t want to read and then apply the law (...) you want the ‘big men’ to be doing that for you while they have given you the power to work; it is there for us to work unless, of course, you don’t want to work” (Interviewee #38: Assembly Member, Bomso Town Council, Kumasi, 14.10.2014).

This informant was, however, quick to point out that some basic necessities such as infrastructure to house a secretariat and a revenue base were prerequisite for the council at the substructure to do its work. This resonates with the lukewarm attitude of the DA to ensuring that the substructures are well-placed to perform their assigned roles. Perhaps his position of influence accounts for why things appear to ‘work better’ in his own town council than others. Quite obvious from the above quotation is the discrepancy between the ideal and everyday reality of the local administration. The availability of the rules and regulations alone does not make the institutions functional and although the informant hinted that the way forward depended on individual bureaucrats, reflecting the views of von Stein (1943), neither the respondent nor his office offered any viable ideas on how that innate bureaucratic ethos should evolve or could be cultivated. An interesting observation in the above quotes is the proclivity for some actors to undermine other institutional structures. This is what could best be termed ‘institutional sabotaging’; everyday attempts to render dysfunctional the tasks of other local state institutional structures because one is not a member, while at the same time the interests they serve are in stark opposition to the beliefs of the saboteurs. These are everyday taken-for-granted institutional realities that are more likely to be missed even by a concerted reformer. Yet, their consequences frustrate whatever good intents the reformer may hold. Thus, it is unsurprising that the official rhetoric and the narratives from local state actors move in different directions.

Apparently, a select group of local politicians, bureaucrats and ordinary residents prefer to keep this dysfunction in that way. This is especially the case when such individuals are the beneficiaries of local institutional dysfunction and who enjoy the preservation of this state of affairs. These actors are more likely to embrace institutional reforms but at the same time exploit ambiguities that help them to keep the institutional arrangement quite the same (see Chabal & Daloz, 1999, p. 91; Bayart, 2000, p. 222).
Constituents react to the goods and services provided by the local state in several ways but two of these changes that are germane to their expression of dissatisfaction with the DAs are: attendance and participation in public activities (e.g. forums, clean-up exercise, etc.) organized by the local state as well as participation in elections for selecting representatives for the different wards in a DA. As regards the latter in particular, the general literature often considers elections as an exercise in testing the regime’s legitimacy because it gives people the right to democratically make their own choices (see O’Donnell, 2007, p. 6); an assertion that is though contested by other scholars who rather argue that legitimacy depends on the quality of services provided by whatever regime is in place (see e.g. Rothstein, 2009, p. 323).157 Yet, the point of departure from legitimacy of central regime is that local state elections go beyond the legitimization of the local political structure to results-oriented evaluation mechanism based on the services provided by the local state; and help constituents to spurn of their representatives who promise but do not deliver development projects in their electoral wards. This list of development goods ranges from sanitation, health education, to road infrastructure but are rarely provided by the local state and their representatives. That situation disappoints constituents to the extent that local political processes become less interesting to these constituents.

Constituents’ interest in the DA activities from the empirical evidence, as in other studies (e.g. Ayee & Amponsah, 2003), still remains very low. This lack of interest in the public forums of the DA is informed by constituents’ feeling they could not trust their local political leadership against the backdrop of the latter’s dismal performance in their electoral wards. Contrary to other jurisdictions (e.g. in some Western democracies) where interest in (local) political participation is often vested in the institutions themselves, what obtains in the setting of this study is an interest in persons as individuals. Those who seldom participate in local state public forums seem...

157 Rothstein (2009), for instance, argues that regime legitimacy does not depend on the type of regime (e.g. electoral democracy) per se but rather it is the quality of decisions made by the regime that give it support from the populace. In the local state, this quality of governance resonates with the provision of development goods and services.
8.3 Reaction of the Local Public to the Institutional Changes

to do so for two reasons. First, those participants may have been enticed to
do so by their patrons, who seek support for the latter’s own political posi-
tion or to change the incumbent representative of their wards and bring new
ones, that the electors feel could be trusted to deliver local public goods.
Second, those participants have some political interests of their own such
as using DA politics to gain experience needed for higher political ambi-
tions as was discussed early on. This distrust in the DAs’ delivery of local
public goods persists despite the frequent institutional changes to make the
services provided by the local state better.

Interestingly, however, some local politicians attributed this lack of in-
terests in the local state’s activities to the negative views associated with the
members of the DA. Some held the view that with more well-educated and
affable individuals entering the DA, the perception may be changing just as
voting trends have:

“(…) there’s been a syndrome; there is that perception that Assembly elections are
for these non-serious people; these are old men, old-fashioned people; these are
people who are not well-educated and so people are not encouraged to move in but
now the perception is gradually changing (…). People are moving out of that mind-
set and now graduates, people with degrees, first and second degrees are in it; me
as I am sitting here, I have done my first degree and my second degree (…) if you
go around you see people filing posters and you’ll see the kind of people who are
vying for the position now at least, you see that we have moved from that lower,
semi-literates to literates (…). So the electoral trends will, of course, change (…) when you come, it is also imperative on you that you let the people see and have a
feel of the change (…) that when they can get people well-educated into the Assem-
bly, the end results will be like people will have a better person to lobby for their
developmental agenda (…) and when they see that, that is how it should be, then
they wouldn’t be just voting for anybody just like that. They would be making sure
that they are voting for somebody who knows his left and right and who knows
what he wants to do” (Interviewee #38: Assembly Member, Bomso Town Council,
Kumasi, 14.10.2014).

However, this argument of changing perception towards the DA with the
advent of more highly-educated individuals into the DAs breaks down in
the light of voting trends in DA elections which have rather been dwindling
instead of appreciating. The pendulum might be swinging in the direction
of political actors but not towards the constituents who seem to base their
decisions on development goods provided by the former. In fact, public dis-
enchantment with the local state is compellingly expressed through voting
trends in the DAs.
Asante points out that voter turn-out rates at local state elections are largely related to the quality of public goods and services provided by the DAs (2003, p. 110). Compared with national election trends, the disillusion with the DAs is clearly elucidated by voter turn-out as shown in Table 18. Indeed, whereas voters’ enthusiasm seems to surge with national elections, the opposite is true for the local government counterpart despite numerous attempts towards institutional reforms to involve more local actors in pursuit of locally-relevant development programmes.


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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Voter Turnout (%)</td>
<td>50.2</td>
<td>78.2</td>
<td>60.4</td>
<td>81.5</td>
<td>69.5</td>
<td>80.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Voter Turnout (%)</td>
<td>59.3</td>
<td>29.3</td>
<td>41.6</td>
<td>32.8</td>
<td>44.0</td>
<td>35.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The fact that local state elections are not coupled with presidential and parliamentary elections, which would have blurred the picture, makes it even clearer for one to gauge local constituents’ disinterests in the programmes offered by the local state as well as in those provided by their representatives. The apathy is especially vivid in the two study locations (see Table 158)

158 Voter turnout in local state elections remains generally low in other jurisdictions especially in the Global North. However, in emerging democracies, the hope that the local state could deliver development is often high and it, therefore, appears striking that this enthusiasm seems to have disappeared so quickly just after the DA system was introduced.
8.3 Reaction of the Local Public to the Institutional Changes

Though the two study areas have different political preferences, the fact that participation in local state elections is constantly dwindling or hardly attracts half the number of registered voters—at least in the case of the Wa municipality—shows that lack of interest in local state activities irrespective of the national regime. That lack of interest in the DAs goes to express residents’ disappointment with type of local public goods provided in their localities (Crook, 2003, p. 80). That adds to existing perceptions about bureaucrats in the local government as weak and incompetent by their counterparts in the decentralized and deconcentrated departments.

Table 19. Voter Participation in Local State Elections in the Study Areas, 2006 and 2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classification</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2010</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Region</td>
<td>Ashanti</td>
<td>39.5</td>
<td>36.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Upper West</td>
<td>51.7</td>
<td>51.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Government</td>
<td>Kumasi Metropolis</td>
<td>24.3</td>
<td>21.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wa Municipal</td>
<td>38.2</td>
<td>45.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author’s compilation based on information from the Electoral Commission, Ghana, 2014.\(^\text{159}\) Registered voters in (a) Ashanti: 2006=1,931,330; 2010=2,150,461; (b) Upper West: 2006=261,576; 2010=326,418; (c) Kumasi Metropolis: 2006=733,002; 2010=874,422; (d) Wa Municipal: 2006=53,041; 2010=66,227.

The attitude of the regime to elections at the local state level raises further doubts about the mismatch between rhetoric and commitment to making the

\(\text{159} \) Although the local state elections were supposed to have been held in 2014, the election only took place in September 2015. This meant that the extended tenure of the DA after March 2014 had no legitimacy and that members were acting illegally as legislators. Yet, attempts to challenge the legitimacy was shrugged off by central state actors without any suggestions to offer solutions. This goes to confirm the lack of genuine commitment to developing the local state institutions.
local state an arena for local development especially in poverty reduction. Elections are inconsistent, dates are not fixed and, thus, mutable at any given point in time. Therefore, Assembly Members could overstay their mandates for long durations without reelection or any legislative backing. This was the case of the DA elections in 2014. The uncertainty around the date for the elections continued from March 2014 till September 2015 but the respective General Assemblies and Executives were still at post.

Thus, everything about the DA system in its nearly three decades of institutionalization appears circumstantial and less concrete in nature putting the entire institutional setting in a constant flux of building and re-building. These practices, apart from making the local state incapable of providing its promises, further affect constituents’ perception that the local state which is rather closer to them does not appear sensitive to their needs. A nagging question that emerges is: are the expectations of the local constituents over ambitious and/ unfounded? The answer to this question must be tackled from the sort of promises made by the central political actors and their policy experts (i.e. bureaucrats and transnational actors). They create the impression about how much is at stake for the local state and its constituents when in reality, that could rarely be provided.

8.4 Concluding Remarks

The argument in this chapter has underscored the position that despite persistent and unending institutional reforms in the local state, constituents as actors in their own right make evaluative judgements about the local state and its goods and services. Indeed, both ordinary residents and public officials make evaluative assessments about the local state which eventually inform the manner in which they deal with the local political structures. It is, of course, appropriate to point out that local political actors’ views on the changing attitudes of the public towards them seem honest. However, that increasing trend appears inadequate to offset the persistent views that the local state under which the local bureaucracy is subsumed is unnecessarily party-politically dominated. It appears onerous to recant the persistent views that inform the attitudes of bureaucrats in the deconcentrated and decentralized departments towards the local state and its bureaucracy as well as their resolve to resist full integration into the local state.
More importantly, however, the consequences of the evaluations by residents, who are the clients and beneficiaries of local public services, entail apathy and disinterest. They strategically disengage from activities organized by the local state (e.g. public forums and clean-up campaigns) and those organized for the local state (e.g. DA elections) because they feel materially distanced from the local state which is very close to them, physically. Indeed, this lack of interests in local state election activities pertains to two issues: beyond their disregard and distrust for their representatives, their apathy also highlights their lack of interests in the whole local governance programme and that they are less likely to engage with it. The fact that other deconcentrated services have severally referred to legislation that founded these services, in order to assert their independence from the local state reveals that new institutions and legislation would have to be evolved to address such contradictions. Yet, new institutions attempting to address existing problems may end up creating more problems and eventually trap the whole idea of local state institutional change in a constant flux of institution-building. It should, however, be pointed out that constituents’ attitude to the local state is informed by what the local state does but these actions in themselves are based on multiple levels of interests and preferences of the different groups of local policy actors. These interests and preferences are articulated in the next chapter.
9. Local State Institution-Building and Strategic Decoupling

Earlier chapters have discussed local institutional change practices and preferences at the local and central state levels. This chapter goes a step further. It integrates empirical data with theoretical arguments to show that the local is very much part of global entanglements in which the former is embedded. Through this fusion, the chapter illustrates the multi-level embeddedness of local state institution-building in global processes. This synthesis reflects the attractiveness of international development funds and resources for the actors of local institutional change and how these actors craftily adapt to receiving those funds. Central to the argument herein is the importance of taken-for-granted rhetoric and text production that enhance legitimacy narratives in the institution-building enterprise. It is posited that actors in the institution-building arena constantly decouple policy from practice but strategically use rhetoric and texts to derive legitimacy narratives for both international and local audiences even if these texts increasingly ignore the local impact of the intervention strategies.

The argument is underpinned by institutional ideas viz. decoupling of policy from practice (Meyer & Rowan, 1991) as enhanced by actors’ embedded interests and agency (DiMaggio, 1988; Scharpf, 1997). Thus, despite the limits set by the institutional environment of development intervention and which constrain the behaviour of their actors, the ambiguities of the rules still predicate the latter as “agentic” players (Meyer, 2010, p. 2) emboldened to use the very ideas and concepts of institutional change to pursue their interests. This obtains when central and local state actors craftily take up ideas from the international development system but strategically disengage these ideas from everyday change practices and service provision. To synthesize empirical evidence with theoretical arguments, the chapter joins empirical data on experiences from participation and observations on informants’ rich narratives of legitimacy in the institution-building processes with relevant materials from other publication outlets (i.e. newspapers, review and evaluations) on the topic at the time of the study. These strands of data allow us to point out that a deeper understanding of the strategies for attracting international development funds emerges by situating
9. Local State Institution-Building and Strategic Decoupling

the local practices within the international development system itself. Transnational actors seek credibility for themselves and they are able to address this concern by teaming up and producing a common narrative with their Global South counterparts. Their practices, of course, produce locally-relevant policies but the implementation and impact remain out of their sphere of influence. Thus, local state actors gain more room to maneuver and their new institutional practices are no less similar to existing ones. The sub-themes discussed herein include narratives of legitimacy on institution-building projects and how they are constructed; strategic responses to local political reforms; and processes that engender cycles of local political reforms and how that perpetuate existing institutional practices.

9.1 Multi-level Embedded Interests and Agency in Local State Institutional Change

It is often thought that public policy sums up the preferences and actions of the central government (see Peters, 2013, p. 3). However, it is prudent to assume that public policy is crafted from the interests of the regime and other influential actors as well as the circumstances in which the policies are made. This conceptualization provokes a critique of the agency of policy actors especially those in the Global South and helps to overcome the simplistic assumption that programmes of local social transformation are handed down to them without specific local reactions. Local policy actors react in myriad ways and, with their embedded interests and those of their transnational counterparts, they shape the success or failure of the programmes of socio-economic transformation in the local arena. To begin, a reference to the conceptual framework (Figure 2) derived from theoretical and extant literature on institutional change is very helpful. The framework advances a three-tier level of analysis, i.e. transnational, central state and local state actors as well as their interests, in local institutional change which provides the starting point to the current argument. In fact, critical perspectives on development intervention programmes in the Global South proceed from the assumption that international development organizations are not free from criticisms about the content and quality of implementation of development projects. International development organizations are seen as part of everyday institutional practices in the Global South. Indeed, it is thought that these organizations face legitimacy expectations and pressures
from their northern governments and strive as much as possible to address same in their everyday intervention strategies in the South (see Kühl, 2009, p. 574; Rottenburg, 2009, p. 20).

At the same time, their Global South counterparts respond to these practices with their own expectations and preferences. Contrary to some notions of indeterminacy in structure-agency debate (see e.g. Giddens, 1984, pp. 19-26), these everyday practices smack of not only inherent interests but also agency on the part of the development actors. They use the institutions, with which they work and seek to change, to address their societal expectations and also their own interests. The intriguing question that follows is how does one explain the paradox of embedded agency in the institutional change processes? Better still, how are institutional actors who are embedded in their institutional environments, with specific rules that constrain their behaviour, able to circumvent these constraints to achieve their interests? These questions refer broadly to the structure-agency debate to which the concept of institutional entrepreneurs attempts to explain. For DiMaggio, institutional actors who possess some ample resources, and capable of changing the state of affairs, seize the opportunity to realize their inherent interests (1988, p. 14). Thus, the institutional structure, while constraining the actors at the same time creates ambiguities with which well-placed and influential actors can exploit the institutions to their own advantage.

Another point worth clarifying is whether or not self-interests are necessarily counter-productive to institutional change and development. Ordinarily, one may expect that vested self-interests in institutional change processes might make local politicians and bureaucrats worse-off (Scharpf, 1997, p. 31). However, the response to this disposition does not appear straight forward; a mix of contextual and structural factors influence any plausible explanations. In some situations, institutional actors with specific self-interests (e.g. bureaucratic corruption) may rather enhance institutional

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160 Giddens sees structure and agency as inseparable; individuals create society and institutions but they are at the same time constrained by the very institutions they have created (1984, p. 25). Nonetheless, the indeterminacy is aptly confronted by the concept of institutional entrepreneurs in which actors capably exploit the ambiguities created by old and new institutions which structure their daily lives.
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change and development but this is contingent on the institutional environment in which that occurs (Vaal & Ebben, 2011, p. 115).\textsuperscript{161} This practice occurred in much of the transitional economies in Asia.\textsuperscript{162} As entrepreneurs interested in sustaining personal benefits, they ensured their very institutions produced the required outcomes that legitimatized their actions. Therefore, they were committed to making sure their everyday practices produced the required results. Thus, one may expect that given their narrative of legitimacy, institutional actors in the Ghanaian context will be more committed to making the institutions, which simultaneously provide them with legitimacy and benefits, produce some concrete results in preservation of their practices. However, some of these policy actors exploit the institutions mainly to curry electoral favour and sustain their patronage networks at the expense of outcomes for which they seek credibility. This situation begs the question why does this happen in a context where ‘good institutions’ are proffered to replace existing ‘bad institutions’? Fact is, these policy actors, given their financial resources and status, are able to overcome and exploit the institutional constraints and ensure that their interests are addressed. Although embedded in the institutional domain, the interests and preferences that furnish them legitimacy are somewhat different and, therefore, evoke different levels of commitment to achieving those interests.

9.2 Embedded Interests but Divergent Commitments to Institutional Goals

It might be pointed out right from the outset that the goals of the actors in the local institutional arena are not diametrically opposed: they all seek ways to engage local level actors to be part of the governance project and help make local institutions accountable and responsible to constituents.

\textsuperscript{161} Vaal and Ebben (2011), using a econometric analysis, believe that in environments where institutions are not very well developed, bureaucratic corruption may reduce uncertainties and enhance the evolution of political and property rights institutions that eventually facilitate economic growth (p. 115). It should be noted that neoliberal accounts of this growth only focus on markets and good economic policies from the regimes (see World Bank, 1993, p. vi).

\textsuperscript{162} The effect of this bureaucratic corruption on economic growth in Asia survived on officials receiving benefits while they provided “special privileges” for enterprises to thrive (Yu, 2001, p. 17). Thus, these practices ensured that “business still got done” even if at an “inflated cost” (Segal, 1999, p. 5).
More important, they seek the evolution of locally-relevant development policies that address problems peculiar to the context. Yet, beyond the identical goals, the commitment is not the same for the different actors. Observations from this study showed that these actors have different (if not ambivalent) institutional rationalities; while the transnational actors work with the neo-classical assumption of efficiency, the exact underlying rationalities of their Global South counterparts somewhat may follow social or political priorities that may contradict economic efficiency as these are often arbitrarily assigned to them. Second, the actors in the institution-building business are not a homogenous group even though their interests may converge.\(^\text{163}\) The transnational actors have different interests and commitment in proffering and supporting institutional changes in local state bureaucracies; central government has its own preferences and strategies for accepting to undertake reforms; and local state actors are interested in processes and practices that help them survive on a daily basis. Therefore, the differential rationalities and commitments of the actors in the institution-building processes cannot always match the impact on the ground. Some antecedent factors are helpful to understanding the mismatch between proffered institutional changes and everyday practices.

The complexity around local state institutional change in Ghana could be remotely located but as discussed in earlier chapters, the more immediate one which has had countervailing effects dates back to the 1980s. Two key factors were crucial namely, the Bretton Woods institutions and the character of the regime itself which, to a greater extent, determined the complexity of institutional reforms in the local state. On one hand, the Bretton Woods institutions pushed for economic and administrative reforms in order to avert total state collapse. On the other hand, the regime’s strategy to institutional reforms was more of political ideology than genuine intent to develop a well-functioning local state administration. The regime which had just emerged from a coup d’état wanted administrative reforms from a populist standpoint. Thus, the regime sought legitimacy by being closely connected to local constituents rather than allowing them to make their own decisions (Crook, 1999, p. 117). Therefore, both situations provided the rec-

163 On the triangular constellation of interests of financiers, project executing agencies; and consultants in the international development business, see Rottenburg (2009, p. 20).
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Ipe for decoupling of the proffered institutional change ideas. The international development system was committed to ensuring the regime’s willingness to implement the new ideas before the latter could reap any benefits from the development system. That explains the Rawlings regime’s initial reluctance to the decentralization programme (Mohan & Stokke, 2000, p. 254) but its later acquiescence to reform the local political institutions. That situation, to a large extent, determined the very practices and responses of the local bureaucracy to the current institutional change processes. Indeed, the regime could afford to strategically make ambitious, idealized but abstract statements about responsive and accountable local institutions to its international audience in order to gain the needed recognition and development assistance. Yet, on the backstage, the regime’s specific rationale, willingness and ability to call the tune within the decentralized local administrations remained quite intact.

9.3 Strategically Decoupling Local State Institutional Reforms

As evidenced so far in this study, after nearly three decades of persistent local institution-building, key de-linkages between local participatory development, accountability and improved socio-economic well-being of constituents still persist. This gives an indication that constituents’ interests and involvement in these local institutional development initiatives remains dismal. But it is the participatory linkage to the overall local economic development outcome that the copious institutional reforms are all about. Based on this lull in the delivery of institution-building outcomes viz. enhanced participation and reduced poverty, the salient question to ask is: where do the change strategies and concepts end up when they are adopted and initiated in Global South contexts? Several explanations on this phenomenon abound. A popular one proffered by scholars in the NPM discourse is to conceive the ever-changing reform models as part of the general processes of “discontinuities and nonlinearities” in the institutional reform enterprises (Hood & Peters, 2005, p. 276). Typical examples may be countries that start to make development inroads, are described as success stories only to stall and even retrogress beyond their starting point (see Collier, 2007, p. 11) perhaps because something external happened on their way to progress.
However, that explanation assigns the reform practices and behaviour to structural factors with little regard for intentions and preferences of institutional actors. Yet, as was pointed out in earlier chapters, institutional actors are more capable to enact behaviour in order to address their interests. The decoupling argument—in which development actors respond to the pressures in the international development arena by disentangling their professed concepts and strategies from their everyday practices—appears an apt description of strategic intents to keep the reform enterprise in vogue because of the benefits associated with doing so. For Meyer and Rowan, decoupling thrives because key actors are able to create the impression, based on assumptions of some “logic of confidence and good faith” that justify “things are what they seem” and to maintain their face (1991, p. 58). Thus, institutional actors are capable of presenting abstract thoughts of reality as concrete institutional outcomes which favour them both perceptually and materially. They provide optimism even if the contents appear empty.

That there are cognitive gains from decoupling in an ever-changing institutional environment is highlighted by Orton and Weick who argue that it is such “loose coupling” that makes it possible for actors to “explain the simultaneous existence of rationality and indeterminacy” even though the two may often appear incongruous (1990, p. 204). Informants in both civil and political positions held common views on some persistent behaviour that institutional change programmes could least confront despite a commitment to doing so in good faith. Indeed, these beliefs about decoupling of change programmes persisted in the minds of the key actors in the local institutional environment; a belief which indicts the very notion of institution-building. A couple of quotations will suffice in elucidating this disposition:

“(…) I am responsible for the Upper West Region but you know Ghana as it is, the facilities to make this work easier are not there (…) so on rare occasions, I get in contact with the personnel officers in the various districts when they want to consult, clarifications, and approval and so on and so forth” (Interviewee #39: senior human resource official, RCC, Kumasi, 13.08.2013).

164 Weick’s notion of loose coupling shares with the idea of decoupling as used by John Meyer and Brian Rowan.
“(... so many factors are not factored into these [institutional] changes ...) but it is business as usual, government business” (Interviewee #32: senior official, Local Government Service Secretariat, Accra, 14.10.2013).

“(...) I think we [Assembly Members] should have common fund for development [but] some people would be interested in keeping them [the funds] in their pockets (...) you know Ghanaians, if they get this money in their hands it could be misused” (Interviewee #1: Assemblyman, Asokwa Sub-metro Council, Kumasi, 02.10.2013).

Thus despite the hopes of development through the local political institutions, a reflexive awareness that the numerous reforms may yield very little persisted. Even more, local policy actors working on new institutional change programmes did so with the inherent assumption and rationality that those programmes may rarely alter existing practices to any significant extent. The case of World Bank and EU programmes on financial reporting standard (mentioned in section 7.3) clearly articulated that belief among local policy actors. This is evidenced by remarks from one bureaucrat:

“(...) the World Bank has a way of reporting and if government doesn’t comply by that they cease their funding (...). Because sometimes it doesn’t conform with the local system of reporting we have to report separately to them to tailor their needs and maybe incorporate them in our normal reporting for central government consumption (...). So we have to report by that format to them then we will now take the figures and also embed them in our system and also report to central government so we’ll be keeping parallel formats of reporting. So that is one of the challenges we often face (...). They believe that that format of reporting will analyse the impact, the so-called impact they want to see (...)” (Interviewee #31: with a finance official, Wa Municipal Assembly, Wa, 01.08.2013).

However, not all local policy actors readily saw the preferences of the transnational actors as condescending with a concomitant effect on institutional change. Some of the local actors saw the practice from their external counterparts as a way to counter the petty corrupt practices of the executive bureaucracy. An Assembly Member was blunt on that point of view:

“(...) it’s somebody giving you something, he will decide what he will give you and when to give you (...) and when they come too, at times they are directed; we want this funding for a specific job. You can’t divert this fund for any other thing; only for the purpose for which it is brought (...) anything less than this they won’t accept. ‘He who pays the piper dictates the tune’. I am bringing my money, I want it this way so [the] one who does not have the money cannot say I want it this way or that way. They have perceived us to be doing things that are not to be done in the sense that when they give us certain donor funds meant for certain projects, we divert them to others areas and the work that we want them to be done which will last longer don’t live up to that time (...)” (Interviewee #2: Assemblyman, Busa Zonal Council, Wa, 31.07.2013).
9.3 Strategically Decoupling Local State Institutional Reforms

While external development funds are sometimes used to sustain existing institutional practices (discussed shortly), the widely held notions and behavioural orientations among local politicians and bureaucrats went beyond general perception of corruption to an expression of fundamental and pervasive expectation of external funds without recourse to their intended goals. Diatribes against officials of one DA, especially local political actors, by two central political actors (i.e. a regional minister and a minister for local government) highlights the latter’s intransigence to addressing confounding issues to local institutional change and actual practices. Instead, their obsession with development funds was glaring as illustrated in their remonstration against the behaviour of local actors who apparently avoided DA meetings to protest the local state hegemony as was captured in a newspaper article:

“(…) when he [regional minister] assumed office, he discovered that members of the Assembly instead of holding regular meetings and performing other functions were rather engaged in internal fighting. He noted that even if the members had issues with the MCE, they could have resorted to appropriate method – pass no confidence vote in him, rather than engaging themselves in media-warfare which had led to the Assembly losing the grant. Key among the criteria for qualification for the grant was a minimum of three Assembly sittings but due to the internal wrangling, Bolgatanga Assembly Members held only two meetings (…) the minister of local government [on his part] warned that, should the Assembly Members misconduct themselves again, sanctions would be applied (…)” (Jalulah, January 21, 2014).165

Thus, the concerns for the contestation by the DA members were entirely disentangled from the preferences of these high-ranking political actors. Therefore, there was no desire to diagnose the institutional deficiencies apart from the funds that ideally are supposed to accrue from ‘well-functioning’ institutions. This is what is herein referred to as strategic decoupling: adopting but craftily disentangling the ideas from practice to allow the everyday activities continue and only reverting to formal standards that bring more institutional legitimacy when seeking more financial resources.

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165 It is difficult to understand the exact sanctions that could be applied to the collective action of the local political actors beyond a vote of no confidence to oust them but which requires two-thirds majority of the electorates in their various wards. What appeared germane during the field research was that those protests were counter-measures against the intrusion in their domain of influence by central political authorities.
Yet, these formal standards do not take into consideration, the actual practices and impact of the adopted but displaced ideas. The roles of local political actors in the decoupling process deserve mention. They may not directly wield influence on decisions to decouple local institutional change programmes. However, their behaviour towards the hegemony contribute to the decoupling of local institution-building ideas much as they do the achievement of the former’s entrepreneurial prowess. Nonetheless, the question of communicating and justifying an urgent need for the change programmes and how they are being achieved appears ever pertinent. These development actors must constantly justify their actions for intervention and resources in order to remain relevant in the development discourse.

9.4 Constructed Legitimacy of Local Institutional Change: The Rhetoric of Development

Actors in the local institution-building arena craftily construct legitimacy in order to be seen as doing something novel with a genuine commitment to institutional change even if the practical reality appears radically different. This constructed legitimacy then as a social process (Johnson et al., 2006, p. 72) involves practices and narratives that are used by organized actors to create a space for action instead of conforming to some administrative rules. Legitimacy construction is, thus, more than mere belief in a juridical institutional order but rather entails all sorts of practices that help make actions within a particular politico-administrative domain possible. An understanding of legitimacy as a social process constructed in everyday practices allow us to move beyond the normative ideas of how local political institutions should be organized and how they should do their work to an appreciation of how local state actors use available institutional ideas and resources in order to tactfully create the spaces and opportunities for appearing credible in pursuing the professed change and development for local constituents.

That the institutional actors exploit rules to justify their actions points to their agency. Relating legitimacy to agency, Suchman (1995, p. 574) suggests that these actors craftily seek out strategies that appeal to their target audience. This audience, which may be domestic (Halliday, et al. 2010, p. 80) or international (Kühl, 2009, p. 575), is key to the legitimization of their actions and, by implication, lead to the achievement of their interests. Legitimacy strategies help the policy actors to reconcile deviation from their
9.4 Constructed Legitimacy of Local Institutional Change

plans with the need for more resources and support. Yet, the pursuit of legitimacy is not directly observable so attempts to understand how actors furnish themselves and their organizations with credibility must also focus on strategic communications and public statements (Stephen, 2015). Actors in the development arena put up legitimacy narratives that are rhetorical statements with which they attempt to rationalize their actions. Here, rhetoric is deliberately and manipulatively employed to exact legitimacy (Suddaby & Greenwood, 2005, p. 40). Through that, these actors gain credibility as well as assent to continue with their development work. Rottenburg (2009) refers to this broadly as representation strategies which are presented as “valid versions of the world” (p. xxx)

The quality of relationship between the epistemic community and legitimacy is vital. Transnational actors in search of legitimacy cannot act alone in the implementation of development policy in Global South settings. They do not have the legitimacy to do that and if they tried, they would be castigated for imposition by both the local states and their central governments. With their elected or semi-elected mandates, it is the local and central states that hold legitimacy to decide on development projects for implementation. However, since the transnational actors, with financial resources, need to legitimize their practices, they must engage the local policy experts. Once sought, they both legitimate each other; the local experts appear genuine in the international and local arenas while the transnational counterparts appear credible to their financiers. Thus, beyond the triangular constellation of the development enterprise: the development bank, the implementing agency, and consultants as described by Rottenburg (2009, p. 2), there is the compelling need for local policy experts to cross-legitimize their actions. Hence, the consent of senior public officials as local policy experts in the Global South becomes increasingly crucial in conferring credibility on themselves. Subsequently, a number of strategies are enacted to appeal to the target audience both international and local.

Two of these strategies are herein discussed. First, at the international level, there is an unending cycle of renewal institutional change concepts (Kühl, 2009, p. 552) in spite of the associated ambiguities. To gain more legitimacy, the renewed concepts are subjected to rational assessment often in a superficial fashion which helps them to hide their inherent weakness (Rottenburg, 2009). These practices are typified by the District Development Fund (DDF) and the Urban Development Grant (UDG) programmes
that are currently being implemented in the Ghanaian local state despite being equivocal namely as capacity-building vis-à-vis performance inducement interventions. Thus, these funds provide a telling example of the processes of legitimization. Second, at the national level, top-ranking officials and their local state actors put up legitimacy narratives of supervision, reforming moribund local institutions and use public forums, accountability workshops, and local regulatory practices to appear credible to local constituents and their international financiers.

9.4.1 Text production and credibility narratives

Thus far, a critical analysis of actors’ preferences and responses in development intervention programmes needs to move beyond the visible events and activities they engage in to inherent motivations behind them. A core strategy used by both transnational and local actors to seek legitimacy is text production. This strategy has several dimensions but, like other international organizations, these texts help international development agencies to “amplify” the rhetoric of development (Halliday et al., 2009, p. 84; see also Rottenburg, 2009, p. 93) and, thus, enhance their legitimacy. Texts in the form of reports, minutes of meetings interspersed with metrics are of central importance to these policy experts and their organizations and these are presented as evidence of change in the Global South. They are used to seek legitimacy even if the texts and their numbers are only remotely connected to reality in the South. A case in point was a mid-year review of institutional change and development programmes in Wa, Upper West in August 2013. This was an evaluative workshop whose goals were to assess gains in development local projects including water and sanitation.

Closely allied to these goals were capacity-building strategies which are strongly supported with external development assistance because they are seen as core prerequisites for the projects to be sustainable. Participants largely included top-ranking central state and local government actors as well as transnational actors who financially supported those programmes.166

166 This programme held in Wa on 29.08.2013 was attended not only by elites of various decentralized and deconcentrated departments. Also present were top-ranking state officials and representatives of international organizations including UNICEF, WHO, UNFPA, World Food Programme, JICA and development NGOs.
Consistent with workshops on development projects, district and departmental heads gave impressive lectures on how the programmes were faring or had fared. Yet and quite critically, central political interests were at play as the meeting was jointly summoned by the regional minister who sought some legitimacy for the regime’s initiatives and actions with the external development assistance. No less remarkable were comments on legitimacy rhetoric by two high-ranking officials:

“(…) reviews document and analyse programme successes and difficulties by providing better information for monitoring progress and implementation (…)”
(senior administrative official, RCC, Wa, Field notes, 29.08.2013).

“(…) this is an occasion to review projects to get to know what is working, what is not working in order to find solutions to make things work and even work better (…)” (senior representative, UNICEF Ghana, Wa, Field notes, 29.08.2013).

While at first, the reviews appeared laudable platforms that attempt to furnish development actors with some qualitative indicators on development intervention programmes, they at the same time addressed more fundamental interests of the policy actors based on the quantitative metrics that are generated. The presenters had mostly travelled from their districts to the regional capital, Wa, to make a presentation to an audience that may be interested in quantitative gains and not necessarily the challenge on the ground. Indeed, all presenters were preoccupied with texts and metrics to highlight success and challenges. Yet, the presenters were the select few from the top echelons of their organizations and departments who may be strategically sensitive to presenting information that brings continuous funding and cooperation. Once detached from the realities in the districts of implementation, these workshops were no different from the prelude to the assessment for capacity-building funds discussed in section 7.3. Therefore, these texts, metrics and reports address higher order interests; reports are very much needed, foremost, for international legitimization of development work and ‘practical gains’. These indicators are presented as evidence of accomplishment in the development arena. Any qualitative intent from the projects on the lives of constituents is only of secondary consideration.

Let us take an intriguing example of a presentation at the review meeting given by a district official in charge of water and sanitation. This particular presentation on drilling of boreholes for potable water in communities in that district focused mainly on interesting statistics about the number of boreholes constructed, and the difficulty in constructing them with an appeal for funds for more boreholes. At the very least, one may expect to learn
about the impact of the potable water on the lives and health of people in those poor, rural communities especially given that the region is known for guinea worm infections. However, the guinea worm narrative could no longer hold because already in 2010, health authorities in Ghana had declared that the infection was no longer endemic in the region and the country as a whole. Therefore, a new justification was needed to understand the prioritization of the borehole project. Surprisingly, no mention was made of water crises or an impending one neither were the existing boreholes described as defunct and requiring replacement. Again, no statistics on the ratio of borehole to the communities in the region and those yet to get a borehole were provided. Thus, what an external observer missed was the real impact of the borehole project on the lives of the rural communities and why it should still be considered a policy priority. Yet, the representatives and participants were pleased with these data and the request made. Indeed, those statistics (i.e. the number of boreholes constructed) are useful for local and national political elites during political events to showcase their commitment to local development just as their transnational counterparts may use them to show successes in rural development and poverty reduction.

The case described above was more collective in that several DAs and central political actors with their transnational partners were involved. Another instance of such credibility seeking events that focused on a single DA was a public forum held in Kumasi. This was a local political accountability workshop on: Social Public Expenditure and Financial Accountability (SPEFA).167 This was a capacity-building workshop the goals of which were to stimulate demands for accountability from local political institutions in urban districts. Specifically, strategies to build the capacity of media and civil society organizations to empower them were advanced. Their strategies for exacting local accountability included efforts to network, monitor and report on local state financial management practices. The participants came in three groups: first, the intended beneficiaries including media personnel and civil society groups, chiefs and community leaders

167 This forum held in Kumasi on 26.09.2013 was the first in a series for 46 urban districts (i.e. municipal and metropolitan DAs). It was attended by chiefs, opinion leaders, media personnel, a regional minister, coordinating director of the KMA, and Assembly Members. Representatives from the local government ministry and the three development organizations: World Bank, SNV-Ghana, and CEDEP were also present.
with local political interests. The second category comprised local and central state actors including regional ministers and a coordinating director of the Kumasi Metropolitan Assembly (KMA), Assembly Members and their unit committee members. The third category comprised representatives from the three development organizations: the World Bank as the sponsor of the programme under its capacity-building programme in urban local governments; the Netherland Development Organization (also SNV-Ghana) as consulting firm; and the Centre for the Development of People (CEDEP) as the implementing agency. This meeting provided another telling example of how legitimacy of accomplishment is sought by matching the interests of local-foreign consulting and implementation agencies with their international financier. This linkage gives more optimism to the rhetoric of capacity-building and change. Comments by a senior politician aptly captured this view:

“(…) SPEFA will provide top quality support for community based civil society organizations to be part of the governance process. SPEFA will build their knowledge and capacity to support the decentralization framework. SPEFA aims at enhancing popular participation in local democracy (…)” (a deputy regional minister, RCC, Kumasi, field notes, 26.09.2013).

More broad and ambitious promises were opined by an official of the implementing agency:

“(…) SPEFA also targets the media, traditional leaders, youth groups, Assembly Members and their unit committees, and persons with disability. Apart from participating in town hall meetings, the SPEFA group will conduct a citizens’ satisfaction survey every two years (…)” (senior management official, CEDEP, Kumasi, field notes, 26.09.2013).

Although not explicitly stated, the SPEFA programme, a subset of urban local government development programme funded by the World Bank and implemented in urban DAs, seeks to enhance public participation in local governance and institution-building processes. Indeed, as pointed out in previous chapters by informants, public participation in the activities of urban DAs is extremely dismal. Therefore, CEDEP’s attempts to organize town hall meetings appeared to be bold initiative to tackle head on, this lack of interest in local state business. Yet, there were several concerns with the organization of the workshop which speaks to the whole outlook of the programme based on previous experiences with such meetings and their outcomes. The setting, loaded mostly with local political elites was not very different from party-political platforms for the regime which strives to be seen as committed to the cause and development of the local state. Also
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curious was the very audience of the setting. Constituents’ participation was rather low and apart from few Assembly Members and media personnel, interaction with some ordinary participants generally showed they lacked the basic skills needed to seek changes in social and financial accountability from the DA. Certainly, it was this shortcoming that the programme sought to resolve. Yet, the outcome remains spurious given that the very concept of capacity-building has remained central to the local political reforms since the 1980s. This is in addition to the fact that some bureaucrats and the executive were somewhat skeptical about the intention of the SPEFA programme when it began. That was why they perceived the project to be “witch-hunting” techniques by civil society organizations (CSOs) to interfere in the activities of professional bureaucrats.168

Even more compelling in the legitimacy narratives were the key actors with their different rationalities and practices in that capacity-building project. SNV-Ghana is an international NGO that specializes in consultancy services for “capacity enhancement” of local organizations (Verhoeven, 2002, p. 19). Despite its broad focus including agriculture, water, sanitation and renewable energy, the organization has emerged from a volunteer-implementation agency under the Dutch Foreign Ministry to an independent advisor on development policy (Verhoeven, 2002, p. 40). On its part, CEDEP is a local civil society organization which, as it claims, focuses broadly on poverty reduction, human resources development and sustainable development.169 It also professes knowledge of the local context, boasting of capacity-building competence and successes elsewhere. With their focus on the now popular but less criticized concept of capacity development, the two agencies provide a perfect expert tandem and requisite instruments for international development agencies and central state actors to do business with. Thus together, they constitute the policy entrepreneurs for local socio-economic transformation. Indeed, it was less remarkable that the Local Government Ministry and the World Bank contracted SNV-Ghana as consultants while CEDEP served as the implementing partner to

168 Interviewee #40: senior project officer, CEDEP, Kumasi, 20.01.2016.
169 In an informal discussion, one official proudly referred me to their project partnerships and expertise with other international development organizations. See e.g. projects with the UK’s Department for International Development (DFID). http://r4d.dfid.gov.uk/Project/2888/Default.aspx; and http://r4d.dfid.gov.uk/Project/3067/Default.aspx
provide capacity-building advice to civil society groups and local constituents in the SPEFA project. That tandem between development actors comprising: funders, local-transnational consultants, and implementing agencies to get things done was compelling. This was exactly the case in the production of credibility index through the capacity development programmes as revealed by an official of one implementing agency:

“It [the report] is very, very important because that is the only way they consider the work has been done (…). So adequate reporting is very key. They have always been telling us [CSOs] anytime we go for review meetings that we need to report on time so they can also report to the Ministry of Local Government in order for them to request for the funds so we can get our funds early to do the projects. So reporting is very key. A comprehensive report like that: taking pictures of projects; talking about the changes the project is making; talking about success stories; challenges; they play a key role. Best practices and all that (…) we need to put all that in the report so that they can inform as we go along to the next stage of the project implementation” (interviewee #40: senior project officer, CEDEP, Kumasi, 20.01.2016).

In fact, to show how much importance the funders and consultants attach to these reports, non-compliance with the project rules could yield serious consequences for the local implementing agencies including delay in the release of funds, total suspension of funds and withdrawal from the project entirely:

“(…) once you request for funds, they come; once you are done with your quarterly activities, you report adequately to SNV, you request for funds they will come (…) so if you don’t have funds to implement your activities, then it presupposes that you have not submitted all the required reports that you are supposed to submit. And once you submit your reports; the quarterly reports on time and you request for funds, they will come so you will start with the next quarter’s activities (…)” (Interviewee #40: senior project officer, CEDEP, Kumasi, 20.01.2016).

Although follow-ups to validate selected reports were occasionally made, the informant hinted that checks on credibility of their performance reports was an exception rather than the rule. Certainly, the construction of legitimacy texts and narratives go far beyond transnational actors (see Rottenburg, 2009, p. 20) to include local policy actors who are important partners in the production. In this particular case, even if the options of the local policy experts are limited, their agency is not diminished and they utilize their few choices in the production of some ‘credible’ narrative for use by both local audience and the international development system.
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9.4.2 Texts and metrics in the chain of legitimizing indices

The tacit agreement among the actors, the rhetoric, and texts provide a legitimate basis for initiating ‘new’ meanings to the very concept of capacity-building which has always been part of local state institutional change, albeit in various guises. That mutual consent is helpful in creating a standard “metacode” (Rottenburg, 2009, p. 182) by which the actors legitimized all events, activities and processes which, though varied, are combined into one coherent and standardized narrative. The aggregated text now becomes very useful for the purpose of seeking credibility, whether locally or internationally. This coherent narrative attempts to explain how development funds have been ‘appropriately’ utilized and their effectiveness, although the aggregation process also fails to address the different sources and challenges within which that text was produced. All that matters is that there is a coherent text of the reports. More telling, these standardized texts and scripts have consequences for other organizations that use them to evaluate their own programmes and to create new scripts and texts. For example, UNICEF Ghana uses the Functional Organizational Assessment Tool (FOAT) data from the DDF programme to assess the quality of governance by DAs and to produce its own legitimacy texts and scripts. Thus, the standardized script attains a chain effect on other international organizations though its content deals mostly with processes and not the quality of everyday change practices per se.

170 The information sharing and cross-legitimizations should not be very surprising considering the close proximity in which the offices of the international organizations are located in the capital, Accra. For example, UNICEF, AFD and World Food Programme are next-block neighbours at Cantomentos in Accra.

171 This evaluative measure and its indicators are used by UNICEF to produce an index (i.e. another metric) for their own texts and legitimacy narrative. The UNICEF metric, called District League Table, assesses social accountability of the DAs by ranking them in public service provision: education, health, sanitation, water, security and governance, with data culled from different sources.

172 Jerven (2013, p. 107) with emphasis on economic growth metrics shows how such data are arbitrary collected, how they do not reflect economic reality. Yet, they are employed by other development-oriented organizations who run sophisticated analysis and implement decisions based on these metrics. Even worse, international organizations including the World Bank and IMF use these metrics and by so doing make these data appear more legitimate.
The general understanding of the different actor constellations on a common narrative helps conceal any questions about hegemony or relevance of their tasks. Even if the central and local state actors ever question apparent hegemonic tendencies, they often use that to enhance and also blur their own attempts to appear credible. Though quite striking at first, central and local politicians as well as their bureaucrats with intent and purpose also produce and construct their own legitimacy narratives. Therefore, it is just a matter of convenience not to question the rationality behind strategies that help them realize their own legitimacy narratives. That top-ranking public officials are key advocates in the construction of institution-building legitimacy is expressed by their references to legislative and other constitutional provisions. These legal texts give the actors a backing to make policies for the local state and with which they are able to throw their full support behind the construction of credibility. They also help the actors to hide their very dysfunction. A remark by a senior bureaucrat aptly describes that position:

“(…) first of all the entire decentralization process that is being implemented in Ghana takes it roots from the Constitution of the Republic of Ghana that is found in Chapter 20 of the Constitution. The whole chapter talks about decentralization so that is where we derive the legitimacy of the process of decentralization from (…). We have a whole directorate in this place known as policy planning, monitoring and evaluation unit. What it basically does is to coordinate the activities of the MMDAs and also monitor the implementation of the various projects and programmes (…) the ministry’s monitoring is apex (…). It is only the ministry which has the powers to sanction (…) it does not mean that we are monitoring almost everywhere but sometimes we can sample regions and pick some districts to cross-check what has been done” (Interviewee #27: senior administrative official, Ministry of Local Government, Accra, 14.10.2013).

The quote above, while apparently pointing to the ‘legitimate’ mandate with which the central state could regulate its local counterpart, also betrays the central bodies in terms of their extent, reach and management of local state bodies. These crafty tactics and patterns, even though contested, cannot be simply ignored; they are part of the reality of legitimacy judgements that furnish the structures with some sense of stability and funding. In fact, it is in this guise that local state actors are able to exploit the ambiguities created

173 Local and central politicians organize voluntary self-help programmes e.g. clean-up exercise in their municipalities to show a sort of “commitment to and support for” the changes in their DAs.
by the institutions that constrain their activities. This situation is very well exemplified by the rational assessment from the capacity development programmes under the DDF and UDG projects which illustrates the behaviour and preferences of all the actors involved in development intervention programme. In particular, the transnational actors appear increasingly intransigent to confront the ‘deceptive’ practices of their local state counterparts:

“(…) meeting records are easy to falsify (…) service delivery improvements on the impact-level might only manifest over longer time horizons and would be difficult to link to the performance of local governments. Thus, among donors, there is a strong tendency to preserve the current focus on input and compliance indicators that mostly measure process. According to them [donors], the integration of service delivery standards would be too complex to manage (…)” (Janus, 2014, p. 21).

This tendency to fabricate metrics confirm insights from earlier quotation by one bureaucrat (as mentioned in section 7.3) when administrators are persistently pressed to produce funding qualification documents on the spur of the moment. This includes holding all quarterly meetings in the last quarter of the year with reports detailing development plans and events for the first three quarters. This skilful presentation of ‘evidence’ was reflected in reports of the 2012 FOAT assessment in which the Nkwanta South DA managed to fictitiously present just the number of documents required (see Dev-Pro Consult, 2013, pp. 10–12) to qualify for the funds. It took a ‘committed’ local politician to uncover the practice of presenting evidence of meetings that never took place. Interestingly, the revelations in the reports of evaluators and subsequent inquiries by the ministry and its secretariat concluded that the documents provided by the DA were not factual (MLGRD, 2013). However, no punitive action was made to restrain the DA from using the funds or repeating that behaviour. It is certainly not surprising that these everyday practices and construction of legitimacy in the international development arena are used to give impetus to arguments that development indices and matrices act as cover up for the practical, on-the-ground outcomes from development intervention programmes. For Rottenburg (2009), evaluations have to be organized in a ritualized manner so they do not thrust into the public domain, the inherent contradictions of development and change activities (p. 71) and with this awareness, all actors consistently preoccupy themselves in producing “facts and figures” to hide the practical deficits of their practices (p. 72). This was evidently expressed by a senior bureaucrat:
9.5 Local Institution-Building Paradox: Strategy and Trap

“(…) we have another fund also called the DDF that is a merit based fund (…) they will come to your Assembly, ask you some questions, ask for the Assembly’s general [minutes of] meetings, etc. and if you pass the functional organizational assessment tool, then a lump sum is allocated to you from the ministry (…) there is another one called the urban development grant (…) if you pass their assessment but this is limited to only metropolitan and municipal [Assemblies] but the DDF is across the board” (Interviewee #32: senior official, Local Government Service Secretariat, Accra, 14.10.2013).

Undoubtedly, the evaluations, standardized scripts and metrics do serve international and national credibility functions for institutional change actors. But they go beyond just the metrics. In fact, the rhetoric and the numbers provide the basis for strategically creating the urgent need for more institutions and to reform existing ones. These concerns are discussed in the next section.

9.5 Local Institution-Building Paradox: Strategy and Trap

Institution-building through technical development assistance and funds as discussed so far presents a paradox: it is both the problem and strategy for local political change and development. Institution-building processes are traps in which both local and central state bureaucrats as well as their transnational counterparts are complicit. There is a perpetual dependence on external development assistance for specific local priorities and institutional strengthening. Yet, empirical evidence from transnational funds (as discussed in section 7.3) provides compelling insights into the use of these funds to perpetuate existing practices and political preferences in the local political structures. Indeed, in the study DAs, there were concerns that funds from the capacity development programme were allotted to projects in designated areas based on specific interests of the members of the executive bureaucracy:

“(…) at the planning department, there are always biases at that level because they always allot the projects to certain areas that they have personal interest; either they have their houses there or they have relatives there (…). Now there is a very special case in point where Bosomase174 has a lot of projects from the DDF and the UDG funds. You go to Oforikrom [sub-metro council], a lot of projects were given to

174 This is a pseudonym. The Assemblyman for that electoral ward was a high-ranking member on the Executive Committee.
them to the detriment of other sub-metros (…) and so at the executive committee level, in fact, I spoke passionately and the Metro Chief Executive was saddened and cautioned the planning director (…)” (Interviewee #13: Assemblyman, Bantama Sub-metro Council, Kumasi, 18.09.2013).

Thus, given the unwillingness of the funders and assessors to engage with the qualitative impact of their programmes on the ground, the use of these capacity-building projects to preserve existing patronage arrangements becomes more pronounced. Let us take an example to illustrate the misuse or diversion of external development funds. In 2013, the Chief Executive of the KMA supported the setting up of closed circuit television (CCTV) gadgets in the central business districts of the city. Despite the security and safety benefits from this local development project, many local politicians disagreed with the rationale and costs involved, viewing the project as a misplaced priority from the DA’s executive. The local politicians favoured projects that addressed the problems of sanitation, roads, unlit streets, etc. in the metropolis. In an interview with a local politician (interviewee #5), he pointed out the general perception of the DA’s leadership, especially the Chief Executive, was that he was overly obsessed with specific notion of ‘modern goods’, given his extensive stay overseas, with no recourse to the basic and everyday needs of the constituents. Indeed, on the ground, it was apparent that critical prerequisites upon which an effective CCTV project depended including appropriate house numbering and street naming for tracing trespassers caught on camera were largely absent. Therefore, as some dissenters inferred, any benefits from that project were in favour of city elites who had their businesses in the central business district. The cameras may deter trespassers and, thus, protect elite interests. The project which was being procured through the Urban Development Grant (UDG) programme had been put in the 2014 budget of the DA at an estimated cost of over US$ 500,000 (specifically GH¢ 2,030,000) and scheduled for implementation as planned. Thus, within the promises of responsive and accountable local governance, the tendency for the executive to set local development priorities that are frequently perceived as ill-conceived prevailed.

Indeed, despite the intent of the capacity-building programme to remedy moribund institutional structures, the tedious processes together with the inherent rationality of efficiency often ended them up in some capability and governance trappings (Pritchett et al., 2010, p. 10; Collier, 2007, p. 64). However, what one observes here goes beyond simple administrative capacity traps to a more strategic process. Local institutions become trapped
perpetually in a cycle of re-institutionalization i.e. more institutional reforms are needed to make change and progress happen while rhetoric is required to make the change strategies credible and vice versa. This way of thinking about institutions and change appears taken-for-granted in everyday practices as contained in the following quotation:

“(…) capacity problem will always be with us. Currently there is one project on capacity by the World Bank (…) there is also another one supported by DANIDA (…). In that case the project coordinator will facilitate that and an amount is transferred to them. We have just returned from some capacity-building programmes. We have done conferences for all the coordinating directors (…)” (Interviewee #32: senior official, Local Government Service Secretariat, Accra, 14.10.2013).

That this taken-for-granted institutional rationality is part of the trappings of local institutional change is marked by practices that predicate identification of institutional shortcomings as part of the assessment and evaluation processes. This arbitrariness is often based on expectation that external development assistance will come to remedy those shortcomings especially within the Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies (MMDAs):

“(…) now in undertaking the assessment leading to the disbursement of [DDF and UDG] funds, the consultants usually identifies some capacity gaps of some MMDAs and based on those capacity gaps, some of the money earmarked for development projects is also earmarked for addressing the capacity needs of the MMDAs (…)” (Interviewee #32: senior administrative official, Ministry of Local Government, Accra, 14.10.2013).

The above quotation is even more pertinent because, with evaluation outcomes somewhat predetermined, assessment consultants are less likely to undertake any rigorous appraisal of impact on the ground (see Meyer & Rowan, 1991, p. 60). And as previously mentioned, even if the assessors undertake rigorous evaluations, they are more likely to soften the tone of any critical observation that might otherwise indict the whole process of capacity-building. As donors are hesitant to get involved in the process (Janus, 2014, p. 21), they are less likely to question what assessors bring to their attention. Yet, that perpetual need for development intervention together with transnational interests is not questioned and neither does it become redundant to their counterparts in the Global North. In fact, a dominant narrative is to delegate a whole repertoire of local institutional change programmes to transnational actors. In setting out the prospects for a new decentralization policy framework, a high-ranking state official in a publication highlighted the necessity and inevitability of transnational actors in local institutional change. More remarkably, emphasis was placed on the
funding schemes and resources from their international counterparts by continually invoking a sense of moral obligation on the latter to initiate institutional change:

“(…) they [transnational actors will] work with the MLGRD to develop and refine appropriate arrangements for sector-wide approach to decentralization support, emphasizing common funding arrangements and joint monitoring and evaluation; propose ways in which to undertake common funding, capacity building, review and information sharing amongst themselves, with the MLGRD and with other stakeholders; (...) work with policy guidelines and harmonize their interventions and work transparently for effectiveness; work towards collaborating amongst themselves and with the MLGRD on systems of budgeting, monitoring, reporting and information sharing; commit to various aspects of decentralization policy in line with their country strategy positions and as shall be mutually agreed upon between them and the GoG” (Mahama, 2013a, p. 6 and 2013b, p. 7).

The persistent invitation for more external development assistance was vividly expressed in remarks by the head of one local government:

“We’re happy and proud to receive support every year from the District Development Facility. The annual review of our capacities gives us (...) an incentive to constantly improve our work for the good of our people. The DDF has not only provided funds. It has helped us develop a new understanding of what service means” (KfW Development Bank, 2014).

Thus, although a curious observation of reports by assessors reveals evasive practices in qualifying for external development assistance, that does not in any way stop the DAs’ call for and reliance on such development assistance. This simultaneous dependence and rejection of global institutional ideas aptly reflects the notion of extraversion as pointed out by Bayart (2000, p. 222). Yet, while the rhetoric and narratives invariably link the two categories of policy experts, the gains from legitimization and development funds derived from that narratives are not sufficient for their tasks to evade the trappings of an unending cycle of institution-building. Even more cogent, the concepts used in the institutional change enterprise are subject to constant ‘recycling’. Indeed, current concepts of institution-building are refurbished versions of change ideas on capacity development all of which seek to yield credibility in the development policy arena. As Kühl points out, while the current capacity development concept pursues goals that enhance the ability of the local people to lead their own development, that concept does not differ so much from its predecessors such as institutional strengthening and institutional development (2009, p. 552). All these concepts have sought to build some form of capacity within Global South institutions.
More critically, emphasis is placed on receiving aid (whether technical or financial) than the content and what problems the funds could help alleviate. That is to say, local commitment to lead the process of addressing the problems with the new ideas and development interventions was absent from everyday practices. Rather, the concern for development funds appears stronger and overrides the contents and outcomes of local capacity development programmes such as those currently being implemented in Ghana and elsewhere.

As a strategy, institution-building serves international, central and local legitimacy requirement. Transnational actors achieve legitimacy in their national contexts with the new ideas they promote in the South and give impression of actively engaging with their Southern counterparts for change. This, in effect, makes their local counterparts more interested in the ideas and support than the supposed impact the programmes may actually have in their local settings. Their preparedness to invoke obligations for external actors to lead the change and their unwillingness to contest the underlying rationale of those strategies assure them of continuous flow of resources but eventually lead to that perpetual cycle of local institutional change. However, without own commitment and visions for local institutional development (see Neubert, 1997), these developing countries could rarely escape the trappings of institution-building which, as it holds at the moment, is cyclical and disoriented from real societal change. That challenge is compounded even further by the uncertain future of the ongoing capacity development programmes. As it is a common practice, a new and catchy concept may be derived that may seek to modify or even reenact the whole process of institution-building all over again.

Taken together, these inherent contradictions between appearance, rhetoric and development realities on the ground are not entirely new. Wallace et al. (2007) have drawn attention to how the logframe, as an effective and efficient rational management tool, was discarded by local partners in order to try with their own “innovative” and sometimes “inappropriate” strategies but they “reverted to the written tools again when it came to reporting and accounting for donor aid money”. Thus, the overreliance on standards (e.g.

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175 Informants from the local government ministry were unsure about the way forward for the DDF and UDG programmes when the funds from their OECD partners are exhausted. Again, the officials were silent on how forthcoming was the government’s commitment to the overall funding pool.
the logframe) does not even engender trust; Wallace et al. (2007) argue that there is always a clear mismatch “between the document and what is taking place” at the level of implementation, a situation which questions the “honesty and transparency” in the logical frameworks. The reason probably is because the local actors tried everything possible to make their “messy experience fit smart metrics” (p. 107). Rottenburg (2007) with a different emphasis has already highlighted confounding factors and practices that render the whole idea of special projects and practices more redundant and, yet, they are frequently touted in the international development system as worthwhile.

What is interesting here, beyond the general debate, is the fact that the phenomenon of rhetoric for credibility goes beyond the transnational interests and preferences. Indeed, the reception of development intervention, change ideas and the legitimacy narratives within local contexts also matter because it is through the contexts that institution-building and the associated traps survive. Local policy experts and high-ranking bureaucrats are actively enticed with development resources to sing the same capacity-building and development song time and again as their international counterparts. Though couched in a more covert manner, the rhetoric and emphases that are placed on more institutional reforms and more development resources incentivize local experts to call for more while local state implementers are also emboldened to dodge any critical evaluations. A cycle is, therefore, established in which calls for more institutions, strategies and more narratives for credibility to their strategies perpetually endures.

9.6 Concluding Remarks

The above discussion has highlighted not only how narratives about legitimacy that justify new concepts enter into the local state institution-building processes. Also fundamental to the discussion is the import of rhetoric, texts and legitimacy narratives in shaping the institution-building enterprise. The chapter has at the same time pointed out the benefits associated with patterns of behaviour that are enacted to exact development funds and to make all composite actors relevant in their specific fields within the development arena. This justification for their tasks in order to appear legitimate is made even more plausible because the composite actors (e.g. international and
9.6 Concluding Remarks

local policy experts, assessors, implementers) are able to intersect their interests on a common ground to produce similar rhetoric and narrative despite their different rationalities and preferences. These are everyday realities that cannot just be ignored in the analysis of institutional change in Global South settings. The rhetoric and texts produced for legitimization provides not only credible basis for other development-oriented organizations to use and seek their own legitimacy. They also become the basis for strategically decoupling the new institutional ideas that are rhetorically argued to bring conspicuous changes within the local state institutional environment.

Once the rhetoric, narratives and strategic decoupling tactics are set in motion, the proffered institutional changes within the local state become caught up in an unending cycle of change that follows fashionable institutional concepts. Yet, the new concepts will not be enough. They must be backed with rhetoric of relevance and legitimized through some standardized metrics even if the metrics are disentangled from local reality. In a complex institutional environment with overlapping rules, it becomes very challenging to couple the new change ideas with existing and entrenched institutions. Thus, not only are such attempts rhetorical, they also strategically create incentives and even attract more complexities to justify the need for new institutions and copious changes. That, of course, makes it possible for the business of institution-building within the development system to take on new concepts and continue its business as usual.
This final chapter takes a retrospective view of the issues raised in the study to highlight the most important aspects of reform policy and their linkage with the general debate on institution-building and development. In the introductory chapter, the processes of carrying out development intervention in developing countries, the development actors, and their rationalities were explored. In particular, the challenges to institution-building that inhibit participatory development in the Ghanaian local state were unearthed. Again, the lacuna in researching these institutional changes was highlighted and, thus, formed the basis of investigation for the study. The second chapter looked broadly at how ideas influencing institutional changes spread and their specific outlook. It extended further the institutional perspective to discuss change processes in local political settings and subsequently helped derive an analytical framework for the study. This analytical framework guided the collection and analysis of empirical data for answering the central research question.

The analysis of the empirical data sought from two local governments has unravelled a number of intriguing and compelling insights into the institution-building processes and everyday practices of the local state and its bureaucracy in pursuit of better service provision and development for its constituents. The discourse and practice of local institution-building intriguingly do not separate local political reforms from local democracy. In fact, the two are joined with the notion of local autonomy to express the ambitious hopes for local socio-economic transformation. Yet, despite the dominant rhetoric, the connection between local political reforms, local democracy and socio-economic well-being appears specious. In short, local politicians constantly wrestle with bureaucrats over local policies and changes based on the interests of both groups of actors. These tussles are not delinked from central state’s vested interest in local political processes and changes. At the same time, transnational support for local institutional change pursues results that legitimize their actions and less interested in qualitative institutional outcomes. In the discussion that follows, the major findings are summarized in relation to the main objective and the research
questions that guided the study. Based on these findings, the study draws conclusion in light of the evidence presented to throw more light on the reform-development paradox that obtains in most developing countries. Recommendations for institutional change practices, public policy-making as well as possible areas for further discussion and research are suggested.

10.1 Looking Back: What We Learn from the Analysis So Far

To begin with, the study has pointed out that the very nature and processes of institution-building in the local state rest mainly within the international development system much as they lie within the state and the general political setting in Ghana. Although local and central political interests, rationalities and preferences shape the local state and its bureaucracy in the institutional change processes, the assertive influence from transnational actors exacts some compliance while at the same time attracting strategic responses from their local counterparts. The complexity involved in addressing these interests and preferences defines the very gap and mismatch between the rhetoric of institution-building and the promise of poverty reduction.

To recap, the overarching concern raised in this study, thus far, deals with the examination of a well-functioning bureaucracy that will be a channel for local institutional change and development. But that approach has been premised on some inherent normative preferences of effectiveness and efficiency with little regard for the different rationalities and preferences of the actors and their agency to act differently. Though all of them are committed to local political change and development, at least in intent, local policy actors have interest in programmes that enhance their personal-political ambitions; the central state is interested in how to design local political reforms that do not diminish the regime’s influence; and transnational actors are mainly in favour of aspects of institutional changes that yield the ‘best’ results to present as evidence of accomplishment. Therefore, this study from the outset took a departure from conventional development policy analyses that prioritize efficiency and effectiveness in the copious development intervention programmes found in the Global South. Again, since the local political arena is the focus of institution-building programmes, much of the emphasis was placed on the interaction between local policy actors in relation to the change programmes.
10.1 Looking Back: What We Learn from the Analysis So Far

Against the backdrop of a critique of the development system itself, the study posed the question: how do interests, rationalities and preferences of local institutional actors shape the pattern and outcomes from local state institution-building programmes in the Ghanaian context? The research then proceeded with the objective of unpacking the various behavioural responses and institutional reactions to development interventions in local state settings. Following a multi-level frame of analysis joined together with empirical data from local state settings, some critical observations became apparent. These observations, discussed extensively in the empirical chapters, are briefly summed up in the following paragraphs.

First, it was revealing that local bureaucrats charged with implementation have to negotiate a difficult balance with local political actors and constituents with local political interests as well as bureaucrats’ own interests in the implementation of change programmes and projects. Yet, the local politicians utilized those encounters as spaces for contesting the local state hegemony. Bureaucrats’ tense interaction with their political counterparts appeared critical and counter-productive to the prospects of any genuine institutional change and development. The second prominent observation is the continuing interests and interference in the affairs of the supposedly ‘autonomous’ competence of the local state by the central regime. These practices make the local state just an appendage of the central and perpetuating an enduring legacy of centralized governance. But these interferences pertain to the regimes interests in the local state as well as its international credibility which partly derives from the practices of the local state.

The third and more condescending in local institution-building are the interests and development rhetoric that are pursued by transnational actors in the local political arena. With their intervention and financial resources, they make policies together with high-ranking public officials that affect everyday practices in the local state. However, their commitment to those policies pertains only to the processes and not the qualitative outcomes. Indeed, the preoccupation with the process allows them to seek their own international credibility which is possible with some superficial evaluations without necessarily involving themselves with the impact of their policies and programmes on the local state and its constituents. Central state actors do not question these ideas and ideals because they equally attain credibility from their international counterparts and become acquiesced with those offers. To a greater extent, their status as local policy entrepreneurs allows them to pursue specific institutional ideas while critical questions about the
changes are ignored. Thus, collectively the experts present a contrived perspective of institutional change. Yet, it is via this lack of commitment to the qualitative impact of the development intervention programmes that local state actors have become adept at strategically decoupling new institutions from existing norms in order to also appear credible to their central and international counterparts. Therefore, new institutions produce little change as the institution-building processes are used as structures of stability and the preservation of existing ones.

Fourth, consequent to the everyday institutional change practices, constituents appear to hold negative attitudes towards the local state and its services, hence preferring to abstain from the latter’s forums, processes and activities that legitimize the local state. The analysis revealed that the linkage between institutional change and economic development remains tenuous in the local state. Therefore, the ambitious institutional change programmes that promise to enhance local participation and improve socio-economic well-being could hardly be coupled with the reality. More compelling, the central state despite its rhetoric of change coercively dominates the local state; a situation which has rather cultivated a negative image for the latter. The local state has been viewed as excessively party-politically dominated. That image feeds the negative attitude of constituents and enhances the resolve of other public services within the jurisdiction of the local state to resist their inclusion into the latter. These non-local state actors view the entire local state and its bureaucracy as an appendage of the central party-political structure.

Another fundamental observation from the findings is the ambivalent visions of the local political actors in the two study areas. Despite operating in relatively dissimilar political structures with different political persuasions and loyalties, these local politicians tended to enact similar responses and preferences in their relationship with bureaucrats. For example, in both study areas the local politicians, just like bureaucrats, held the same imagined vision of a functioning local state bureaucracy in the Weberian sense. They held the vision of dealing with the local state on merit without having to resort to personal alliances and connections. Yet, this vision was not subsequently realized in practice. Their personal interests and preferences led them to different references and behavioural dispositions in the change processes. In both districts, these local politicians shared the vision that the executive bureaucracy will draft local development policies and projects. These programmes would then be authorized by the local politicians for
execution by technical bureaucrats. Nonetheless, both actors constantly clashed over implementation competence because of what was perceived as vested interests by both parties. Indeed, the general affiliation of the local politicians from the Wa municipality with the incumbent regime at the time (i.e. the NDC) did not offset their confrontation with bureaucrats as it was the case in the Kumasi metropolis where the local politicians were mainly seen as opponents of the incumbent regime. Thus, in contrast to prevailing notions, the obvious differences in socio-economic outlook and political preferences between the north and south do not affect the behaviour and conduct of local administration in any significant way. Admittedly, reception of the local state in the two study locations differ; some constituents in Upper West tend to appreciate the local state more than their counterparts in Ashanti. Yet, that behaviour derives mostly from their late experience with decentralized political institutions compared with Ashanti. Certainly, as regards the everyday execution of local authority, the behaviour and rationality of bureaucrats and local politicians, as observed from this study, are very similar. This was evidently clear from the evaluation and ranking of the two districts in the results-based funding arrangements.

10.2 Conclusions: Towards a Multi-Level Model of Institutional Reform Analysis

The propositions and conceptual framework for this study utilized arguments from neo-institutionalism and actor-centered perspectives and posited a hierarchy of interests and negotiations that shape the particular outcomes of institutional reforms. This was approached from a multi-level analytical frame by showing how the local and national institutional change ideas and practices are embedded in global political and development processes. The findings in this study clearly articulate the processes of local institution-building and their everyday practice of change and development in several ways. First, the framework employed in the analysis of the issues points to the embeddedness of the local and national contexts and actors in the international development system and its processes. This is insightful because the farthest studies on the subject in developing countries have gone is to explain the embeddedness within the national context. Others studies have explained the multi-level embeddedness with different emphasis and from different analytical perspectives. Therefore, this study is
among the few to approach the topic from an institutional and multi-level complexity of local state institution-building, administrative practices and change in developing countries such as Ghana. Last but not least, the study, while situated in two geo-political locations in Ghana has implications for other local state change processes locally in Ghana but also across the continent of Africa. This is especially so given that Ghana was among the pioneers of local state institution-building and somewhat remains a model for other countries especially in sub-Saharan Africa.

As a corollary to the first, this approach focusing on actors within institutions is very useful for analysing the day-to-day processes of institutional change and preferences of some group of actors with different rationalities. More importantly, it helps us to go beyond conceptualizing institutions and actors’ behaviour in the Global South as radically different from their occurrence elsewhere. Rather, observed differences have to be seen as context-specific types within broader institutional frames as elsewhere (see Agyeman, 1996, p. 18) but with varied change patterns and preferences. As extant evidence suggests, the challenges of multi-tier, multi-level governance appear quite global than local. Indeed, these patterns of behaviour are possible in municipal politics and local institutional change even in the Global North (for Germany see Scharpf, 1997, 2008; for the UK, see Lowndes, 2005; Connelly, 2010) albeit with different rationalities and preferences. Therefore, the ‘uniqueness’ of the Ghana case, as applies elsewhere in the Global South, may aptly be conceived on the basis of specific expressions and the exact references made about institutional changes in everyday situations. In the Ghanaian setting, local institutional change and development processes have not only the forces of re-centralization to confront but also their embeddedness within global development processes and legitimizing rhetoric. These legitimacy rhetoric and associated behaviour go beyond a simple face-saving mechanism. They are strategies that are craftily enacted to achieve a purposeful end. Their trappings of institution-building processes are, however, enormous.

Second, despite the rationalities that inform their entry into the local policy arena, local politicians generally contest and undermine the local bureaucracy from a different rationality (i.e. personal-political ambitions). The payoff from doing so is more rewarding because it predicates them towards achieving personal ambitions than that offered by either the societal well-being or regime’s survival, whichever thrusts them into that arena. Local and central bureaucrats become caught up in regime and local politics (and
their own personal political interests). But policy experts from the transnational arena are not interested in central and local state politics. That will bog them down into complex political negotiations which will limit their ability to produce the needed results they seek to deliver to their financiers. In that sense, the expert groups become focused on processes and provision of means (by offering advice, funds, technical support, etc.) than the impact of the change objectives on the ground. As Hirschmann (2011, p. 418) points out, this focus on processes and metrics or quantitative outcomes perpetuate the preferences of change actors at the expense of local socio-cultural and political dynamics and realities. Indeed, the processes and quantitative indicators are given preeminence over local societal well-being. For the transnational actors, this focus on process allows for the production of texts for legitimacy purposes without disrupting the chain of institution-building and flow of development resources. Thus, although the gap between policy goals and practices on the ground persists, it is the crafty manner with which legitimacy is sought by revising, revitalizing and justifying old concepts for further institution-building that appears particularly intriguing.

Third, while the actions of the central state in local state settings (e.g. creation of new districts, elevation from one category to another) may at first appear critical to enhancing local needs and priorities, they in fact are based on a different rationality. These actions provide incumbent regimes with some local legitimacy and ensure their support base is kept intact through the creation and provision of patronage channels and resources. Consequently, the gap between institution-building logic (i.e. addressing local socio-economic needs) and social change reality (i.e. local participation and poverty) is increasingly widened. Although the concept of local participation in itself remains specious and illusory (Crawford, 2008; Ayee, 2003), its application alludes to a privileged class of actors based on configuration and reconfiguration of the larger political system and the regimes. This class of actors is able to ensure the interests and preferences of the central regime are implemented until the latter is reconfigured or changed. The imagined visions and hopes of functioning institutions remain dominant in the everyday institutional discourse, enactments, practices and change. At least in intent, this very vision of reliable and accountable institutions that must deliver local public goods remains substantial. Nonetheless, it is at the point of translating this prescience into practical societal reality that it becomes problematic. This is because the actors’ interests and
preferences do not (and perhaps could not) match the local political and socio-economic realities vis-à-vis the imagined visions. However, this selective interpretation of the products of modernity should not be surprising at all. Indeed, it reflects the autonomy with which actors respond to and interpret modernity on their own terms while their point of reference remains the Western model (Eisenstadt, 2000). The difficulty arises only when the development rhetoric persistently argues that it is the Western model that should prevail.

Against this backdrop, the implementation of this institutional vision is left to few hegemonic actors who implement their preferences according to the interests of the central political regimes. Contrary to the dominant development rhetoric, more DA structures do not appear to translate into more participation and reduced poverty. They just add to ambiguities that allow the central regime to ‘get its way through’. Therefore, local state institution-building cannot be conceived as *deus ex machina* with some sacrosanct and ultimate solutions to the problems of local participation and socio-economic development.

10.3 Contribution to Theory and Research

The joint application of institutional perspectives in analysing the complex local state institutional environment in Ghana is unique in that studies on this topic tend to focus mainly on Global North themes. This reluctance to adapt institutional arguments to the analysis of development and change in Southern countries emanates from the very deficiencies in the functioning of institutions in the South. However, that neglect is intriguing because it is within the Southern context where institutions overlap that actors are very much and capably exploit these institutions to their own advantage. This situation pertains more strongly in the institution-building arena and studies in local politics and institutional change by scholars including Lowndes (2005), Scharpf (2008, 2010), Connelly (2011) implicitly suggest this approach may be useful in the Global South. Subsequently, this study has elaborated further institutional analysis beyond the confines of the North to local policy processes and change in the South. This is an endeavour that many researchers often avoid given the competing nature of the institutions at work. But this lack of interest is difficult to understand because it is those
very competing interests that development programmes, designed for that context, seek to change.

In particular, this study situated within the broader context of socio-political research has elaborated further the notion of institution-building from neo-institutional theory in sociology. It has enriched our understanding of institutional change as a constructed reality in the development debate and practice i.e. the processes of institutional change and development are socially constructed by the actors involved based on their different rationalities, interests and preferences. Again, this study joins the growing number of approaches that foreground institutional theory in the analysis of actors’ agency. Therefore, the study has shown the possibility for research situated in developing country contexts to benefit from the application of the ‘actors-institutions’ framework in their analysis. Findings from this study have shown that the actors of development policy, from transnational to local actors, are not necessarily constrained by the institutional structures in which they work. In fact, they exploit these institutional structures and even use them to contest the hegemonic structure itself.

The study has traversed previously disparate approaches to understanding local institutional change which focused on specific levels of local, central and transnational domains. With the multi-level approach used herein, a clearer picture of institutional change processes emerges marked by the interests and preferences of local and international, state and non-state actors involved in the change processes. This helps us to go beyond existing explanations in order to situate the implementation and change dynamics within different meaning systems. That is, the tension between bureaucratic definitions and preferences of change vis-à-vis local socio-cultural and economic reality. Thus, this study has carefully and conjointly applied the institutional framework together with the multi-level analytical approach and multiple data sources from different study sites to explain local political reforms and change in the Ghanaian context. This approach goes further than the local level explanation offered by Thomi (2000a/b), Crook (2003), Ayee (2003), Kumi-Kyereme et al. (2006), and the local-central level analysis advanced by Crawford (2008, 2009) to a more holistic articulation of the local within global institutional change processes and preferences. Again, the approach extends beyond the general debate of interests, assertiveness and legitimacy narratives within the international development system (see Rottenburg, 2009; Kühl, 2009; Weilenmann, 2009). Through a
multi-level framework, the analysis comprehensively situates these interests and preferences within transnational, central and local state contexts. This facilitates the explanation of how local political actors use their agency to contest their hegemonic structure, which in itself is embedded in a complex web of interests from both transnational and central state settings. The patterns of behaviour put up by central and local state actors are equally explained as strategic responses to transnational funding and not an inherent commitment to the institutional change ideas per se.

All in all, some commentators may bemoan the critical argument advanced in this study as an indictment of local institutional change programmes and, perhaps, advocating a non-change perspective. Yet, this critique of the development system is warranted because, given its own inherent interests and preferences, it creates both the setting and resources for the dramas to occur. From this standpoint, it becomes obvious that the development system cannot continue to follow the conventional approach of programme efficiency and effectiveness, which in itself is underpinned by neoliberal thinking on rational policy processes and choices.

10.4 Practical Insights, Policy Relevance and Future Research

Based on the uncertainties about the future of the current capacity development programmes, a ‘new’ concept will certainly emerge to re-ignite the process of institution-building afresh. Without advocating for development assistance to be scrapped, it appears pertinent that the development system will have to rethink how to make institution-building strategies and financial resources get to their very target instead of the current narrow focus on metrics and reports with less attention to their qualitative impact on the ground. That, of course, will involve a radical shift in perspective and practices of actors within the local state as well. The bureaucrats and local politicians have to re-align their rationalities and preferences towards pursuing institutional changes that produce participatory and development outcomes. That will, quite expectedly, be resisted and may require more commitments together with robust rules to ensure discipline. That approach calls for attitudinal change without which everything risks coming back to the very trappings of institutional change. Civil society groups especially, community-based organizations have a crucial role to play here; they may take the lead for constituents to hold their elected representatives and local bureaucrats
socially and financially accountable. But given the contextual realities, civil society actors also risk being co-opted by institutional entrepreneurs for pursuing the latter’s self-interests. The best scenario will be to combine these inherent interests with a commitment to producing results that yield both individual and societal benefits.

A departure from the institution-building traps is obviously plausible. But that will require a radical departure from the current legitimacy narratives and selective preferences based on quantitative indicators that make international and central bureaucrats appear credible. In that sense, reflexivity in the practices and analysis of the international development system and the epistemic communities may be required. On one hand, their interests and preferences for both international and local legitimacy requirements may have to be recast while embedding these practices in more societal realm to generate the qualitative impacts of local participation and poverty reduction outcomes on the other.

The question frequently asked is: what is wrong with public policy in Ghana? Oft-cited responses are that the problem with public policy in Ghana, as elsewhere in sub-Saharan Africa, is purely a local political problem (cf. Green, 2010), the “weakness” or lack of “conventional public policy” (Neubert, 2009, p. 37) or even bad governance (Collier, 2007, p. 64). But the problem goes beyond these arguments. Over the last three decades, policies on institution-building especially at the local state level have been very much conventional even if mainly in intent. The constraints faced by the state in exerting its influence over public policy may not necessarily be posed by the limits to the state’s absence or presence. In the present study, the factors that inhibit public policy lie inside the formal structure much as they do in the informal where the state’s reach is limited. Thus, actors in the formal state are capable of challenging public policy from within. This situation obviously calls for more research to unearth and analyse these contestations within the formal structures where the state’s reach is profound.

The analysis herein does not assume that institutional change is impossible. The focus rather is on lack of critique of the numerous institutional ideas that are initiated at the behest of the world financial institutions and other international development agencies. Their ever-changing institutional ideas may have to be questioned to bring to light the actual impact on the ground vis-à-vis existing ones. This critique has matched the never-ending rhetoric of change with on-the-ground reality to give a fair picture of the
institution-building processes in the Global South. In fact, the existing institutional framework may not be as dysfunctional as often suggested (Agyeman, 1996, p. 18). Despite persistent notions of bad institutions in Africa, change and development have frequently occurred. Indeed, recent evidence from economic history in Ghana and sub-Saharan African in general gives us some food for thought on socio-economic development (see Jerven, 2015, p. 125 and, pp. 83–86 for the Ghana case) beyond the dominant narrative of non-change. Therefore, it appears the international development system has been asking the wrong questions. Perhaps, the question worth asking is: how has institutional change been possible in the context of interests and preferences? Thus, instead of a constant search for new institutions, scholars, policy-makers and practitioners may be better-off turning the searchlight on the factors that induce and occasion actors’ interests and preferences in the existing institutions. That would be more helpful than strictly approaching the local institutions and their reforms from an inherent assumption of a well-functioning bureaucracy in the Weberian sense (Migdal & Schlichte, 2005, p. 14; Neubert, 2009, p. 36) and with new sets of institutions. Indeed, institutional change occurs but it is context-specific and less predictable especially when gauged from a normative standpoint. Therefore, a useful approach to local political reforms will be to focus attention and build on successful cases of institutional change.

A point on the appointment of district heads, the DCEs, is appropriate. To curb the incessant influence from the regime and the arbitrary sacking of incumbent DCEs, some commentators call for the office of the DCE to be made elective. Other observers argue that an elected DCE from an opposition party will promote anti-regime strategies and stifle the central government. They therefore suggest that the election and tenure of the central government be made coterminous with the DAs while the office of the DCE remains appointive. However, these suggestions do not solve the problem of local autonomy required for the local administration to set their own priorities. A viable approach is firstly for a clear distinction to be made between development programmes from the central government and public goods provided by the local authority. Subsequently as the boundaries of local autonomy become clearly spelt out, the election of a DCE will ideally be based on performance; the ability to deliver local public goods for which constituents could clearly judge after four years. Thus, DCEs would not un-
necessarily spend their time and resources thinking about central government programmes as in doing so, they would risk underperforming locally and consequently be voted out of office.

Some of the local political actors have shown greater desire and enthusiasm to transition from local politics to national politics, using the former as a launch-pad for their political careers. This inherent interest shapes very much their relationships with the local state structures. As local policy makers who are deemed necessary for the institutional change processes, this ambivalence yields influence over judgements about their visions and social reality of change. Yet, this less conspicuous interest is hardly articulated and critically analysed. Even if we assume that all local political actors are potential entrepreneurs, they certainly have different social, political, and economic endowments. Therefore, it will be particularly interesting to learn about how the constraints of local politics still facilitate that vision and thrusts them onto the national political landscape. In the same vein, their strategic behaviour used to challenge the hegemonic structures would be useful in explaining the overlaps of their visions for institutional change vis-à-vis their own interests. How that interaction plays out may be invaluable to explaining the role of local politicians in the long term prospects and outcomes of local state institution-building. In addition, adequate remuneration for local politicians is crucial or they risk being manipulated by some powerful local elites with patronage enticements. Such manipulations will further diminish any little participatory priority setting there is at the moment.

If local state institution-building is entangled in a perpetual trap, then the socio-psychological benefits to bureaucrats (and also local politicians) who put up the different narratives may have to be explored much further. The changing narratives obviously may have consequences for their job-satisfaction and turnover intents in the local state bureaucracy. Also crucial is how they are socialized to narrate institutional change legitimacy. Additionally, even though professional standards spread together with new institutional ideas, as the sociological new-institutionalism suggests, that could not be directly observed from the behaviour of local and central state bureaucrats studied. Therefore, the particular bureaucratic ethos held by bureaucrats is worth pursuing further especially from organizational sociology perspective. Some of these bureaucrats pointed out that they develop that ethos from their training and on-the-job experiences. Yet, the fact that their actions straddle global references and locally-specific behaviour make their
bureaucratic ethos less concrete and difficult to pin down, when gauged at least from von Stein’s ideal-type description of this behaviour even if it remains an ideal-type. For von Stein, the evolution of the (local) state is an inherent attribute of bureaucrats irrespective of rules and regulation. Of course, the bureaucrats’ references to both global and locally-specific patterns of behaviour give the impression of their awareness of what is expected of them as professional bureaucrats. Therefore, how they are able to maneuver the local contexts to produce services that are commensurate with their beliefs about professional bureaucrat cultures will contribute immensely to research and the body of knowledge in the realm of sociology of organizations especially on the Global South.

Comparatively, this study although situated in two local state structures has implications for other Ghanaian settings, the sub-Saharan Africa region and beyond. Significantly, the observation that no differences exist in receipt of development funds mean institutional practices and preferences may be similar or even the same in the 216 local self-governments. The findings from local institutional change processes point to more fundamental issues in the reform of the larger public service including education, health, and agriculture sectors. Institutional changes in these sectors also derive from the international development system and the rationalities and preferences of the actors may not vary so much from that of their local state counterparts. Therefore, policy decisions and future research in these other domains could take cues from the observations of institutional change policies and everyday behaviour made in the local state.

Beyond Ghana, Tanzania’s urban local development programme, as pointed out earlier, has churned out complicated structures that could hardly be managed by local and international actors apart from furnishing them with funding legitimacy. Therefore, it will suffice to extrapolate that the ongoing urban local government strengthening programmes in Mali and Ethiopia, also supported by the World Bank, are more likely to produce similar outcomes despite the different political systems and institutional practices in those settings. But in doing so, we should be mindful and resist the temptation of juxtaposing one country with another in terms of their institution-building processes, everyday practices and their outcomes. In order not to overstretch the comparison, an empirical justification at a contextual level will be required. Sociologically, the search for general patterns of institution-building and bureaucratic practices requires comparative cases
studies of Global South institutional practices with their Northern counterparts. With hindsight, a study by Bosetzky’s (1974) on informal bureaucratic practices in the German public services and Selznick’s (1980) study of cloaking practices in a Tennessee public organization give impetus to such comparisons. Thus, despite the different contexts, global level comparative studies on institutional arrangements and everyday practices will contribute immensely to sociological theorizing especially in the sociology of organizations.

Legitimacy narratives go beyond metrics and standardization; they also involve texts and scripts which are standardized to achieve a credible status. Because these behaviour and practices are often covert and subtle, asking new questions about them requires more engaging research approaches and data in order to more accurately capture the nuances of everyday policy-making and institution-building in state settings. More ethnographic-style research that allows for ‘shadowing’ of the actors and participants in their texts and scripts production as well as the dramas in the texts and script production will be very crucial for understanding and theorizing the decoupling-legitimizing nexus in an extensive and rigorous manner. This approach will require extended stays in selected departments concerned with the whole process of local institution-building viz.: central and local politicians, bureaucrats, consultants and international development actors. These observations and existing data become useful for unravelling the processes, daily practices and strategic responses adopted by different institutional actors as they encounter and create institutions (Lounsbury & Crumley, 2007, p. 1007). It is even more pertinent to employ a mixed-bag of different methods and data sources for complementary purposes instead of a sole focus on quantitative evaluative surveys or anecdotal cases of individual narratives. By so doing, we could overcome the limitations imposed by the efficiency approach as used in the current institution-building project. This approach offers appropriate techniques and strategies for analysing development cooperation and intervention compared with those solely based on some predetermined criteria of programme success.
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### Acronyms and Abbreviations

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<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AFD</td>
<td>Agence Française de Développement/French Agency for Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CEDEP</td>
<td>Centre for the Development of People</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CIDA</td>
<td>Canadian International Development Agency</td>
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<tr>
<td>CSO</td>
<td>Civil Society Organizations</td>
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<tr>
<td>DA</td>
<td>District Assembly</td>
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<tr>
<td>DACF</td>
<td>District Assemblies Common Fund</td>
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<tr>
<td>DACFA</td>
<td>District Assemblies Common Fund Authority/Administrator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DANIDA</td>
<td>Danish International Development Agency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DCE</td>
<td>District Chief Executive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DDF</td>
<td>District Development Facility/Fund</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DFID</td>
<td>Department for International Development</td>
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<td>EU</td>
<td>European Union</td>
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<tr>
<td>FOAT</td>
<td>Functional Organizational Assessment Tool</td>
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<td>GA</td>
<td>General Assembly</td>
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<tr>
<td>GDP</td>
<td>Gross Domestic Product</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GLSS</td>
<td>Ghana Living Standard Survey</td>
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<tr>
<td>GoG</td>
<td>Government of Ghana</td>
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<tr>
<td>GSS</td>
<td>Ghana Statistical Service</td>
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<tr>
<td>HDI</td>
<td>Human Development Index</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IMF</td>
<td>International Monetary Fund</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JICA</td>
<td>Japan International Cooperation Agency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KfW</td>
<td>Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau/ German Development Bank</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KMA</td>
<td>Kumasi Metropolitan Assembly</td>
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<tr>
<td>LGSS</td>
<td>Local Government Service Secretariat</td>
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<tr>
<td>LI</td>
<td>Legislative Instrument</td>
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<tr>
<td>MCD</td>
<td>Metropolitan/Municipal Coordinating Director</td>
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<tr>
<td>MCE</td>
<td>Metropolitan/Municipal Chief Executive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MLGRD</td>
<td>Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>MMDA</td>
<td>Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MP</td>
<td>Member of Parliament</td>
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<tr>
<td>NDC</td>
<td>National Democratic Congress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NDPC</td>
<td>National Development Planning Commission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NPP</td>
<td>New Patriotic Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OECD</td>
<td>Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PNDC</td>
<td>Provisional National Defence Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RCC</td>
<td>Regional Coordinating Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SNV</td>
<td>Stichting Nederlandse Vrijwilligers /Netherland Development Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPEFA</td>
<td>Social Public Expenditure and Financial Accountability</td>
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**Acronyms and Abbreviations**

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<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>UDG</td>
<td>Urban Development Grant</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNFPA</td>
<td>United Nations Population Fund</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNICEF</td>
<td>United Nations Children’s Emergency Fund</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WHO</td>
<td>World Health Organization</td>
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<td>WMA</td>
<td>Wa Municipal Assembly</td>
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**Appendixes**

Appendix I

Items and Scores for the DDF and UDG Funds

*A. Minimum Conditions for Accessing the Funds*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Minimum conditions to fulfil</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Development Planning</td>
<td>Functional District Planning and Coordinating Unit; Annual Action Plan formulated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Management and Accounting</td>
<td>Annual Statement of Accounts prepared; No adverse audit comments bordering on dishonesty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Procurement</td>
<td>Procurement plan prepared</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implementation Capacity</td>
<td>Progress reports on Implementation of Annual Action Plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Functioning of the General Assembly</td>
<td>Minimum number of General Assembly meetings held</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Appendixes**

**B. Items and Scores on the FOAT Performance Measure**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Administration-related</th>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Task-related</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Management and organization</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Planning system</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transparency, openness and accountability</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Fiscal capacity</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human resource management</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Environmental sanitation</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship with Substructures</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Financial management and Accounting</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship with Substructures</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Procurement</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>35</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>65</strong></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Source: MLGRD, 2012a. *Note.* Administration- and task-related categories created by author
Appendix II
Summary of the Structure of Local Government

The key functions of the Ministry include the following:

1. Design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes to reform local governments;
2. Design and implementation of policies for installation of effective decentralized public administration system at the regional, district and sub-district level.
3. Promotion of efficiency in local administration
4. Human resources development and manpower training to upgrade the performance of the local government sector
5. Promotion of participation of civil society in administration and development through community actions;
6. Facilitation of accelerated rural development;
7. Promotion of allocation of development resources to support local level development.
8. Promotion of human settlement development in both urban and rural areas; registration of births and deaths to provide the statistical bases for development planning.
9. Advice government on matters affecting local government
10. Promotion of environmental sanitation.
Appendixes

Appendix III

List of Interviewees

A. List of Interviewees directly quoted in the text; ordered by first appearance in the empirical chapters

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case #</th>
<th>Status</th>
<th>Profession</th>
<th>Department/Interview Location</th>
<th>Interview dates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Local politician [elected]</td>
<td>Teaching</td>
<td>Asokwa Sub-metro Council, Kumasi</td>
<td>02.10.2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Senior bureaucrat</td>
<td>Administration</td>
<td>Regional Coordinating Council, Kumasi</td>
<td>04.03.2014, 28.07.2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Local politician [elected]</td>
<td>Self-employed</td>
<td>Suame Sub-metro Council, Kumasi</td>
<td>21.08.2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Local politician [elected]</td>
<td>Civil engineering</td>
<td>Kwadaso Sub-metro Council, Kumasi</td>
<td>12.09.2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Local politician [elected]</td>
<td>Self-employed</td>
<td>Nakori-Chansa Zonal Council</td>
<td>28.08.2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Local politician [elected]</td>
<td>Self-employed</td>
<td>Suame Sub-metro Council, Kumasi</td>
<td>19.08.2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Middle level bureaucrat</td>
<td>Administration</td>
<td>Suame Sub-metro Council, Kumasi</td>
<td>29.08.2013</td>
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<tr>
<td>11</td>
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<td>Budgeting and finance</td>
<td>Kumasi Metro Assembly, Kumasi</td>
<td>11.07.2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Local politician [appointed]</td>
<td>Teaching</td>
<td>Wa Municipal Assembly, Wa</td>
<td>18.09.2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Local politician [elected]</td>
<td>Teaching</td>
<td>Bantama Sub-metro Council, Kumasi</td>
<td>18.09.2013</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 15 | Local politician  
(elected) | Teaching | Asokwa Sub-metro 
Council, Kumasi | 03.10.2013 |
| 16 | Local politician  
(appointed) | Self-employed | Suame Sub-metro 
Council, Kumasi | 08.10.2013 |
| 17 | Middle level bu-
reaucrat | Administration | Kwadaso Sub-metro 
Council, Kumasi | 12.09.2013 |
| 18 | Local politician  
(elected) | Self-employed | Kwadaso Sub-metro 
Council, Kumasi | 13.09.2013 |
| 19 | Middle level bu-
reaucrat | Administration | Bantama Sub-metro 
Council, Kumasi | 16.09.2013 |
| 20 | Senior bureau-
crat | Budget and fi-
nance | Regional Coordinating 
Council, Wa | 27.08.2013 |
| 21 | Middle level bu-
reaucrat | Planning | Wa Municipal Assem-
by, Wa | 31.07.2013 |
| 22 | Senior bureau-
crat | Administration | Manhyia Sub-metro 
Council, Kumasi | 31.07.2013 |
| 23 | Senior bureau-
crat | Technical and 
administration | Regional Agricultural 
Directorate, Wa | 16.09.2014 |
| 24 | Senior bureau-
crat | Planning | Regional Coordinating 
Council, Kumasi | 16.08.2013 |
| 25 | Senior bureau-
crat | Planning | Regional Coordinating 
Council, Wa | 28.08.2013 |
| 26 | Middle level bu-
reaucrat | Planning | Kumasi Metro Assem-
by, Kumasi | 12.07.2013 |
| 27 | Senior bureau-
crat | Planning and 
administration | Ministry of Local Gov-
ernment, Accra | 14.10.2013 |
| 28 | Local politician  
(elected) | Self-employed | Manhyia Sub-metro 
Council, Kumasi | 20.09.2013 |
| 29 | Middle level bu-
reaucrat | Administration | Oforirom Sub-metro 
Council, Kumasi | 09.09.2013 |
| 30 | Middle level bu-
reaucrat | Administration | Wa Urban Council, 
Wa | 17.09.2014 |
| 31 | Middle level bu-
reaucrat | Budget and Fi-
nance | Wa Municipal Assem-
by, Wa | 01.08.2013 |
| 32 | Senior bureau-
crat | Administration | Local Government 
Service Secretariat | 14.10.2013 |
Appendixes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case #</th>
<th>Status</th>
<th>Profession</th>
<th>Department</th>
<th>Interview dates</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>Senior bureaucrat</td>
<td>Health</td>
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<td>10.06.2013</td>
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<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>Senior bureaucrat</td>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>Metro Agric Directorate, Kumasi</td>
<td>18.06.2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39</td>
<td>Senior bureaucrat</td>
<td>Human resource/administration</td>
<td>Regional Coordinating Council, Kumasi</td>
<td>13.08.2013</td>
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<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>Senior project officer</td>
<td>Development practitioner</td>
<td>CEDEP-Kumasi</td>
<td>20.01.2016</td>
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</table>

B. List of Interviewees not directly quoted in the text; ordered by date of interview

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Case #</th>
<th>Status</th>
<th>Profession</th>
<th>Department</th>
<th>Interview dates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>41</td>
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<td>05.06.2013</td>
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<tr>
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<td>11.06.2013</td>
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<td>Senior bureaucrat</td>
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<td>11.06.2013</td>
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<td>45</td>
<td>Senior bureaucrat</td>
<td>Agric Technician</td>
<td>Regional Agricultural Directorate, Kumasi</td>
<td>11.06.2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46</td>
<td>Senior bureaucrat</td>
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<td>Metro Directorate of Health, Kumasi</td>
<td>14.06.2013</td>
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<tr>
<td>47</td>
<td>Middle level bureaucrat</td>
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<td>Metro Directorate of Health, Kumasi</td>
<td>19.06.2013</td>
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<tr>
<td>48</td>
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<td>Agric Technician</td>
<td>Metro Directorate of Health, Kumasi</td>
<td>19.06.2013</td>
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<td>No.</td>
<td>Role</td>
<td>Department/Specialization</td>
<td>Organization</td>
<td>Date</td>
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<td>49</td>
<td>Middle level bureaucrat</td>
<td>administration</td>
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<td>31.07.2013</td>
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<td>50</td>
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<td>Wa Municipal Assembly, Wa</td>
<td>01.08.2013</td>
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<td>51</td>
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<td>Budget and finance</td>
<td>Kumasi Metro Assembly, Kumasi</td>
<td>05.08.2013</td>
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<td>Regional Coordinating Council, Kumasi</td>
<td>15.08.2013</td>
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<td>54</td>
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<td>21.08.2013</td>
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<tr>
<td>55</td>
<td>Local politician [elected]</td>
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<td>21.08.2013</td>
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<tr>
<td>56</td>
<td>Middle level bureaucrat</td>
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<td>58</td>
<td>Senior bureaucrat</td>
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<td>Kwadaso Sub-metro Council, Kumasi</td>
<td>13.09.2013</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
### Appendixes

| 71 | Local politician [elected] | Health | Manhyia Sub-metro Council, Kumasi | 01.10.2013 |
| 72 | Local politician [elected] | Self-employed | Oforikrom Sub-metro Council, Kumasi | 01.10.2013 |
| 73 | Local politician [elected] | Finance | Oforikrom Sub-metro Council, Kumasi | 01.10.2013 |
| 74 | Local politician [elected] | Self-employed | Bantama Sub-metro Council, Kumasi | 02.10.2013 |
| 75 | Local politician [elected] | Self-employed | Asokwa Sub-metro Council, Kumasi | 07.10.2013 |
| 76 | Local politician [appointed] | Self-employed | Suame Sub-metro Council, Kumasi | 09.10.2013 |
| 77 | Local politician [appointed] | Self-employed | Suame Sub-metro Council, Kumasi | 09.10.2013 |
| 78 | Middle level bureaucrat | Administration/ Executive | Asokwa Sub-metro Council, Kumasi | 11.10.2013 |
| 79 | Senior bureaucrat | Administration | Office of the Head of Civil Service | 14.10.2013 |
| 80 | Senior bureaucrat | Administration | Metro Health Directorate, Kumasi | 16.10.2013 |
| 81 | Senior bureaucrat | Administration | Metro Health Directorate, Kumasi | 16.10.2013 |
| 82 | Senior bureaucrat | Administration | Metro Health Directorate, Kumasi | 16.10.2013 |
| 83 | Senior bureaucrat | Health/ Administration | Metro Health Directorate, Kumasi | 16.10.2013 |
| 84 | Senior bureaucrat | Administration | Metro Electoral Commission, Kumasi | 29.07.2014 |
| 87 | Local politician [appointed] | Self-employed | Manhyia Sub-metro Council, Kumasi | 15.08.2014 |
| 88 | Local politician [appointed] | Self-employed | Bantama Sub-metro Council, Kumasi | 22.08.2014 |
| 89 | Local politician [appointed] | Teaching | Bantama Sub-metro Council, Kumasi | 27.08.2014 |
| 90 | Local politician [appointed] | Self-employed | Bantama Sub-metro Council, Kumasi | 22.08.2014 |
| 92 | Middle level bureaucrat | Information technology | Municipal Directorate of Agric, Wa | 17.09.2014 |
| 93 | Local politician [appointed] | Teaching | Wa Municipal Assembly, Wa | 17.09.2014 |
| 95 | Middle level bureaucrat | Finance | Busa Zonal Council, Wa | 19.09.2014 |
| 97 | Middle level bureaucrat | Administration/ Secretary | Bantama Town Council, Kumasi | 23.09.2014 |
| 98 | Middle level bureaucrat | Administration/ Secretary | Kwadaso Town Council, Kumasi | 25.09.2014 |
| 99 | Middle level bureaucrat | Administration/ Secretary | Suame Town Council, Kumasi | 25.09.2014 |
| 100 | Local politician [elected] | Teaching | Bantama Town Council, Kumasi | 01.10.2014 |
| 101 | Local politician [elected] | Self-employed | Atonsu-Agogo Town Council, Kumasi | 08.10.2014 |
| 102 | Local politician [elected] | Health/ Administration | Oforikrom Town Council, Kumasi | 08.10.2014 |