

Decentralization and conflicts: A case study of the Kassena-Nankana West District of Ghana

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Abstract

In Ghana, decentralization has been adopted as a means of promoting democracy and local governance, but the outcomes have been problematic in some cases. This study, which assesses decentralization and conflict in the Kassena-Nankana West District, collected both quantitative and qualitative data from the District Assembly staff and community members through both purposive and stratified sampling techniques. From the study, conflicts result in heightened demand by the Kassena and Nankana for the creation of separate districts out of the existing district. Some of the causes of conflict between the District Assembly functionaries and citizens at the local level include low participation of citizens in decision making, poor dissemination of information from Assembly members to community members and inadequate financial resources for the District Assembly to undertake development projects needed by the people. District Assemblies need to mainstream peace-building and conflict management strategies into the Medium Term Development Plans to prevent conflicts between key stakeholders.

Keywords: Decentralization, Local Governance, Conflicts, Kassena-Nankana West District

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Introduction

The pursuit of decentralization by post-independence governments in Africa is not only intended to quicken the pace of democracy through active involvement of the citizens but also to bring about good governance and economic development (Mahama, 2009). Good governance is a vehicle for the state, the private sector and civil society to participate in the decision making process and articulate their interests and priorities and reconcile their differences as well as manage internal tensions and disputes. Good governance is also key to addressing the underlying conditions such as poverty, inequality and social exclusion that generate conflict. This is because one of the tenets of good governance — participatory democracy— ensures active participation of the citizens in determining their development needs and aspirations at the local level, hence the motivation for the adoption of the decentralization policy in Ghana.

There are legal provisions supporting citizen participation in Ghana. Article 1 of Chapter 1 of the Constitution states that “the sovereignty of Ghana resides in the people of Ghana in whose name and for whose welfare the powers of government are to be exercised in the manner and within the limits laid down in the Constitution” (Constitution of Ghana, 1992). Chapter 20 of the 1992 Constitution posits that “to ensure accountability of Local Government authorities, people in particular Local Government areas shall, as far as practicable, be afforded the opportunity to participate effectively in their governance” (Constitution of Ghana, 1992). Other legal provisions include Assembly Members consulting their electorates before and after meetings and also the participatory planning and budgeting process. The legal provisions for participation make it a right and not a privilege.

Ghana’s decentralization policy over the past two decades has placed emphasis on popular participation among others (Mahama & Otten, 2008). Article 35 (6d) of the 1992 Constitution stipulates that the state must “make democracy a reality by decentralizing the administrative and financial machineries of government to the regions and districts and by affording all possible opportunities to the people to participate in decision-making at every level in national life and in government” (Constitution of Ghana, 1992 Article 35 (6d)). The constitution gives meaning to government structures at the local level through which people can participate in the decision making process and form an integral part of the government at the local level. Decentralization promotes public participation and local ownership of the development process, such that decisions pertaining to the siting of markets, schools and roads should satisfy all diverse interest groups within the jurisdiction. This is however in contrast with the assertion by Kimenya (2002) that political institutions are not able to accommodate diverse interests, which has the potential to generate conflict between beneficiaries of development and local government functionaries.

Conflict may either be beneficial or destructive to the people and communities involved. But whatever the outcome of conflict, the process assumes a dynamic path which in retrospect provides avenues for knowledge enrichment and experience acquisition for dealing with events. Thus, conflict is the source of a vigorous and dynamic society (Nwanko & Nzelibe, 1990). A study conducted by Barron et al. (2006) on local conflict and community development in Indonesia

reveals that development projects and conflicts are inextricably linked because development involves political decisions, which sometimes leads to a contested process. Since development involves the interaction of people, Nwanko and Nzelibe (1990) and Nicholson (1971) contended that conflict is a vital factor in human life. It exists within the individual, between two people or within a group. It is bound to occur where there is interaction between at least two individuals or groups whose ultimate objectives differ. Conflict is normally perceived as the competition for the attainment of scarce resources. Conflicts exist in different forms and at different levels. One such form is political conflict (Idowu, 2004). This form of conflict exerts an effect, directly or indirectly, on the direction and content of public policy. Political conflict is ultimately about publicly determined access to public goods and services. It is about the distribution of the rights and privileges available in the public domain (Idowu 2004). Political conflict is situated in the structure of power and the various attitudes or social behaviour surrounding it. To this end, conflict entails relationships between groups and individuals. To strengthen this relationship, Bigdon (2003) argued that conflict at the local level is seen as part of any social transformation process of societies with the potential to consolidate democratic decision making and problem solving. The conflicts that emerge as a result of the governance process may not be a result of the inability of political institutions to accommodate diverse interests, but a part of human existence. Decentralization has helped to reduce conflict at the national level and to replace it with local level conflict. Conflict can manifest itself in the devolution of power to the local level and leads to power struggle amongst the local government functionaries. Conflict can also manifest itself in expansion in the number of new districts which has altered relations between ethnic groups and thus led to local-level conflict (Green, 2008).

In Ghana, the creation of new District Assemblies in some parts of the country has generated disputes (Owusu, 2005a; 2009). In a study on the dynamics of communal conflicts in Ghana's local government system, Gati (2008) and Agbenorku (2010) have argued that there are various contestations among communities over the creation of districts which centre on boundary demarcations, names of districts and the names of district or municipal capitals. For instance, contentions regarding the siting of district capitals have resulted in demonstrations by the chiefs and people of Prang in the Brong Ahafo Region against the siting of the district capital at Atebubu. Others include protests by Gomoa-East District against the designation of Afranse as the capital, protest by Ledzokuku- Krowor District against the designation of Teshie – Nungua as the capital. There was also a protest by Kassena-Nankana West against the designation of Paga as the capital (Gati 2008). In other cases, there are agitations for the creation of new districts for various reasons (Owusu, 2009; 2015). For instance, the agitations between the Kassena and the Nankana for separate districts created a conflict between the two ethnic groups following the creation of the Kassena-Nankana West District in 2008 with its capital at Paga, a town in a Kassena community. This paper explores opinions on decentralization and conflict using the Kassena-Nankana West District as a case study. It is divided into six main sections as follows: introduction, conceptual and theoretical perspectives, study setting, methodology, results and discussion, and policy recommendations.

Conceptual, theoretical and empirical perspectives

In this section, central concepts and theories will be defined and their relevance for the study will be explained. Decentralization is considered as the transfer of power from the central government to a more peripheral level as a means for overcoming physical and administrative constraints of development, improving the management of resources, and increasing community participation (Khan, 2006). Decentralisation processes involve four main forms or alternative strategies. These are devolution, delegation, deconcentration and privatisation. Devolution is the transfer of authority for decision-making, finance, and management to quasi-autonomous units of local government with corporate status. . In a devolved system, local governments have clear and legally recognized geographical boundaries over which they exercise authority and within which they perform public functions. It is this type of administrative decentralization that underlies most political decentralizations.

Through delegation, central governments transfer responsibility for decision-making and administration of public functions to semi-autonomous organizations not wholly controlled by the central government, but ultimately accountable to it. Deconcentration is the redistribution of decision-making authority and financial and management responsibilities among different levels of the central government. Privatization can range in scope from the provision of goods and services based entirely on the free operation of the market to public-private partnerships in which government and the private sector cooperate to provide services or infrastructure.

Governments decentralize in order to accelerate development, break bureaucratic bottlenecks arising from centralized government planning and management, and promote participatory governance (Cheema & Rondinelli, 1983). However, problems associated with centralized government still exist in decentralized systems of government. In some cases, responsibilities are decentralized to local governments but the resources needed to carry out these responsibilities are still centralized.

Mahama and Otten (2008) posited that decentralization has taken centre stage in development discourse for some time now. In Ghana, the decentralization process seeks to devolve political, administrative and financial authority from the centre to the assemblies. Local governments have the power to make laws, plan for the district and execute those plans. They also have the power to mobilize revenue for the development of the district. These powers are derived from the 1992 Republican Constitution of Ghana and the Local Government Act (Act 462). This is clear from the provisions of the Fourth Republican Constitution. Article 34 Section 5 (d) of the 1992 Constitution required the state to “make democracy a reality by decentralizing the administrative and financial machinery of government to the regions and districts and by affording all possible opportunities to the people to participate in decision-making at every level in national life and in government” (Constitution of Ghana, 1992). This is supported by Mahama and Otten (2008) who indicated that the thrust of Ghana’s decentralization policy over the past two decades has been to promote popular participation by shifting the process of governance from “top-down” to ‘bottom-up”, with its fulcrum resting on the devolution of power, competencies and resources to the district level. In

support of this view, Ahwoi (2010) emphasized that the district level of government is the devolution, where decentralization in the true sense of the concept is played out. Devolution aims to increase public participation in local decision making which results in transparency and accountability.

Ghana's decentralization policy forms the basis of the new local government system which is premised on the assumption that development is that which responds to people's needs and represents their goals, objectives and priorities. District Assemblies are given the powers by the constitution and operationalized in Act 462 to plan, budget and mobilize resources for the overall development of the Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies (MMDAs) (Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development, 1996; Mahama, 2009).

Local governments in Ghana play very important roles with actors in the administration and development at the local areas. However, actors, practitioners and decision-makers at the local level do not have adequate information and knowledge on the functions and responsibilities of the MMDAs. According to Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (2010), apart from the various laws on Local Government not being in simple language, it is difficult to have access to the various Local Government laws. Moreover, there are some stakeholders who do not have enough information to understand the workings of the District Assembly in order to effectively participate in the decision-making process. This situation creates an atmosphere of conflict between the functionaries of the local government structures.

Decentralization is intended to promote local governance. Governance is "the exercise of economic, political and administrative authority to manage a country's affairs at all levels. It comprises the mechanisms, processes and institutions through which citizens and groups articulate their interests, exercise their legal rights, meet their obligations and mediate their differences" (UNDP 1996 as cited in Abazaam & Millar, 2008:62). The UN Human Development Report (2004) pointed out that governance has two faces: first, the leadership, which has responsibilities derived from the principles of effective governmental organizations, and second, the governed, that is the citizens, who are responsible for making relevant inputs in the socio-economic and political affairs of their society. In other words, governance is a relationship between the rulers and the ruled, the state and society, the governors and the governed. It is important that the two principal actors be as close as possible to ensure that the legitimacy, accountability, credibility and responsiveness of the rulers and the effective participation and responsiveness of the ruled are achieved.

In line with this, Kenya (2010) suggested that local governance is the active involvement of the local population, within the territorial boundaries of a local government, in ensuring improved quality of service and leadership at the local level. It is also the direct and indirect roles of sub-national governments (Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies (MMDAs)). Some of these roles include providing a range of local services, creating space for citizen participation and civic dialogue, achieving environmentally sustainable local development, and facilitating outcomes that enrich the quality of life of residents. Citizen participation is considered an important factor for successful decentralization. Citizens' participation in local government produces more efficiency

in programmes as well as promotes good governance (Lowndes et al, 2001 cited in Ahmed et al, 2010). Without community participation, there is obviously no accountability, no development and no programme. Participation enhances civic consciousness and political maturity. It is about increased citizens' involvement in and influence over local governance (Aref et al., 2009; Gumut, 2006; and Agyepong, 2009).

There are legal provisions supporting citizen participation in Ghana. Article 1 of Chapter 1 of the 1992 Constitution of Ghana states that “the sovereignty of Ghana resides in the people of Ghana in whose name and for whose welfare the powers of government are to be exercised in the manner and within the limits laid down in the Constitution”. Chapter 20 of the same Constitution posits that “to ensure accountability of Local Government authorities, people in particular Local Government areas shall, as far as practicable, be afforded the opportunity to participate effectively in their governance”. Other legal provisions include Assembly Members consulting their electorates before and after meetings and also the participatory planning and budgeting process. The legal provision of participation makes it a right and not a privilege.

Arnstein as cited in Ahmed et al (2010), developed a ladder of eight rungs, with each rung corresponding to the extent of citizens' power in determining a plan or program. The eight rungs are categorized into three. The bottom rungs of the ladder are manipulation and therapy. These two rungs describe levels of non-participation, the real objective of which is not to enable people to participate in planning, but to enable power-holders to educate the participants. The next categorization involves three levels of tokenism: informing, consultation, and placation. At this level, citizens may indeed hear or be heard, but under these conditions they lack power to influence decisions. It is the illusion of a voice without the voice itself. The highest level of the participation ladder is citizen-power, which includes partnership, delegated power and citizen control. At this level, citizens control all issues and win the majority of decision-making seats. Participation is considered key to the governance process of people at the local level. The inability of systems and structures to create opportunities for citizens to participate in the governance process can generate conflicts of various kinds.

There seems to be professional infighting among the main functionaries and power brokers within the assembly system over their roles and responsibilities. The rivalry is common among the Metropolitan, Municipal and District Chief Executives (MMDCEs), the Members of Parliament (MPs) and Assembly Members.

Under the Local Government Act 1993 (Act 462), everybody has a role to play in promoting the interest of the Assembly. The District Chief Executive (DCE) has political, executive and administrative powers within the district. He or she presides over Executive Committee and Assembly Tender Review Committee meetings, is responsible for the day-to-day performance of the executive and administrative functions of the assembly and supervises the decentralized departments of the assembly. The DCE functions as the chief representative of the Central Government in the district.

Another functionary in the assembly is the MP who represents a constituency within the district. MPs serve as the link between Parliament and the Assemblies, guide the assemblies on legislations passed by Parliament to ensure that the bye-laws of the assemblies are not in conflict with national legislation, identify problems of their electorates so as to expose/lay bare their needs in Parliament, brief the Assemblies about the proceedings in Parliament at Assembly meetings and provide feedback on programmes and projects that are of interest to the districts.

The Assembly Member is another key personality in the administrative structure of the local government. He serves as the liaison between the District Assembly and the community. He therefore plays a critical role in community development. The Assembly Member participates in the work and activities of the Assembly such as attending meetings and taking part in discussions. The roles and functions of the Assembly Member prescribed by Act 462 include joining and participating in committee meetings of the assembly, serving on at least a committee of the assembly, educating the electorates on government policies and assembly projects, and maintaining close contact with the electorate and consulting with them on regular bases. They are also to consult the electorate before each Assembly meeting on issues to be discussed in the Assembly. The Assembly Member is also to collate views, opinions and proposals on matters affecting the district and present the issues to the Assembly.

With these roles enshrined in the Act, however, there seems to be confusion among the key players in the Assembly. The unclear nature of the roles played by each member creates conflict in the Assembly. Ahwoi (2010) posits that the 1992 Constitution was the first constitution to make MPs members of their local authorities. Interestingly, in recent times, the Fourth Republic has also become a period where there have been unending conflicts between MPs and their MMDCEs in particular, and Assembly members. Unfortunately, in practice, the presence of MPs in the local Assemblies appears to have given the impression that they are directly responsible for the provision of infrastructure in their respective constituencies and districts in addition to their role as national legislators. This situation puts the MPs in competition with the MMDCEs, the Assembly Members and sometimes even with the Unit Committee Members.

The rivalry has been most unhelpful as the line of demarcation of functions between MPs and MMDCEs has become blurred. In the process, MPs have been at the forefront of agitations for the removal of MMDCEs while MMDCEs have also campaigned actively to unseat MPs, especially in constituencies where the two belong to the same political party, or worst of all, when the two belong to different political parties. In the end, one seems to sabotage the other and it is the District Assembly system that has to suffer. This unhealthy rivalry comes about as a result of the structure of the District Assembly system and the unclear nature of their responsibilities. There is the need to bring the rivalry to an end to promote the needed development in the affected districts.

Although different theories have been proposed in an attempt to understand the concept of conflict, the relational and structural conflict theories have been employed to explain decentralisation and conflict in the Kassena-Nankana West district. According to Felati (2006), relational theory attempts to provide an explanation for violent conflicts between groups by exploring sociological,

political, economic and historical relationships between such groups. The belief here is that cultural and value differences as well as group interests all influence relationships between individuals and groups in different ways. At the sociological level, differences between cultural values are a challenge to individual or group identity formation processes and create the tendency to see others as intruders who have to be prevented from encroaching upon established cultural boundaries. Cultural boundaries are traditions, norms, beliefs, rituals, and language that hold the community together. Political economy, for example, identifies power and the advantages that it confers as a key source of tension between different interest groups within a political system. In situations where multiple groups share a common resource that is fixed in nature, the chance that each will attempt to eliminate, neutralize or injure the other or monopolize such a resource (Maoz, 1982) is as high as the tendency to enter into a negative relationship. Thus, relational theory attempts to provide an explanation for conflicts between groups and their relationships.

The structural conflict theory constitutes the conceptual framework for the study (Figure 1). The structural theory recognizes the competing interests of groups as the most important motivation for conflict. The competing interests however do not necessarily result in conflict between the competing groups. The emphasis here is the identification of power structures and institutions as causes of conflict. These institutions could be local or state institutions. In other words, they could be formal or informal institutions and by their structural arrangements, serve as a source of conflict. In the local governance system, conflict began to emanate when MPs were made to be part of the District Assemblies as posited by Ahwoi (2010). The roles of the two functionaries, the MMDCEs and MPs, have not been clearly spelt out; hence, serving as a source of conflict in the District Assemblies. Brown (1996:23) contends that the structural factors can be triggered by 'proximate causes'. These factors change latent conflict into overt and sometimes violent conflict. Under this study, characteristics such as weakness in decision-making institutions, lack of clear-cut decisions on the part of local and national political leaders, lack of clear-cut roles and responsibilities or failure to involve Members of Parliament in making decisions that concern the areas under their jurisdiction are some of the factors that could be pointed to as constituting the triggers. Therefore, the arrangement per the constitution creates an environment that starts up conflict. When such a situation happens, it allows one party to see the other as saboteur because one is making the other unpopular.

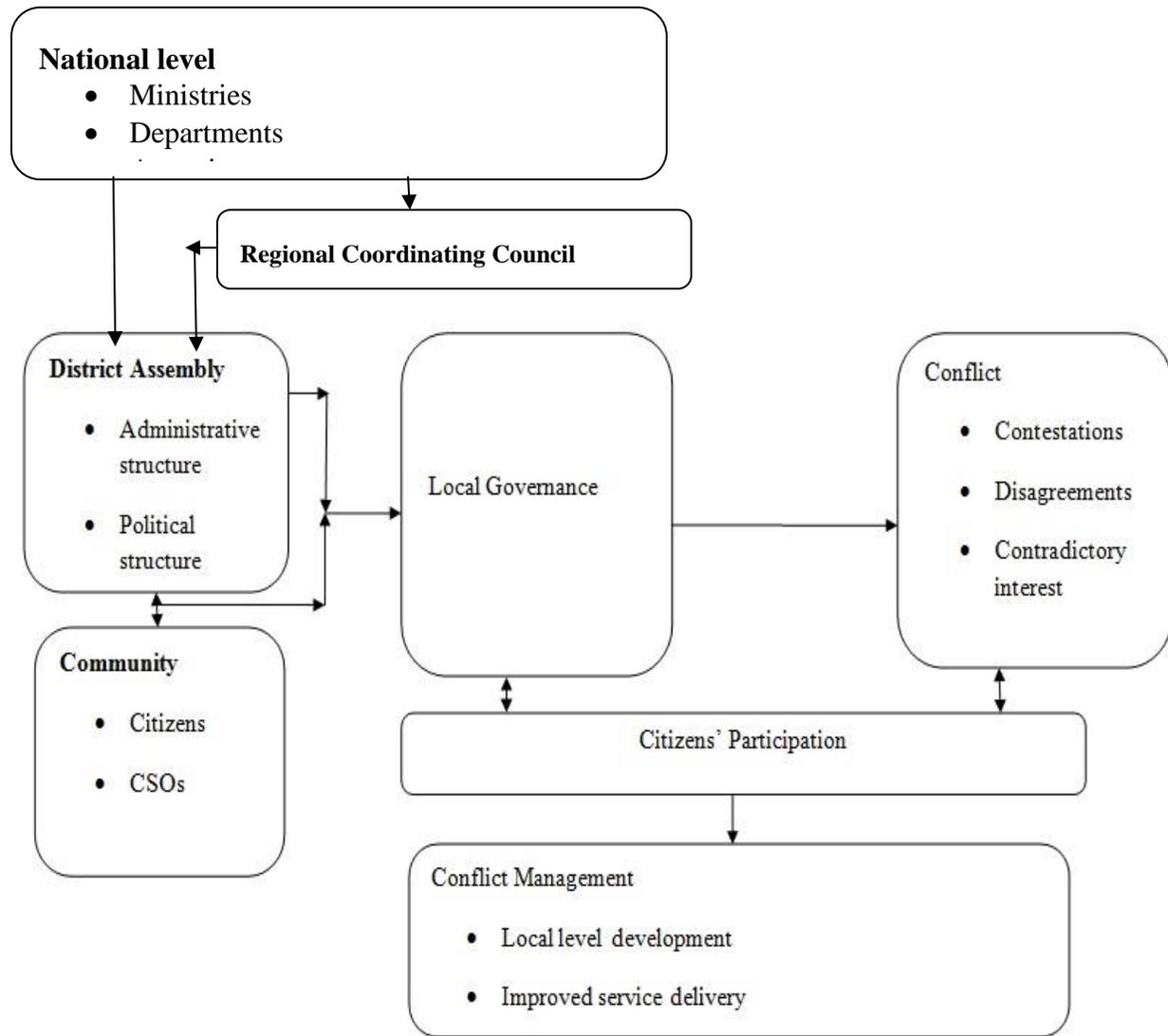
As pointed out in the definition of structural conflict theory, most social conflicts are based on the unequal distribution of scarce resources. Weber (1978) identified those resources as class, status and power. The different status positions of two people may cut across their similar class interests. Thus, what becomes important as a source of social conflict is the covariance of these three systems of stratification. If the MPs or the MMDCEs perceive that the same group controls access to all three resources, it is likely that the legitimacy of the system will be questioned because people perceive that their social mobility is hampered and that they are becoming unpopular.

Another general source of conflict from Marx's perspective has to do with a group's sense of deprivation caused by class inequalities. This sense of deprivation is what leads a group to class consciousness and produces conflict and social change. Marx was primarily concerned with explaining the structural changes or processes that would bring the deprived class to this realization; such things as rising levels of education and worker concentration. Any attempt to ignore the deprived class or group in the local governance system can result in conflict in the locality.

There are various actors in the governance process at the local level who play various roles for the district to perform its development mandate. Under this study, the structural factors that can trigger conflict are the uneven allocation of resources, the non-involvement of people in decision making in matters that directly affect them and the lack of responsiveness on the part of the DA to address the needs of the citizens. Citizens as stakeholders in local governance represent different sections of the interest groups. Decisions taken by the DA directly affect the citizens of the Kassena-Nankana West District. When there is perceived unfairness in the allocation of resources, it may result in conflict. The structural conflict theory fits into the study because it recognizes political and institutional factors as well as available resources as factors responsible for the emergence of conflict. Where there are contestations and disagreements by citizens at the district level, it may affect local level development and service delivery. The DA, in pursuit of its core mandate, may inadvertently generate conflict. Conflict may affect local level development and the participation of citizens in DA activities (Schelnberger, 2005).

The management of conflict will mean the representation of all interest groups, transparency and accountability in the use of resources and inclusiveness in decision making. When conflict is well managed at the local level, it leads to local level development and improved service delivery in education, health and security (Warioba, 2008).

Fig. 1: Conceptual framework showing the relationship between conflict and decentralization



Source: Adapted from Best, 2006; Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development, 1996; Local Government Act (Act 462), 1993

Study area

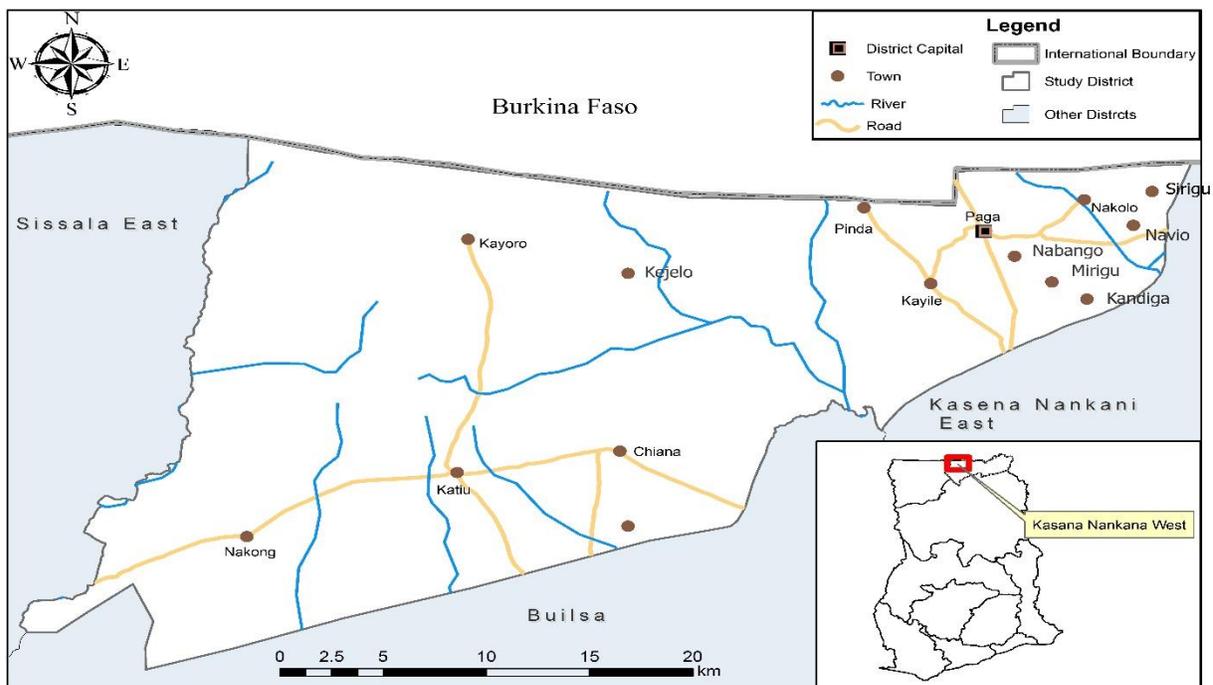
The Kassena-Nankana West District is one of the 13 districts in the Upper East Region of Ghana. The district has a total land area of approximately 1,004 sq km. The district lies approximately between longitude 1⁰⁰' and 38.194'' West and latitude 11⁰¹' and 34.116'' North. It shares boundaries with Burkina Faso to the North, Bongo district to the North East, Bolgatanga

Municipality to the East, Kassena-Nankana East to the South, and Builsa and Sissala East Districts to the South West and West (Fig. 2).

The total population of the district in 2010 was 70,667 (Ghana Statistical Service, 2012), comprising 49.0 percent males and 51.0 percent females. The district is about 90 percent rural (Ghana Statistical Service, 2012). The predominant ethnic groups in the district are the *Kassena*, the *Nankana* and the *Mamprusi*. Other ethnic groups include the *Kantosi*, the *Moshie*, the *Builsa*, the *Zambramas* and a small number of migrant workers from Burkina-Faso.

The District Assembly has a total membership of 48 made up of the following: the District Chief Executive, elected Assembly Members (32), appointed Assembly Members (14) and one Member of Parliament. There are nine Area Councils and forty-six Electoral Areas in the district. There are seven Paramountcies, namely *Paga*, *Chiana*, *Katiu*, *Nakong*, *Kayoro*, *Mirigu* and *Sirigu*. Under these Paramountcies are one hundred and twelve communities (Kassena-Nankana District Assembly, 2010). The cultural diversity of the district means that conflicts could occur where resources are not fairly distributed.

Fig. 2: Map of the Kassena- Nankana West District



Source: Geography and Regional Planning Department, University of Cape Coast, 2012

Data and methods

The data for this paper were obtained from both primary (i.e. from respondents) and secondary sources (i.e. both published and unpublished documents). The study combined both quantitative and qualitative approaches to ensure that the weaknesses of one approach are offset by the strengths of the other (Pinnawala, 2009; Tanle, 2010). The descriptive study design was adopted because it made it possible to explore the study from different perspectives connected with decentralization and conflict (Hakim, 2000). The target population were the community members and staff of the Kassena-Nankana West District Assembly aged at least 18 years. The assembly staff included the District Coordinating Director, District Engineer, District Planning Officer, District Budget Officer, District Finance Officer, Presiding Member, members of the Works Sub-Committee, members of Social Services Sub-Committee, members of the Development Planning Sub-Committee, the Finance and Administration Sub-Committee and the Presiding Member.

A sample size of 398 community members was determined from the total district population of 70,667 using the Isreal's (2009) sample size determination formula (See Appendix 1 on page 31). In addition, 34 respondents including the assembly staff were purposively selected as key informants. A stratified sampling technique was used because the Kassena-Nankana West District is geographically zoned into three by the District Assembly. The sample size of 398 was therefore divided into three parts, 133 respondents per zone. Using the existing house numbering system of the Navrongo Health Research Centre (NHRC), a lottery method was used to select houses from each zone. A respondent aged 18 years or older was randomly selected from each house. The rationale for interviewing people aged 18 years or above was that in Ghana 18 years is the age of maturity (Tanle, 2010).

A questionnaire was used to collect quantitative data from the community members while an in-depth interview guide was used to collect qualitative data from the assembly staff and some community leaders. The questionnaire covered the demographic characteristics of the respondents, causes, effects and management of conflicts in decentralization, while perceptions and expectations of the people on decentralization were among the issues covered by the qualitative guide. The SPSS version 21 was used to analyse the quantitative data while descriptive statistics were used to present the results. Through content analysis, the qualitative data were teased out to support the discussion, especially on the core issues on decentralization and conflicts.

Results and Discussion

Background characteristics of respondents

The background characteristics of the respondents show that about two-thirds were males, which is contrary to the fact that there are more females (51%) than males (49%) in the Kassena-Nankana West District (Table 1) (Ghana Statistical Service, 2012). This could be that the male population were more available and willing to be interviewed than their female counterparts. The higher

proportion of male respondents means that their views could dominate in governance and conflicts at the local level. Moreover, in the Ghanaian socio-cultural setting, males are often the main decision-makers at both the household and community levels.

Table 1: Background characteristics of respondents

Background characteristic	Frequency	Percentage
Sex		
Male	239	60.1
Female	159	39.9
Age		
Less than 20	76	19.1
20-30	104	26.1
31-40	47	11.8
41-50	70	17.6
51-60	23	5.8
61+	78	19.6
Marital status		
Single	128	32.2
Married	243	61.0
Separated	4	1.0
Divorced	11	2.8
Widowed	12	3.0
Education		
None	130	32.7
Primary	74	18.6
Secondary	154	38.7
Tertiary	40	10.0
Occupation		
Farming	119	29.9
Trading	69	17.3
Civil service	107	26.9
Artisan	63	15.8
Driving	17	4.3
Student	23	5.8
Total	398	100.0

Source: Fieldwork, 2012.

About three-quarters of the respondents were aged 50 years or less. This means that most of them are within the working age group and thus decisions on the allocation and use of resources at the DA could affect the livelihoods of such people. Sixty-one per cent of the respondents were married. On formal education, about a third were illiterate while the rest were literate, of whom about half

have had secondary school education or higher. Education is considered fundamental to the respondents' understanding of local governance and conflicts and strategies to manage them at the local level. Nearly seven out of ten (67.3%) were working in the informal sector and therefore they would need some support from the DA to expand their businesses. There is a feeling of discontent when the support that is required by people from the DA is not forthcoming. They vent their frustrations on the DA knowing that resources are decentralized to be used by the DA to improve their lives. The implication is that those in the informal sector are more likely to contest and agitate against the DA if resource allocations do not go in their favour.

Opinions of respondents on the functions of the District Assembly

Opinions on the functions of the DA were sought in order to find out whether or not respondents knew the functions of the DA. Knowledge about the functions of the DA could influence the people's expectations from the DA and also give them the opportunity to assess the contributions of the DA to the socio-economic development of the people in the community. From the results, about half of the respondents felt that the District Assembly's function is to provide infrastructural development for the citizens in the district (Table 2). This is also evident in the qualitative data as some of the respondents indicated that:

The Assembly constructs roads and builds schools (Community leader). Another said: our wives are traders. They sell things in small quantities to help in the upkeep of the family. It is the responsibility of the DA to build markets for the communities so that our wives can go there and sell (Community leader).

The second important function of the DA as mentioned was the provision of social services (24%). Some of the responses indicated that the District Assembly is responsible for the cleanliness of the district and provision of educational and health facilities for the people. For example, a respondent from one of the communities observed that:

The government has provided the District Assembly with money to feed school children and pay cleaners in the district. Another community member indicated that: 'The security of the district is in the hands of the District Assembly. It is the duty of the District Assembly to ensure that peoples' lives are not in danger. The District Chief Executive sometimes tells the police to arrest people who cause trouble in the district.

It is evident that the people are aware of the District Assembly's responsibilities, key among which, according to the respondents, is the provision of infrastructural facilities and social services to the people. The 1992 Constitution and the Local Government Act, Act 462, 1993 have spelt out broad functions for the District Assembly. Some of the functions outlined are that District Assemblies should be responsible for the overall development of the districts; formulate and execute plans, programmes and strategies for effective mobilization of resources; promote and support productive activities and social development in the district; cooperate with appropriate national and local security agencies responsible for the maintenance of security and public safety in the district. These

functions should be performed in respect to matters affecting the people within their areas, with a view to ultimately achieving localization of those activities (Constitution of Ghana, 1992).

Table 2: Opinions of respondents on the functions of the District Assembly

Function	Frequency	Percentage
Infrastructure development	214	45
Service delivery	113	24
Organize assembly meetings	74	15
Revenue mobilization	69	14
Others	10	2
Total	480*	100

Source: Fieldwork, 2012

**multiple responses*

Expectations of community members from the District Assembly

Being aware of the functions or responsibilities of the DA, the people naturally will expect the DA to carry out those functions to improve their socio-economic lives. The study indicates that about a third of the respondents reported that the DA met their expectations or they were satisfied with the performance of the DA. Some of the arguments to support this point were:

The Assembly has reduced the crime rate and improved the sanitation situation, the District Assembly has extended electricity to my community, the District Assembly has constructed classroom block and the District Assembly has come to our aid in case of disasters (Views of some community members of both sexes).

One other respondent said that: *I have been employed as security guard in one of the schools* (Community leader). The expectations of the local citizens from the DA are high, an indication that people are always looking for direct benefits from the DA. There is the tendency that when their expectations are not met, they could resort to conflict.

However, about seventy percent of the respondents stated that the DA had not met their expectations. One of them noted that:

The DA failed to let government know that the district demarcation is bad and needs re-demarcation, electricity and other facilities are lacking in the community and I do not know what the revenue collected by the DA is used for (Community leader). Another respondent also indicated that: *I do not have a job and the DA is not helping me get a job, many communities do not have basic amenities, no feedback from the DA when concerns are raised by us, the DA has failed to distribute projects and other amenities equitably* (Community leader).

The assertion by some members of the sub-committees was that the performance of the DA did not meet their expectations. They explained that they take part in deliberations concerning plans

and budgets of the DA. However, some of these plans are never implemented. To support this assertion, one Assembly Member said this:

The District Chief Executive (DCE) decides where some big projects should be sited. When you are an Assembly Member and you are close to the DCE, be sure your electoral area will benefit.

It can be concluded that the expectations of people from the District Assembly are both personal and collective. They also vary from one location to the other. These expectations arise a result of decentralized decision-making and service delivery. When the expectations of the people are not met, the needed co-operation and participation from community members will not be achieved.

Causes of conflicts in the District

Conflict theories posit that there are different reasons and motivations for the generation and escalation of conflicts. Although the quest for separate districts between the Kassena and Nankana has been the underlying factor for the conflict in the Kassena-Nankana West, the study revealed that the main causes of conflicts in the district were participation by citizens in decision-making at the DA, miscommunication, lack of education on the works of the DA and inadequate financial resources to respond to the demands of communities.

The structural conflict theory explains that incompatible interest based on competition for scarce resources is responsible for conflict in society. The theory also looks at social problems such as political and economic exclusion, injustice, poverty and diseases as sources of conflict. One of the causes of conflict in local governance as revealed by the study was exclusion of community members from the decision making process. For instance, a community leader stated that:

Our views are not considered when it comes to decisions of the DA. The DA does whatever it feels is good for us and not what we want. That is why sometimes we do not agree with the decisions of the DA.

People who are excluded from the decision-making processes of the DA contest such decisions. For example, a respondent from Paga indicated that:

Government wanted to appoint people to manage the crocodile pond through the Assembly. We rejected this because we were not consulted. We the community members used to manage the pond and earned some income from it. How can we agree to this?

The exclusion of the public in decision making is attributed to Assembly Members who failed to carry out their core mandates as stipulated in the Local Government Act (Act 462), 1993. Assembly Members are expected to meet with people from their electoral areas to deliberate on matters of concern before general assembly meetings. Also, they are expected to meet with the people after the assembly meeting to discuss decisions taken during the assembly meetings. An official of the District Assembly recounted that:

On the issue of development, the Assembly deals with Area Councils and the DA members. These are the ones who represent their people and they should always give feedback to the people they represent. The challenge is however about resources to enable the DA members carry out this role.

This was supported by one District Assembly Official who said that:

When people are excluded in decision making process, it leads to conflict because people will protest the decisions of the DA. The Assembly Members are representatives of the people at the assembly and we expect them to always meet with their people to take their concerns. This is often not done. The challenge is that they complain that they do not have resources to always organize meetings.

It can be deduced that the participation of Assembly Members at the DA is not felt by a wider segment of the population and therefore does not create the needed opportunity for the voices of the citizens to be heard. This is in contrast with Article 35 section 6(d) of the 1992 Constitution which mandates the state to “make democracy a reality by decentralizing the administrative and financial machinery of government to the regions and districts and by affording all possible opportunities to the people to participate in decision-making at every level in national life and government” (Constitution of Ghana, 1992). Amponsah and Boafo- Arthur (2003) argue that the only means by which crucial information can be used as critical inputs for effective and efficient policy formulation is through popular participation in local governance. It is evident that the inability of the DA, which the structural conflict theory refers to as political power structure, in handling the competing interests by creating room for participation, is a source of conflict in the district.

The study also revealed that miscommunication between the citizens and the DA is another source of conflict in governance at the local level. Misinformation hampers the inclusion of people in decision making. This creates wrong perceptions in the minds of the people about the governance process. One *District Assembly official* summed this up when he said that:

Sometimes people do not understand what goes on in the assembly. A section of people in Paga were angry with me for issuing a permit for the construction of a petroleum station. I was actually confronted by the people. I was accused of taking money from the owners of the petroleum station. The people contested the decision and tried stopping the construction of the petroleum station at that particular site. The people were not aware that the area was demarcated for such purpose. They were misinformed by others.

Poor information dissemination by DA staff coupled with difficulties involved in accessing information from them was also identified by the community members as a cause of conflict in local governance. They attributed this to lack of communication channels of the DA. To buttress this point, a community member said:

Assembly staffs do not give us information on what they are doing. They are always busy in the office.

In a similar study by Njunwa and Kunkuta (2003:13-14) it was revealed that “many permanent public officials in local government in Tanzanian councils lacked the culture of information sharing, which added to misunderstanding and conflict”. Apart from sharing information with the citizens through the Assembly Members, there are other channels through which the Assembly can disseminate information. However these channels are not employed by the assembly. When DA staff do not share information with the relevant stakeholders, it leads to misunderstanding and conflict because people are left to speculations and misinformation.

One other cause of conflict identified in the study was the low level of education of assembly members. The level of education of people determines their level of understanding of issues in the governance process. Though Assembly Members are supposed to explain issues to their people in the local language, the grasp of technical issues discussed at the assembly makes it difficult to explain to their electorates. An official of the District Assembly indicated that:

Some issues of local governance are difficult to explain in simple terms to people. If people do not understand the issues involved in the Assembly activities, then they will agitate against or contest some decisions. Another official also stated that: most people are not educated in this part of the country. Even among the Assembly Members, not everyone is educated. This limits their understanding of some important and complex issues of the Assembly. If the Assembly Member does not understand the issues clearly, how can he/she explain to the understanding of the electorates?

The low level of education was however not mentioned by both the community members and members of the Sub-Committees of the DA.

Furthermore, conflict can result from inadequate financial resources available to the DA. Inadequate financial resources make it difficult to meet the many and varied interests of the people, which is a source of conflict as posited by the structuralists. The DA depends heavily on financial transfers from the central government to undertake projects in the district. An official of the DA indicated that:

Our Assembly like any other DA is supported with funds from central government. These funds come in the name of the District Assembly Common Fund and other special funds like the DDF (District Disability Fund). The funds are not enough and are mostly not released on time. The DA is constrained financially. It puts us in a situation where we are not able to meet the demands of the people and to execute the plans of the Assembly. Most of the people are not aware of these challenges that the assembly faces. The Assembly Members are not able to meet the people to inform them on issues of the Assembly because of these same resource constraints (District Assembly Official).

The members of the Sub-Committee and the Presiding Member (PM) also supported the view that inadequate financial resource is a cause of conflict in local governance. For instance, the PM stated that:

The district is new and therefore has so many developmental challenges but limited resources. It cannot do much to satisfy every community. People are not satisfied with the situation but the truth is that, the DA does not have adequate financial resources.

This is supported by Babyegeya (2002) with the argument that an inadequate financial resource is one of the main causes of conflict. He states that the more acute the scarcity of supply of resources relative to the amount needed and demanded by rival parties, and the more important the resources are to them, the greater the likelihood of a conflict emerging and its intensity increasing. A similar study by Manyak and Katono (2010) on decentralization and conflict in Uganda also revealed that a deficit in resource funding and the inability to meet the demands of communities were major sources of conflict.

Transparency and accountability on the part of staff of the DA in resource allocation was also mentioned as one of the causes of conflict in the district. Respondents were of the view that DA staff members were not open to the citizens to let them know what is happening at the DA. This was how a community leader put it:

We don't hear anything from the people at the DA. The officers decide what they want to do. They don't always want us to know what they are doing.

This defeats the letter of the law which posits in Article 240 (e) of Chapter 20 of the 1992 Constitution that “to ensure the accountability of local government authorities, people in particular local government areas shall, as far as practicable, be afforded the opportunity to participate effectively in their governance” (Constitution of Ghana, 1992). In the Kassena-Nankana West district, avenues for accountability are limited. The majority of the people are unaware or do not have adequate information about the resources that are generated or made available to the Assembly (e.g. the District Development Fund, the District Assembly Common Fund, Internally Generated Funds). The lack of accountability and transparency therefore creates a gap between the DA and the citizens. To sum this up, Bigdon (2006) argued that good local governance means openness, deliberation and integrated action in transparent and efficient procedures. It motivates peoples’ participation through an inclusive and participatory decision making process which is considered as an important conflict transformation strategy within heterogeneous societies. It can therefore be concluded that the lack of transparency and accountability do not encourage people’s participation in decision making and therefore have a high potential for generating and escalating conflict.

Effects of conflicts in the District

Conflict in the decentralization process in whatever form has implications on the governance process, relationship among communities and the general socio-economic development of a district. The results show that conflict leads to strained relationships and mistrust because of the feeling that some communities are more favoured in the allocation of resources from the DA than others. A community member remarked:

There is no peace and unity in the district because we do not benefit from projects by the district whilst others benefit a lot. This is why we also want a district of our own to also get development.

This is consistent with a study by Baron et al. (2007, p.14) which revealed that “Kecamatan Development Plan (KDP) and some other projects introduce competition within and between villages over which proposals should be funded. This type of conflict can be described as in-built, where the very nature of the programme triggers small disputes over the allocation of resources through the competitive process”.

Improper allocation of development projects was identified as an effect of conflict in local governance. For instance, the District Engineer said that:

When the District Assembly planned to build bungalows for its staff, the intended site was to be closer to the District Assembly in Paga. Due to the conflict over project allocations, the proposed site was changed to a community around Sirigu. Most communities complain that most of the development projects are located in Paga, the District Capital.

Consequently, people in other parts of the district feel that Paga, the district capital, has benefitted more from development projects than the rest of the district. The District Coordinating Director confirmed this when he said:

The chiefs and people of Chiana, Kandiga and surrounding communities are separately demanding and lobbying government for separate districts. These are Kassena and Nankana speaking communities respectively who do not want to be part of this district. This creates uncertainty and dissatisfaction in the district.

Also, some people in areas that have not benefitted from development projects from the DA are reluctant to pay rates, fees and taxes to the DA. DAs have been mandated to mobilize resources for the development of the district (Local Government Act, Act 462, 1993). It is evident that when the DA is not able to mobilize revenue as a result of people’s refusal to pay their fees, it becomes handicapped in its financial resources. A community member indicated that:

We cannot continue to pay fees to the District Assembly to be used to develop only Paga while we do not benefit.

Inadequate financial resources could limit the capacity of the DA to provide social services and promote development in the district.

Policy recommendations

In Ghana, DAs are mandated by the 1992 Constitution of Ghana and the Local Government Act, Act 462, 1993 to provide social services and general development to the districts. This entails the participation of other stakeholders like the Civil Society Organizations (CSO's) and the citizens. It is aimed at improving the lives of the people at the local level by creating inclusive democratic governance and good relationships between the DA and the citizens. Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made for policy intervention.

- There should be increased financial assistance and timely release of funds to the DAs. This will enhance the capacity of the DA to meet most of the expectations and aspirations of the people. There is also the need for regular civic education to educate the populace on their responsibility to pay rates, fees, taxes and other levies to the DAs to enable them (DAs) carry out their constitutional mandate of providing social services and development projects to improve upon the lives of the people.
- The demand for projects by communities and the limited financial inflows to the assembly suggest innovative ways to raise funds. The DA should explore building a modern market in Paga since it is a border town and could attract traders both within and outside Ghana. This will improve revenue mobilization because the coverage for the collection of fees and taxes will be expanded. Improved financial resources of the DA will enhance its service delivery and development projects. Through this, they will be able to meet to a large extent the expectations and needs of the communities, thereby preventing conflicts.
- To ensure transparency in the assembly's resources, there should be education on the guidelines, disbursement, volume and utilisation of the DACF and any other funding from the Assembly to enable citizens understand issues clearly to avoid conflict over resource allocation.
- Decentralization as a process is meant to enhance participation in processes of political decision-making and socio-economic development at the local level. There is the need for the DA to have monthly meetings with the communities to enhance participation, address differences and nip thorny issues in the bud to prevent them from escalating.
- Peace and stability are important in the development agenda of the district. There is the need to build the capacities of District Security Council members on conflict prevention and resolution to effectively manage conflicts in the district through annual training. Peace building and conflict management should be made one of the planning guidelines for the preparation of the Medium Term Development Plans (MTDPs) of the Metropolitan,

Municipal and District Assemblies (MMDAs). This could empower MMDAs to incorporate peace building and conflict management into their MTDPs, which could prevent or at least reduce conflicts in some districts.

Appendix 1

Sample size determination

The sample formula for descriptive studies below was used:

$$n = \frac{N}{1+N(a^2)}$$

Where;

n = sample size, N= Population, a = margin of error.

(Source: Israel, 2009)

Using the following parameters;

Confidence level = 95%

Margin of error =0.05

Population = 70,667

$$n = \frac{70667}{1+70667(0.05^2)}$$

n = 398

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