



DRUSSA
Development Research Uptake
in Sub-Saharan Africa



POLICY BRIEF

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**Decentralization of MOFA: Implications
for Sustainable Agricultural Productivity**

Effective collaboration with Local Government Service (LGS), Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development (MLGRD), Office of the District Assemblies Common Fund (DACF), Office of the Head of Civil Service (OHCS) to orientate MoFA staff at all levels of government – National, Regional and Local.

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Abstract

This policy brief examines the decentralization of the Ministry of Food and Agriculture (MoFA) in Ghana and its influence on increasing agricultural productivity in the country. The implications of decentralizing the Ministry of Agriculture for sustainable productivity among small holder farmers in Ghana are explored. It draws on an expert presentation on decentralization in Ghana to provide context for discussions that will inform policy makers about the 'what ought to be done' in the new restructuring of the Ministries. The results show that while decentralization is essential for the growth and development of decentralized institutions, such as the Ministry of Food and Agriculture, the fundamentals of the process should be right in order to attain the set objectives of the process. Decentralizing for the sake of it does not work and hence the need for Ghana to tread cautiously, if agriculture, the backbone of Ghana's economy is to remain one of the most important sectors of the country.

Introduction

The challenge of providing and maintaining public services and goods by the Central Government has brought increasing calls for decentralization of public institutions. While the concept has been defined and applied in different ways, in this brief, decentralization is mostly referred to as the transfer of decision making powers and responsibilities from central government to local governments. It involves the transfer of management, planning and administrative responsibilities as well as allocation of resources from the central to local government institutions such as District or Municipal Assemblies in Ghana. By this law, the decentralized department's administrative responsibilities are under the Assembly and therefore the Regional Coordination Councils. Thus, under the Act of Local Government, L.I 1961, the department of Agriculture at the District Assembly level was created as part of the Assembly but not as a decentralized department. This was to ensure a better delivery of services to the populace.

This new arrangement suggests that the Heads of the Departments of Agriculture at the Districts are required to prepare their own budget and annual plans as part of the composite budget of the Assembly. Thus, the Head of Department becomes a cost center manager charged with the responsibility of managing the department's budget. While the process is still ongoing, and not much documentation has been done, studies elsewhere have shown a mixed result of the performances of the decentralization process, suggesting that a universal approval of the process in any wholesale manner is unacceptable. There is not much documented information to alert the public of the performance of the process in the country. In this direction, it is required that a systematic study of the phenomenon's feasibility and sustainability in relation to the core objectives of the process is analyzed and shared with the stakeholders before embarking on or continuing with the process.

The Science and Technology Policy Research Institute (STEPRI) of the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) in collaboration with the Ministry of Food and Agriculture organized the first Policy Symposium under the Development Research Uptake in sub Saharan Africa (DRUSSA) Project.

The theme for the Policy Symposium was 'Decentralization of MoFA: Constraints and Opportunities for sustainable Food Production'. The question arising from the presentations and discussions was whether or not the decentralization process was making a positive impact.

Identified opportunities of the process

As with any institution undergoing reforms, the decentralization of MoFA also brings on board some challenges and opportunities for the stakeholders, particularly among smallholder farmers in the country. It is required that policy makers gain a better understanding of the issues in order to correct the deficiencies. Below are some merits of the process:

- Productivity factors including management, organization skills, land and other production inputs are easier to plan with District Assembly for enhanced interface;
- Specific naturally endowed commodities and livestock at the district level will be well focused on in the extension activities and other support areas;
- Specific agricultural business messages will be packaged for specific localities as a way of developing the local economies through innovation and local adaptations and use of materials;
- As a result of regional differences in crops, skills and climatic conditions, there will be specialized staff to suit the context of the district for a sustained improved production;
- Pertinent issues that need direct interventions will be handled at the district level. Top-down decisions shifting to bottom – up decisions; and
- Agricultural extension staff will become specialised to deal with the expectations of the district since expectations from the national level are not the same as those for the districts.

Status and some emerging issues

As pointed out earlier, the Ministry of Food and Agriculture (MoFA) is one of the main Ministries of Central Government that has been decentralized to the local government services. This process started since 1997 and it is still on-going, beginning with the setting up of a department of MoFA referred here to as District Department of Agriculture (DDA), in the various District Assemblies of the country. This process is to ensure a complete devolution of some directorates of the Ministry with specific functions to the local governance or District Assembly level. The policy aims at ensuring devolution of activities to the local governance structures under the L.I. 1961, which facilitates the establishment of department of agriculture at the district level.

The new arrangement has raised some critical questions about the reporting lines, and human resources management, among others and these need to be carefully looked at and corrected. Prominent among these is the question of whether or not the decentralization of MoFA is faring well and whether it is at the stage that successes can be replicated elsewhere in other public institutions. This implies that while the decentralization is gradually becoming a buzzword in developing countries, policy makers need to be equipped with an evidence-based research of the real experience on the ground.

For example, while the District Department of Agriculture (DDA) is seen as part of the local government, reporting is directly to the central Ministry. Also while the department is expected to be fully accommodated or hosted by the Assembly, promotion of staff and staff development programmes are still under the Ministry of Food and Agriculture. Funding of activities is still in limbo, as questions about where funding for the DDA's activities should come from -local government or MoFA- are still not completely answered.

The issue of funding is very crucial and needs to be settled effectively. Other challenges with these arrangements relate to agricultural extension coverage, inadequate staffing, recruitments and logistical support. These and other issues about the arrangement demand an immediate solution by policy makers. Policy makers are therefore required to make well-informed decisions that will ensure development of their people and communities. This should be based on a well-designed and systematically conducted research. Without this, development initiatives in the country will continue to be based on ad-hoc measures which do not always yield good results needed for enhanced development and poverty reduction.

Conclusion

The District Department of Agriculture is an important one in the District Assemblies and public policies should be well implemented to enhance its efficiency and effectiveness. From the policy discourse, a systematic study of the MoFA decentralization process is required for well-informed decisions and to ensure that the right policy measures are implemented. Reporting lines by MoFA Staff at the district to the national levels should be clearly spelt out and funding challenges at the district level for agricultural extension activities resolved.

Recommendations

Recommendations emerging from this Policy Symposium are as follows:

- Capacity building and education of MoFA Directors on the decentralisation should be considered;
- Metropolitans, Municipalities and, District Assemblies (MMDAs) must be encouraged to create an Agricultural Sub-Committee in each respective assembly to facilitate full integration and development of agriculture in the districts;
- MoFA should create a knowledge repository at the regional departments of agriculture to provide adequate coordination and backstopping functions to the District Agricultural Development Units (DADUs);
- MoFA should ensure that the agriculture profile of MMDAs in their Medium Term Development Plans (MTDP) and the Annual Composite Budget reflect the Agricultural DDA's view;
- Monitoring and Evaluation is key to the success of decentralization and should be made strong within the Assemblies; and