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Decentralization and Citizens' Participation in Local Governance: Does Trust and Transparency Matter? – An Empirical Study

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Abstract The wind of change that swept across the African continent and other developing countries ensuingly engendered the need to institute measures that would bring government to the people's doorstep. This led to the prioritization and touting of decentralization. Against the backdrop of the proximate reason to accelerate public access to government, the express expectation was that a germane space would be created to enhance participation. However, the validity of this postulation is yet to be realized. The study, therefore, set out to examine the relationship between decentralization and people's participation, with the mediating role of trust and transparency. Results of data analysis (561 respondents), using the structural equation modelling technique, established not only the appropriateness of the proposed study model, but also, the imperativeness of the trust and transparency to decentralization and participation. The implications of the study are delineated for effective policy and practice.

Keywords: local government; decentralization; citizen participation; trust; development; Ghana

Introduction

Responding to the institutional frailties and development challenges that had struck developing countries in Latin America, Asia and Africa, while breaking the centralization of government power, culminated in the inception and widespread implementation of decentralization in polities dotted around the prior mentioned jurisdictions. Consequently, in view of the much-professed efficacy of decentralization, as a development policy vehicle fuelled and largely driven by the World Bank, decentralization became a buzzword synonymous with not only progressive development, but also participatory and all-inclusive people-centred governance. Basically, the principal rationale undergirding the concept of decentralization entails the transfer of resources,

responsibilities and authority from a superordinate government entity to a lower tier subordinate government or non-government body (Bawole, 2017).

In the views of Adams and Agomor (2020), the transfer of responsibilities, authority and resources helps eschew alienation, while consolidating grassroots participation in governance. It occasions no surprise that the sustainable pathway to charting development and people-centred governance in public policy-making and implementation has been anchored on decentralization (Agyemang-Duah, 2018; Nyendu, 2015). This is the case in developing countries including Ghana – where decentralization has become an inextricably emblematic constituent of governance. Ghana's journey towards decentralization began in earnest in the 1970s and 1980s under the leadership of Flight Lieutenant Jerry John Rawlings – leader of the then Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC).

The transition from military to democratic rule, and the ensuing institutional reforms thereof, actually provided a stimulus for the democratization process, of which decentralization is a component. Part of the bold efforts to give firm legs to the decentralization process commenced with the enactment of the 1993 Act 462 under the PNDC law. This law provides the framework and mechanism for fostering participation at the various levels of government – in tacit consistence with the stipulations of Article 35, paragraph 6 (d) of the 1992 constitution, under the directive principle of state. A further ostensible demonstration of greater resolve towards decentralization is ingrained in the enactment of legislations including, but not limited to the 1994 National Planning Act 480, 1994 Local Government (Urban, Zonal and Town Councils and Unit Committees), Establishment Instrument (LI 1589), 2003 Local Government Service Act 656; 2003 District Assembly Common Fund Act 455; 2003 Procurement Act 663; 2004 Financial Administration Regulation (LI 1802); Local Government District Tender Board Regulations (LI 1606); 2008 Education Act (LI 778), among others.

As though these were not enough, government's commitment to the process finds evidence in the designation of Chapter 20 of the 1992 Constitution for 'Decentralization and Local Government'. Actually, the inception of local governance has yielded benefits. Notably, local governance has been a conduit for ensuring equilibrium in power distribution between the centre and the localities. More so, it has fostered the sustenance of social and political peace building while accelerating the distribution of essential social services (Adam and Taabazuig, 2015; Smith, 1985). These benefits notwithstanding, considering the strenuous commitments, and more particularly gauging from the optimism and euphoria that greeted the inception of decentralization and the expectations therein, leaves much to be desired as Ghana is still trying to configure decentralization (Asante and Debrah, 2019).

Broadly speaking, with weak structures, delayed fiscal transfers and administrative opacity culminating in dissipating gains, the combined effects of these situations have consequently precipitated trust and transparency deficits in local people (Agyemang-Duah et al., 2018; Asante and Debrah, 2019; Bawole, 2017) who constitute the kernel

of the decentralization process. These observations have fuelled anecdotal narratives and revolving around local people's apathy and indifference in, and towards, local governance. In this light, social discourses, particularly on radio, have also been overwhelmed with reports of how the dearth of openness in local governance is gradually engendering a population-wide local people's confidence and trust in the local governance process. In view of this, questions abound whether trust and transparency really matter in decentralization. To date, apart from the speculations, to the best of the knowledge of the authors, no study has provided an empirical answer, more especially in the Ghanaian context.

Therefore, this study seeks to contribute to the literature by exploring the salience of decentralization on participation, taking into cognizance trust and transparency. The study proposes a theoretical model. The quantitative method was employed for the study which was carried out in Accra, Kumasi, Tema and Tamale. The remaining parts of the paper are structured as follows: the 'literature review' section discourses on study-related works. The next section covers 'structure of local government in Ghana'. Theory and hypotheses are covered under 'theoretical undergirds'. Study methods are captured under 'methodology'. Results are captured under 'data analysis and results'. Extensive discussion is presented under 'discussion of findings'. Study implications are captured under 'implications. The study concludes by delineating 'limitations and future research directions'.

Literature review

The widespread implementation of decentralization, across the length and breadth of developing countries around Latin America, Asia and Africa, was against the conviction that decentralization is gravid with enormous potentials to drive development and widen the socio-political space. Ostensibly, this created a fascination among countries and development actors alike to drive and propagate the new development framework. Led by the World Bank, a clarion call was made to nations to put in place measures targeted at offering voices and participatory spaces to the probable left out groups within the sphere of local governance – particularly the local people (Blair et al., 2000).

The much-touted notion of decentralization propelling participation appears to be one entwined in theory and as such not practical (Antwi-Boasiako, 2010; Ayee, 2008; Yeboah-Asiamah, 2016). This seems to suggest that the realization of participation via decentralization also appears relative, as the situation is likely to differ with respect to various areas and jurisdictions. The acclaimed potency of decentralization, as a countervailing mechanism to centralization and retrogression, may have engendered the flurry of studies that seeks to extensively explore its impacts and determinants. In identifying these factors, Inkoom (2011) and Bawole (2017) identify a paucity of certain indispensable elements including but not limited to fiscal soundness and local people's interest in local governance.

Another district-wide study by Mohammed (2016) also identifies structural deficiencies and concludes on the impoverished state of affairs brought about by structural deficiencies and inefficiencies primarily bordering on wavering trust and transparency in local governance affairs. In the same light, these studies highlight how decentralization has rather given way for exclusion and alienation. At this point, it becomes crystal clear that whereas decentralization is touted an enhancer of participation, trust and transparency are also essential ingredients. Against the backdrop of the observations from prior qualitative studies brought together, our study seeks to deviate from the largely ‘qualitative and speculative’ threshold to offer an empirical basis to explore the relevance of decentralization to participation, as well as trust and transparency.

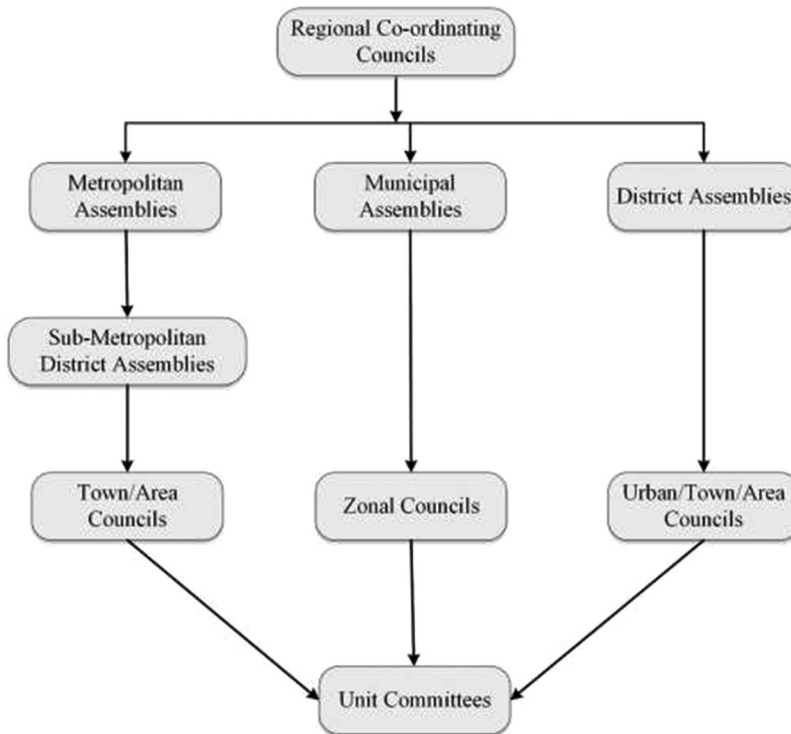
Structure of Ghana’s decentralization system

Ghana’s local governance structure is traceable to the colonial period; thus, during the pre-independence era when the British colonial administrators administered the native people via an indirect rule system. Governance under this system was based on native administrative structures foundationed on a chieftaincy traditional system, led largely by monarchs (thus chiefs, queens and other people of royal extractions). Local governance system, since its inception from that time, has undergone rapid and phenomenal transitions as evidenced in the passage of the PNDC Local Government Law 207 and other legislative instruments (L.I) including, but not limited to L.I 1589.

The most crucial of all these transitions lays in the passage of the 1992 constitution of Ghana, which set the tone for Ghana’s democracy, and particularly offered firmer legs to decentralization. This is ingrained in the designation of Chapter 20, Article 240 of the constitution to decentralization and local governance practice. As captured under [Figure 1](#), this constitutional arrangement created a tripod local government structure composed of regional, district and sub-districts. These structured are efficiently linked up to a superordinate national-level structure composed of 10 regional councils (which fall under the helmsmanship of the President and Parliament – at the upper echelons, as well as Ministries, Departments and Agencies – who operate in concerted conjunction with the finance ministry and the MMDAs), 170 district assemblies (MMDAs), over 3000 urban, town and zonal councils complemented with 16,000 unit committee structures which constitute the lowest level of the decentralization structure (refer to [Figure 1](#)).

The regional councils are headed by the regional coordinating councils chaired by the regional minister who is an appointee of the president. The coordinating councils are composed of the regional ministers and deputies, presiding members and district chief executives of the various districts, as well as two representatives from the regional house of chiefs. The district assemblies are composed of metropolitan (towns with over a population of 250,000) and municipal (areas with a

Figure 1: Local government structure in Ghana



population over 95,000). The district levels are for smaller areas. The council members for district assemblies vary from smaller to bigger areas – hence subject to area population.

Nonetheless, it ranges between 20 and 130 (Inkoom, 2011). In composition, whereas the Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies are composed of 70% members elected via universal adult suffrage, 30% constitute nominees of the executive president (Ayee, 2013). The MMDAs are helmed by chief executives whose appointments are subject to the confirmation of two-thirds (2/3) majority of the assembly persons. The sub-district levels operate at tier levels made up of sub-metropolitan, urban and zonal and town councils. In essence, these structures are to enhance and further deepen citizen participation in decision-making, planning, execution and monitoring of local governance (Gyimah-Boadi, 2009).

Theoretical undergirds of the study

Decentralization is acclaimed as a development policy vehicle with enormous potentials to forge progress while opening up a germane space for people's development and political participation in the decision-making process. The multi-pronged development-oriented concept has been variously conceptualized by a myriad of academics

and authorities (Asante and Debrah, 2019; Dickovick and Riedl, 2014; Wunsch, 2014). Decentralization is used in reference to the ceding of planning, decision-making and resource allocation and/or administrative powers from the central government to field authorities (Rondinelli and Cheema, 1983). Agyemang-Duah et al. (2018) conceptualize the concept as entailing the granting of decision-making powers from superordinate to a subordinate body. In the views of Wunsch (2014), Englebert and Mungongo (2016) and Asante and Debrah (2019), decentralization connotes the transfer of resources and responsibilities from a central authority to corporate and/or statutory autonomous local government entities. These conceptions taken together imply either a vertical or horizontal transfer of power, functions and resources from top administrative structures to other structures at the bottom. This underscores decentralization as machinery with the potency to integrate various entities into a well-coordinated homogenous administrative framework.

Decentralization comes in the three forms: political, administrative and fiscal. Political decentralization refers to the transfer of power from a higher governmental authority to a lower governmental or non-governmental body. Administrative decentralization, on the other hand, involves the distribution of powers to subordinate bodies for administrative works not only limited to human resource management. Fiscal decentralization refers to the allocation of powers and functions from a higher body to a lesser body for financial functions such as revenue generation, mobilization and control (Adjei-Bamfo et al., 2018; Tang and Huhe, 2016; Yin and Lucas, 1973). From the foregoing discourse, it is apparent that the proximate rationale underpinning decentralization rests on the notion of forging all-inclusive governance that inures to the development needs of the local people while making them integral and indispensable stakeholders of the governance process.

Agyemang-Duah et al. (2018) reiterate the indispensability of people's participation in the local governance process. In this regard, Tosun (2000) and Mohammed (2016) contend in unison that the efficiency and results-orientedness of decentralization largely rests on local people's inherent right to be informed on issues relating to their collective affairs and welfare. Nonetheless, Tosun et al. (2016) appears to highlight the malnourished and largely deficient state of people's participation in local governance across African polities. A diagnosis of the unappealing situation by Mohammed (2016) and Agyemang-Duah et al. (2018) attributes the malaise to local people's perceived peripheral role in the local governance process.

Against this backdrop, local people feel sidelined, and as such not integral components of the ruling process. Porumbescu (2017) on the other hand also identifies the dearth of transparency in local governance as a recipe for local people's indifference towards local governance and institutions. Taking that decentralization is engineered to enhance participatory governance, it is clear that the combined effects of these situation will obviously not only exert negative consequences on the purposes for which it was incepted, but also impair the benefits therein as well. Among other things, prior qualitative studies have principally underscored the bane of the

deficiencies in decentralization to the dearth of trust and transparency (Adjei-Bamfo et al., 2018; Osei-Kojo and Bawole, 2018; Yeboah and Andrew, 2020). These observations have provided the motivation to explore the salience of these factors on decentralization and local people's participation.

Hypotheses' development

The study puts forward nine (9) hypotheses out of which six (6) signify causal relationships with the other three (3) seeking to test the mediating salience of 'trust' and 'transparency' on the relationship between 'decentralization' and local people's 'participation' in local governance. The ensuing discourse covers the proposed hypotheses of the study.

Decentralization

The elementary rationale, informing the inception and subsequent implementation of local government across various polities, around the world is anchored on the need to grant citizens sufficient space to take central stakeholder roles in the decision-making process of their own affairs. The challenge in realizing an effective and efficient government in low-, middle- and high-income countries has essentially spurred experimentations with diverse governance concepts, including decentralization (Rondinelli and Cheema, 1983). Actually, decentralization is meant to break the menacing effects that come with the centralization of power and functions in a single authority. In this respect, while the ceding of power to other bodies helps in expediting the decision-making process and entrenching effectiveness and efficiency in governance, it empowers the local people to participate in governance. Proponents have hailed the concept as a catalyst for participation (Bardhan and Mookherjee, 2006; Faguet, 1997). In view of this contention, the study asserts the following:

HI. Decentralization significantly enhances local people's participation in local governance.

Furthermore, decentralization positively impacts and forges local people's participation, which has the tendency to ensure checks and balances (thus transparency) (Cheema, 2010). This suggests that the efficiency of local governance on people's participation does not occur in a vacuum; but rather to some extent, it is anchored on the prevalence and depth transparency (Beshi and Kaur, 2020). The dearth of transparency in governance has precipitated the overthrow of government systems. These situations have ensuingly sapped citizens of trust and confidence in government and its ancillary structures (Gordon, 2000). Openness in decentralized governance can thus be employed as a conduit to gain people's confidence. More so, the observation of transparency in decentralized governance improves local people's trust in the governance

process to such an extent that local people feel proud to associate themselves with the process as stakeholders. It is instructive to note that an appreciation in transparency will correspondingly positively impact decentralization and trust. Against the backdrop of the pertinence of transparency to decentralization and trust, the study puts forward the following:

H2. Decentralization has a significant relationship with transparency, such that an appreciation in transparency will promote decentralization.

H3. There is a significant relationship between decentralization and trust such that an appreciation in local people's trust in decentralized structures promotes decentralization.

Transparency

Transparency, as an intrinsic component of anything with significant bearing on development and good governance, appears to have been in vogue since the pursuit of the institutional reform policies in developing countries in the 1980s led by the World Bank. Put simply, local government structures' compliance with mechanism meant to communicate undertakings to relevant stakeholders, principally including the local people, aids in forging strong population-wide intention among the local people to participate in the governance process (Cheema, 2010; Katsiaouni, 2003; Steiner, 2007). The observation of transparency tenets, in addition to accountability, has the tendency to increase local people's appreciation of decentralized development institutions, thereby helping to strengthen trust in, and towards, government (Beshi and Kaur, 2020). In the light of the above discourse, we put forward the following hypotheses:

H4. Transparency in decentralization has a positive impact on local people's participation in local governance.

H5. Transparency has a positive impact on local people's trust in local governance.

Trust

Trust is conceptualized as a hazy and multidimensional construct without a precise meaning. As a consequence, there has been panoply of interpretations of the concept (Beshi and Kaur, 2020). Thomas (1998) identifies trust as a psychological construct based on a set of beliefs rather than expectation. Regardless of the variations, the underpinnings of the concept converge around the notion of the willingness to absorb risk anchored on positive anticipation in the behaviour of a trustee (Beshi and Kaur, 2020; Grimmelikhuijsen et al., 2013; Tschannen-Moran and Hoy, 2000). In the views of Cheema (2010), for instance, trust refers to trustee citizens' expectation (as in grassroots' institutions interaction with local people and delivery of relevant

resources for local development) of effective and efficient service delivery from government and its ancillary structures. To this end, trust in local governance, as replicated in the context of this study, refers to the local people's expectation of local institutions to deliver on their statutory mandate as development agents. Trust in government, including local government, is deemed a *sine qua non* for institutional effectiveness and competitiveness (Beshi & Kaur, 2020). In essence, the degree of trust between citizens and state institutions dovetails into determining the sort of interaction between these two entities. More so, it is reasonable to suggest that local people's trust in decentralized structures will likely whip up the former's interest in participation. Therefore, trust could be said to be the super glue that inextricably bonds these indispensable parties in a union of mutual benefit. The significance of transparency in propelling trust in governance is confirmed by (Park and Blenkinsopp, 2011; Porumbescu, 2016). In the light of the local development roles that local government agencies perform, the study speculates that local people's trust may be improved when public goods like water, electricity, hospitals etc. are sufficiently and adequately provided for, while measures are put in place to strengthen fairness, clarity and participation (OECD, 2017). Any results contrary to these may dampen confidence and trust and further create a negative impression about local government structures among local populations. In view of the foregoing discourse, we hypothesize the following:

H6. Trust exerts a significant impact on local people's participation.

H8. Trust has a significant effect on the relationship between decentralization and local people's participation.

At this point, it is important to reiterate that trust is not only sufficient to drive local government efficiency and effectiveness as well as local people's participation. Another necessary ingredient to strengthen trust is transparency which has recently been proposed as a medicine to cure the public sector institution malaise. The imperativeness of observing transparency in corporate governance has gained prominence – more particularly at a time that various countries (especially those of developing countries' extraction) are exerting backbreaking efforts to reform and/or restructure public sector institutions. It is, therefore, not surprising that public sector openness in their engagement with relevant stakeholders including local people has recently been touted as cardinal to stakeholder cooperation and participation (Adiputra et al., 2018; Musa et al., 2015; OECD, 2017). Redford (1969) identifies transparency as a prerequisite for stakeholder participation in governance settings. In asserting the centrality of transparency to governance, Rourke (1960) asserts that 'nothing could be more axiomatic for a democracy than exposing the government and the government process to criticism and scrutiny'. Government and/or local transparency refer to the clarity in government undertakings. It also refers to the ability to unravel

government’s internal engagements. The touted efficacy of transparency to corporate governance has provided the impetus to further explore its salience within the context of local governance. From the foregoing, we propose the following:

H7. Transparency has a significant mediating impact on the relationship between decentralization and local people’s participation.

H9. Transparency and trust exert a significant mediating effect on the relationship between decentralization and local people’s participation in local governance.

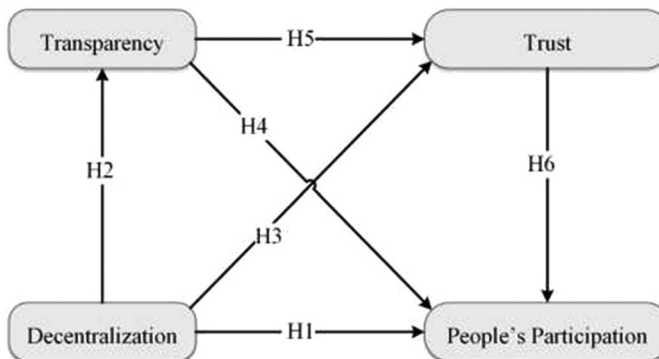
From the foregoing discussion and arguments, the proposed model for the research is presented in [Figure 2](#).

Methodology

Settings, sample and data collection

Drawing data informed the use of a cross-sectional survey approach for data collection starting from 10 December 2019 to 30 March 2020. As Ghana is a large country, the study strategically selected Accra, Kumasi, Tema and Tamale for the study. The selection of these areas was primarily because of their heterogeneous and cosmopolitan population characteristics. Against the backdrop of the recommendation of Songsore (2003) and Agyei-Mensah and Owusu (2010), the study areas were classified into low-, middle- and high-income residential areas. While people in the low residential areas are characterized by congestion, poor road networks, slum and a dearth of basic social amenities, those in the middle residential areas enjoy higher standards of living with less congestion and restricted use of public goods such as washrooms and water etc., compared with the former. Residents in the high areas have higher socio-economic backgrounds, no congestion and have good roads. Considering the need to obtain representativeness, the study randomly selected participants from these areas. The population sample represented heterogeneous populations with distinct demographic

Figure 2: Proposed research model



features (i.e. age, gender, education etc.) (Table 1). In determining the sample size, considering Hair et al. (2010) and Kline (2010) recommendation of 200 and 300 as ideal for SEM-based analysis, a minimum sample of 400 was set by assuming a 5% sampling error, with 95% confidence interval and another population proportion of 50%.

Nonetheless, the sample size was increased to enhance a more general replication and inferences from a larger study population. As such, the study distributed 600 printed questionnaires. To enhance the response rate, the study distributed souvenirs such as USB flash drives, key holders and other stationeries. Participation in the study was voluntary. In all, 585 useable questionnaires were retrieved. After reviewing and sorting questionnaires with incomplete responses, 561 questionnaires remained representing 96% response rate. Data were drawn using a structured questionnaire (Appendix). There was no on-going political, economic or societal phenomenon that may have affected the data collection process and response from participants. Given the threat of common method bias (CMB) to mono methodological studies, research items and their characteristic effect, the study considered CMB (Zhu et al.,

Characteristics	Frequency (<i>N</i>)	Percentage (%)
<i>Gender</i>		
Male	298	51.5
Female	272	48.5
<i>Age</i>		
18–25	99	17.6
26–35	129	23.0
36–45	122	21.7
46–55	132	23.5
55+	79	14.1
<i>Level of education</i>		
Primary	102	18.2
Secondary	96	17.1
Tertiary and above	273	48.7
No formal education	90	16.0
<i>Number of years stayed in the area</i>		
<2	92	16.4
3–5	121	21.6
6–10	142	25.3
11–15	83	14.8
15+	123	21.9
<i>Area of stay</i>		
Metropolitan	222	39.6
Municipal	159	28.3
District	180	32.1

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of respondents (*N*=561)

2013). And during data collection, there was no on-going activity that could have affected respondents and influenced response. The results revealed that CMB might not threaten the result outcome. As such, prior to conducting the structural analysis, Harman's one factor test was carried out (Harman, 1976). Test outcome revealed a value of 39.05 which is <50.0, indicating that CMB was not a problem (Harman, 1976).

Scale development and pre-testing

Questionnaire with measurement items designed for the study was piloted. Essentially, piloting was to enhance restructuring, clarity and rewording of the sentence to drive effective communication and understanding. Piloting was also meant to improve instrument quality while enhancing content validity. Piloting involved two groups: group of academics and decentralization practitioners with subject experience and knowledge. The second group was composed of local people in the study areas. Interaction with the first group took the form of focus group discussion which necessitated the refinement of the questionnaire by way of rewording, reframing and deletion of some questions. The next interaction with the second group was in the form of a face-to-face interview with local people. Feedback from this engagement led to further refinement of the research questions which enhanced study participants' understanding within the decentralization and local governance context.

Measurement of constructs

Study items making up the proposed study model were four (4) constructs in all. Study items were all measured with multiple scale items adapted from prior studies which had established their validity and reliability. Items were measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). 'Transparency' (3 items), 'Trust' (4 items), 'decentralization' (5 items) and 'participation' (4 items) were all measured with variable items adapted from (Beshi and Kaur, 2020), and further refined to suit the study context. Measurements are captured in Appendix.

Data analysis method

Considering the quantitative nature of the study and the proposed research framework, the structural equation modelling technique was employed to verify the research model and evaluate the respective relationship paths among constructs. The SEM technique is effective in testing these relationships (Chin, 1998). The preference for SEM was hinged on its; (a) potency to simultaneously evaluate a series of direct and indirect relationship within a model; (b) strength to examine relationships between latent and observed variables; (c) capacity to examine latent variables utilizing a cluster of indicators while testing their hypothesis at construct levels; (d) the effectiveness to provide

precise measurements by modelling random errors in observed variables (Arkorful et al., 2020; Hair et al., 2010). In conducting data analysis, the Analysis of Moment of Structures (AMOS) and Statistical Package for Social Scientists software package version 24.0 were utilized. The SEM analysis entails two distinct, yet significantly interrelated models; thus, the measurement and structural model (Anderson and Gerbing, 1988). Whereas the measurement model was employed to test the relationships between latent variables and their respective corresponding items, the structural model on the other hand was used to evaluate relationships between constructs. In the ensuing section, we present data analysis detailing the estimates of measurement and assessment of construct reliability and validity. Also, results of the structural model, indicating relationships among hypothesized constructs, are presented.

Data analysis and results

Measurement model analysis

Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was performed to assess values of factor loadings. Results revealed scores to be greater than the minimum threshold of 0.70.

From Tables 2 and 3, the measurement model tests, composed of validity (AVE) and reliability (Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability) tests, were carried out and they exceeded the minimum threshold of 0.50 and 0.70, respectively (Fornell and Larcker, 1981; Hair et al., 2010; Wu, 2010).

These represent a good convergent validity and reliability of study constructs. In terms of discriminant validity, the criterion of Fornell and Larcker (1981) (Table 4) and the Heterotrait–Monotrait ratio (HTMT) (Table 5) were considered. In view of this, factor correlations between pair of latent variables should not be below the AVE square root via the factor correlation matrix (Table 4)

AVE values for the respective variables, diagonally presented in bold fonts (Table 4), indicate that variables are greater than correlation for any pair of variables. HTMT was simultaneously, albeit, complementarily checked to take care of the shortfalls inherent in the Fornell and Larcker (1981) criterion as identified by Garson (2016), and ably supported by Henseler et al. (2015). An appropriate and suitable Heterotrait correlation should be lesser than the Monotrait correlations. The proposed ideal HTMT, per the recommended criterion of Henseler et al. (2015) should be below

Constructs	Mean	Standard deviation	Cronbach's alpha (α)
Decentralization (DEC)	4.228	0.662	0.889
Participation (PAT)	4.233	0.637	0.864
Transparency (TRA)	3.758	0.787	0.857
Trust (TR)	3.744	0.687	0.805

Table 2: Descriptive statistics of items (N=561)

Measure	Factor loadings	Composite reliability	Average variance extracted
Decentralization (DEC)			
DEC1	0.866		
DEC2	0.793	0.891	0.621
DEC3	0.919		
DEC4	0.841		
DEC5	0.721		
Participation (PAT)			
PAT1	0.875	0.866	0.620
PAT2	0.901		
PAT3	0.852		
PAT4	0.703		
Transparency (TRA)			
TRA1	0.885	0.861	0.673
TRA2	0.844		
TRA3	0.914		
Trust(TR)			
TR1	0.762		
TR2	0.875	0.807	0.512
TR3	0.759		
TR4	0.738		

Table 3: Results of loadings, composite reliability and AVE of constructs

0.90. In a more stringent situation, Kline (2010) recommends a cut-off point of 0.85 as the benchmark for establishing and grounding discriminant validity. Taken together, we can conclude that the results of measurement model analysis confirm the adequacy of the convergent validity, reliability and discriminant validity accordingly.

Measurement and structural model evaluation

The study used AMOS to evaluate goodness of fit of the measurement and structural model. To this end, the significance paths of the various hypotheses were tested as well. The panoply of indices measured that include parsimonious comparative fit

Construct	R^2	DEC	PAT	TRA	TR
DEC		0.873			
PAT	0.421	0.447**	0.911		
TRA	0.143	0.328**	0.403**	0.912	
TR	0.271	0.377**	0.475**	0.358**	0.908

Table 4: Fornell–Larcker criterion

Construct	DEG	PAT	TRA	TR
DEC				
PAT	0.569			
TRA	0.475	0.430		
TR	0.511	0.444	0.378	

Table 5: Heterotrait–monotrait ratio (HTMT)

index; normed fit index; goodness-of-fit index; degree of freedom and root mean square error of approximation were all employed to evaluate the overall fitness of the model. These indices indicate the diverse categories of model fitness and their respective levels of acceptance fit, as captured in Table 6. Table 6 confirms results to have good fit consistent with the recommended threshold of Wu (2010). In this regard, the proposed study model finds credence in respect of the prior accepted study benchmarks of (Arkorful et al., 2020; Elkaseh et al., 2016; Miles and Shevlin, 2007).

Hypotheses testing and effects

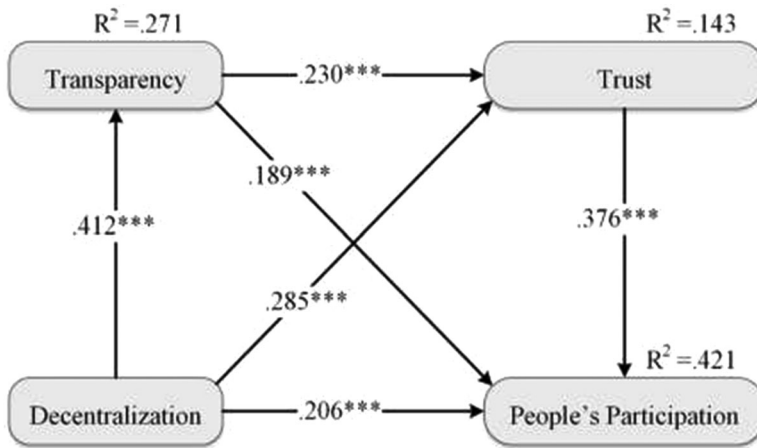
The proposed hypotheses were tested after signifying the validity of measurement model (Figure 2). As shown in Figure 3, results of path analysis indicate that ‘decentralization’ has a significant positive relationship with ‘participation’ ($\beta = 0.206^{***}, t = 4.875, p < .001$). Moreover, ‘decentralization’ was also revealed to have a significant positive relationship with ‘transparency’ ($\beta = 0.412^{***}, t = 8.001, p < .001$). Furthermore, study results revealed a significant relationship between ‘decentralization’ and ‘trust’ ($\beta = 0.285^{***}, t = 6.447, p < .001$). Similarly, ‘transparency’ was also revealed to significantly relate to ‘participation’ ($\beta = 0.189^{***}, t = 4.849, p < .001$). Moreover, ‘transparency’ was revealed to positively relate to ‘trust’ ($\beta = 0.376^{***}, t = 6.593, p < .001$). ‘Trust’ was further revealed to have a significant relationship

Measurements	Indices	Criterion	Results	
			Structural model	Measurement
Absolute fit measures	AGFI	>0.80	0.903	0.903
	GFI	>0.90	0.930	0.930
	RMSEA	<0.08	0.066	0.066
Incremental fit measures	NFI	>0.90	0.929	0.929
	CFI	>0.90	0.948	0.948
	IFI	>0.90	0.948	0.948
	CMIN/DF	<5.00	3.473	3.473

Table 6: Model fit measures

Note: AGFI, adjusted goodness-of-fit index; GFI, goodness-of-fit index; RMSEA, root mean square error of approximation; NFI, normed fit index; CFI, comparative fit index.

Figure 3: Validated research model. Note: $p < .001^{*}$**



with ‘participation’ ($\beta = 0.376^{***}$, $t = 6.593$, $p < .001$). These results confirmed proposed study hypotheses 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 (Table 7).

In order to test the mediation salience of trust; transparency; trust and transparency on the relationship between ‘decentralization’ and ‘participation’, we conducted a 95% confidence interval with 5000 bootstrap samples, as recommended by Hayes (2017). The absence of zero between the lower and upper level bootstrap confidence interval indicates a significant relationship, as shown in Table 8. ‘Transparency’ was revealed to mediate between ‘decentralization’ and ‘participation’. Trust was confirmed to also mediate between ‘decentralization’ and ‘participation’. And finally, test of overall mediation between study constructs confirmed the significant mediating effect between variables (Table 8).

Moreover, R^2 values for participation, trust and transparency were also checked. Actually, the values of R^2 present an evaluation of the components of variance of endogenous variables explained by the structural model. This further indicates the quality, suitability and appropriateness of the model (Ringle et al., 2014). R^2 values range from small (2%), medium (13%) and large (26%) (Cohen, 1988). Results of

Causal relations	Path coefficients	T statistics	Hypothesis	Result
DEC → PAT	0.206***	4.875	H1	Supported
DAG → TRA	0.412***	8.001	H2	Supported
DEC → TR	0.285***	6.447	H3	Supported
TRA → PAT	0.189***	4.849	H4	Supported
TRA → TR	0.230***	5.621	H5	Supported
TR → PAT	0.376***	6.593	H6	Supported

Table 7: Values of path coefficients and hypotheses testing

Path	Estimate	95% bootstrapping		Hypothesis	Result
		LLCI	ULCI		
DEC → TRA → PAT	0.091	0.056	0.134	H7	Supported
DEC → TR → PAT	0.130	0.094	0.168	H8	Supported
DEC → TRA → TR → PAT	0.025	0.014	0.039	H9	Supported

Table 8: Specific indirect effect

Note: LLCI, lower level confidence interval; ULCI, upper level confidence interval.

R^2 indicate the following: participation ($R^2=0.421$), transparency ($R^2=0.143$) and trust ($R^2=0.271$). Thus, local people’s participation was revealed to have recorded the largest variance followed by trust, and finally, transparency.

Discussion of findings

Proposing a four-construct model, composed of nine hypotheses, the present study put forward a model anchored on decentralization to investigate decentralization and local people’s participation in Ghana’s local governance. The study makes interesting significant findings which have the potential to help shape and reform decentralization in developing countries in particular and other jurisdictions around the world in general. Relative to the study demographics, males were 298 (51.5%) and females were 272 (48.5). The significant dominance of males in the study could be explained in the light of reported low interest and apathy of females in local governance politics in Ghana, as reported by Odame (2010). Therefore, it is not surprising that discourses on affirmative action and women empowerment have recently become topical. In terms of age distribution, respondents between the ages of 18–25 were 99 (17.6). Those between 26 and 35 were 129 (23.0); between 36 and 45 were 122 (21.7); between 46 and 55 were 132 (23.5) and finally those aged 55 and above were 79 (14.1). At the educational level, respondents with primary education were 102 (18.2); secondary were 96 (17.1%); tertiary and above were 273 (48.7) and those without formal education were 90 (16.0). Data also revealed respondents, who have stayed in the study areas for a period of between 6 and 10 years, were dominant. And in terms of spatial distribution, respondents from the Metropolitan areas were composed of 222, making up 39.6% of the respondents. Whereas respondents from the municipalities were 159 (28.3%), those from the districts were made up of 180 (32.1%).

Besides, empirical analysis of data confirmed a significant relationship between decentralization and people participation. This outcome is in consonance with proposed hypothesis 1. A plausible reason for this outcome could be explained in the light of decentralization helping to offset deficits in the people’s alienation from central government structures. In another dimension, the pertinence of

decentralization to enhancing participation could be understood when appreciated on the basis of how decentralization helps in extending government's outreach decision-making system to the people. In this regard, awareness is fostered, based on which local people could develop a sense efficacy with the hope that decision-making will likely respond to local needs. Local people's awareness of proximity to government structures could heighten participation since they may feel or experience an appreciation in their chances of influencing policies and taking part in decisions bordering on their general welfare.

Also, in agreement with proposed hypothesis 2, our study results further confirmed a significant relationship between decentralization and transparency to the extent that the prevailing levels of transparency in decentralization enhance decentralization practice. This could imply that local people's perceived sense of openness in local governance could significantly improve their trust in local governance and also encourage participation as well. Transparency and open governance, as a mechanism to improve local governance, is given credence by da Cruz et al. (2016). At this juncture, it could be posited that the more local state institutions open up to citizens, the more confidence local people develop in local institutions. On this score, local institutions may consider adhering to accountability and other reporting mechanisms as a way to improve transparency (Beshi and Kaur, 2020; Cheema and Popovski, 2010; Veal et al., 2011).

Moreover, empirical study results confirmed a significant relationship between decentralization and trust with respect to the fact that an elevation in the level of people's trust may correspondingly inform a rise in people's confidence regarding decentralization. This outcome resonates with the study's proposed hypothesis 3. The pertinence of trust to decentralization is echoed by Lighthart and van Oudheusden (2015) and Porumbescu (2017). This outcome makes it overarching for local structures to exert efforts targeted at increasing trust. At this point, in view of this finding, it is worthy to note that local people's exhibition of good faith and confidence in local structures will be determined by the amount of trust reposed in the latter. Therefore, it behoves local government structures to remain as open and cooperative with local people as possible. Not ending there, in view of the high regard that local people assign to local traditional chieftaincy institutions, it is important that local government institutions establish a strong relationship with them – as a way to gain trust and confidence from the local people.

Furthermore, results of the study confirmed transparency as a significant correlate of participation. In the same breadth, transparency was also revealed to significantly relate to trust. Similarly, trust was also confirmed to have a significant effect on participation. These results corroborate the study's hypotheses 4, 5 and 6. These findings considered together could suggest that people's participation in local government cannot be isolated from trust. In much the same way, local people's level of trust in local government entities cannot be divorced from their perceived sense of openness in local governance. As such, it could be said that the dearth of trust and transparency

in local governance could be a recipe for institutional ineffectiveness, inefficiency and irresponsiveness. In another perspective, the absence of trust and transparency in decentralization may impair people's participation. Efficiently responding to these situations, it is important that local government institutions administer and govern in a fair manner that provide answers to local peoples nagging questions and responding to their development needs as well. Our outcome is reconcilable with Diaz-Serrano and Rodríguez-Pose (2015), Douglas and Meijer (2016), Porumbescu (2017) and Grimmelikhuijsen et al. (2017).

Besides, per the outcome of hypothesis 7, transparency was revealed to have a mediating effect on the relationship between decentralization and participation. In much the same breadth, study results relating to proposed hypothesis 8 indicated the significant mediating effect of trust on the relationship between decentralization and participation. These study outcomes underscore the relevance transparency and trust as sufficient and efficacious facilitators of decentralization and participation local governance. By this outcome, transparency and trust could be said to be a reliable super structure on which decentralization and participation subsist.

Moreover, given the pertinence of these variables, it could also be generalized that the sustainable pathway for government and other development actors to sustain decentralization is to enhance and deepen the recognition for transparency and trust. In testing the direct and indirect mediating effect within the proposed study model, both effects were established as significant, thereby confirming hypothesis 9. This interesting outcome could be feasible, given the levels of interaction between the variables. These seminal empirical study findings illuminate on the much-often discounted underpinnings of decentralization and participation.

Thus, much as the study demonstrates the salience of decentralization to participation or participatory governance, it points out trust and transparency as indispensable prerequisites to the governance process. On this note, for government and its supportive local government institutions to earn local people's confidence and cooperation, there is the need to initiate measures to work hand in hand with the local people. Not ending there, there is also the need to create accountable, transparent and responsive government structures. The study findings provide guidelines and sufficient pointers for incepting, reforming and consolidating decentralization around the world. These findings could help identify and counter shortcomings inherent in decentralization systems.

Implications of the study

The study findings have relevant theoretical and practical implications. Findings from the study confirm decentralization as a concept gravid with enormous development-oriented prospects capable of pushing the frontiers of mass participation when trust and transparency are enabled. Moreover, the study findings also pose substantial practical implications for governance, government and its affiliate structures across the

world. Given the dearth of an empirical study on decentralization in developing countries with burgeoning democracies, more especially Ghana, our study comes as timely in offering pointers for incepting and implementing efficacious result-oriented models of decentralization around the world. For practical purposes, our study proposes government structures to place premium on entrenching trust and transparency in governance – all as part of a much broader and stronger concerted efforts to deepen decentralization.

Conclusion, limitations and future research direction

Entrenching trust and transparency in local governance is very essential in fostering people's participation in the decentralization process. Nonetheless, extant research on decentralization has largely employed qualitative methods to explore issues. This research constitutes an initial attempt to chart an empirical path in the research area. This study developed and proposed a theoretical model anchored on decentralization variables to investigate the salience of trust and transparency in forging participation in local governance. Empirical analysis of data using the structural equation modelling technique confirmed the usefulness of the proposed model, as well as the pertinence of trust and transparency in local governance.

Although the study conducted a comprehensive research, limitations do exist which need to be delineated to guide and streamline policy, generalization and the conduct of future research. Firstly, data for the study were elicited from sampled regions, which may restrain replicability of results herein. Although these regions share common characteristics, there are the tendencies for subtle differences to exist. The findings may be applicable in certain situations, and may not in others. On this threshold, much as we call for the exercise of caution in the generalization of the study findings, we entreat future studies to employ trend data to investigate the subject matter. The study also strongly recommends future studies to draw data from more countries for further research. The study recommends future studies to concentrate on specific areas as study areas for further exploration of the theme under consideration. The study is quantitative. Considering the advantage of mixed studies in gathering in-depth data, we recommend such methods for future studies. The next study, to be commissioned after this, will focus on addressing the limitations highlighted. These limitations, however, do not invalidate the research outcome.

Compliance with ethical standards

Conflict of interests: The authors declare no potential conflict of interest with respect to the research, authorship and/or publication of this article.

Informed consent: Informed consent was sought from all individual participants included in the study.

Ethical approval: All procedures performed in this study were reconcilable with the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee and the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards.

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Appendix: Constructs and measurement items

Constructs	Measurement items	Sources
Transparency	City administration plans and programmes are executed transparently	Beshi and Kaur (2020)
	The administrative processes are transparently disclosed With sufficient information disclosed, residents are able to track progress and overall administration	
Trust	City management authorities are capable of acting effectively in our interest	Beshi and Kaur (2020)
	City management authorities are sincere in their duties	
	City management authorities are sincere in their honest in their duties	
Participation	City management authorities are capable	Beshi and Kaur (2020)
	City management authorities are alert to public opinion	
	City management authorities recognize public input in decision-making	
	City management authorities respond to public inquiries and requests	
Decentralization	City management authorities promote residents' involvement in the governance process	Beshi and Kaur (2020)
	City management authority provides space for participation in the decision-making process	
	City management authorities maintain feedback and communication with the residents	
	City management authorities recognize responsibility towards the community and residents	
	City management authorities make efforts to promote responsiveness to local needs	
	City management authorities represent residents' interest	