# The Role of Political Parties at the Local Government Level

## A Reflection on South Africa at the time of the Policy Process of Review on Decentralisation

Lara Natalini

The ongoing review of decentralisation in South Africa will definitely affect political parties' legitimisation mechanisms at the local level. For this reason, one may expect the same actors, together with civil society organisations (CSOs), to be actively involved in the policy process of review. Their apparent low involvement in this process is taken as this policy brief's starting point, which is aimed at focusing on the role of political parties in local governments.[1] The article also uses references in the case of Ghana to highlight the main challenges for local governments in South Africa, and suggests critical perspectives for further studies.

## Introduction

At the time of writing this policy brief, South Africa is undergoing a reshaping of the political arena, which seems a necessary and healthy process considering the African National Congress (ANC) legitimisation crisis.[2]

The process of consultation on the reform of decentralisation is a chance for all citizens to participate in the shaping of the level of government that most influences their everyday life. It is a crucial moment for local politics and governance to act and show its effectiveness, in particular for opposition parties to play their role of fostering representation and participation in such a relevant process.

Every day the ANC legitimisation is indeed being played at the local level. Decentralisation is ultimately for the government not only the channel to address inequalities and redistribute resources, but also the main instrument to show its capacity of conveying the voices of all South Africans and answer their different needs.

Another interesting aspect to be noted is that South Africa is the only case in Africa where opposition parties happen to control some of the local governments. This aspect of the process embodies undeniable opportunities and challenges

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for representation and participation at the local level, especially for marginal groups. However, it is a popular opinion that opposition political parties' representatives at the local level do not have any contact with the electorate, and are not concerned about and involved in what goes on at the grassroots.

On the basis of such considerations, and in order to highlight the challenges that the process of decentralisation is facing in the country, it is useful to consider also another African decentralisation model, that of Ghana, which significantly differs from South Africa in one of the core characteristics outlined. As a matter of fact, local elections in Ghana are held on a non-partisan basis. The case of Ghana will be used here to reflect on the meaning of having or not having a partisan local arena, and the way it can affect representation and participation, the level of local governments' autonomy from the centre, and service delivery performances.[3]

## Background

'Democratic decentralisation' is defined as a process which involves the transfer of powers to democratically elected local authorities with fiscal autonomy. 'Fiscal decentralisation' refers to the transfer of financial resources and powers to raise levies from the centre to local governments, together with the recognition of autonomy on local governments' budget decisions. However, the impact of 'deconcentration,' which entails the transfer of workload from the central government head offices to regional branches having limited discretion, will also be considered.[4]

Moreover, by 'democratic local governance' one refers to a local system where representative actors interact within the broader framework of the country's political system to manage the public affairs of a local community being accountable to it.[5]

However, that of the decentralised state, as the model of the state itself, is not an indigenous one. For this reason there is need for a synthesis with the existing local governance dynamics that were already working on the ground before the introduction of the decentralised state.[6]

## Representation and Participation

### The pre-existence of a local governance system

In both Ghana and South Africa, when observing local governance dynamics, one will discover the presence of 'overlapping identities.'[7] One of the main related problems is the often troubled interaction between traditional leaders and local governments in rural areas, which affects the implementation of development projects. For example, the chiefs are the only authority who can talk to the grassroots and mobilise them, or there is often the need for the chief's authorisation to utilise a particular land.[8] Moreover, as far as South Africa is concerned, government has to acknowledge the strengths of churches and witchcraft, which strongly affect people's everyday life.[9]

Ayee (1999, 131) points out the relevance of parallel structures of power put in place by Ghanaian governments to work on the ground with District Assemblies. The author refers to Rawlings' revolutionary committees, which populated the local arena in the 1980s to create consent around and involvement in the new revolutionary rule.

On the contrary, what happens in South Africa is that there has always been a high level of grassroots' politicisation because of the ANC mobilisation activities spread out during the last century, and because of the liberation struggle legacy.[10]

### The 'developmental role' of local governments

In both countries, local governments have been given a 'developmental role.'[11] Local governments are indeed thought to be able to convey the voices of the grassroots and answer their needs.

However, in Ghana, the bottom-up planning process, supposed to begin at the Unit Committee level, has never really worked.[12] Since they are not paid, Unit Committees are not even always elected and in place. What happens is that, since Unit Committees cannot convey people's voices, District Assemblies end up working on a poverty reduction agenda, which is drafted by the government in the country's Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs).[13] Ultimately, the paradox is that District Assemblies are asked to work on an agenda which is that of the government, not the one of the people.

Similarly, in South Africa, the relatively participative municipalities' Integrated Development Plans (IDPs) are not, as one would expect, informing the district and metropolitan IDPs of the grassroots' priorities. On the contrary, they are ultimately supposed to articulate the mechanisms and instruments to implement national policies.[14] Moreover, it is interesting to note that, together with a shift from the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) to the Growth, Employment and Redistribution Programme (GEAR) at the national level, municipalities' perception of their economic development role seems

to vary from seeing it as pro-poor, pro-growth, or a mixture of the two.[15]

On the basis of these considerations one may advance the hypothesis that the focus on the 'developmental role' is meant to underline that local governments in both cases are not conceived as spaces for political confrontation among different development agendas, but as mere instruments to implement development policies shaped at the national level. 'Developmental' seems to ultimately mean 'non-political.'

## Mechanisms for representation and participation at the local level

As far as representation and participation are concerned, it is useful to warn about the misuse of the concept of 'community' in the development environment; a word which is usually given many definitions.[16] The homogenous and harmonic 'communities' one may like to theorise about probably do not exist; what local governments deal with is groups of individuals which may have very different ideas and expectations, while sharing common problems to be solved or interests to pursue.

In both the considered cases, the weaknesses of the non-paid Ghanaian Unit Committees and South African Ward Committees, together with that of the methods for community information and participation, hinder the ownership of development initiatives. Local governments are supposed to hold regular meetings with their electorate, and people are expected to participate in various forums organised, for example, for budget approval or development planning purposes. However, especially in remote rural areas, there is a huge lack of information and the majority of the people do not even understand what consultation processes are about.

Moreover, the different and conflicting legitimisations within local councils often cause conflicts which undermine the development process. The various actors that populate District Assemblies and Municipal Councils, chosen and/or appointed in different ways, act as different conflicting elites. For example, it is common for Assembly Members and Ward Councilors to end up fighting for the allocation of resources to their respective areas.

In addition, one of the main challenges affecting both countries is the lack of a clear definition of the role of traditional authorities at the local level. Chiefs are appointed to local governments not only to deal with traditional matters, but also because of their recognised ability to mobilise people and their unique role in create cohesion.

In Ghana, by law two thirds of the Assemblies' members are elected on a non-partisan basis, while a third is appointed.[17] The rationale for the choice of the Rawlings' regime in the 1980s was that communities would have been more committed to working together for development had they not been divided on a partisan basis. The appointees are needed to ensure the presence of skilled personnel, considering that the non-partisan based elections may drive voters to elect illiterate candidates they trust more than others. However, appointees are usually chiefs, who are also not supposed to be party affiliate in order to avoid divisions among their communities. Moreover, the main figure at the local level, the District Chief Executive, is appointed by the government. The appointment is needed to facilitate the government's control of developmental policies at the local level.[18] Finally, the non-partisan local political system is thought to facilitate women's participation and involvement in politics. It is not difficult to understand that decentralisation is, ultimately, an instrument for the government to control the country.

On the other hand, in South Africa there is not only a partisan local political system, but there are also opposition political parties running municipalities. However, the proportional representation local governments' electoral system seems to hinder the partisan political system potential.[19] People do not really choose their representatives because these are selected by parties. The result is not only an abuse of political nominations of unskilled personnel, but also the fact that these Councilors end up not being concerned about the grassroots.[20] The same Ward Committee members are not directly elected but chosen by the Council among the ruling party affiliated Council members. One may also question the representativeness of Metropolitan Municipalities, with no local tiers governing big urban environments. In these cases, especially if Ward Committees do not work properly, it is unbelievable that Metropolitan Municipalities may be able to exercise their function of conveying the voices of their millions of inhabitants.

Considering the limits and potentialities of South African decentralisation in allowing representation and participation, some critical issues must be examined.

Firstly, it seems to be more useful to speak in terms of social groups instead of communities. Some observers clearly state that we do not look for social cohesion in a country which has developed an 'anti-society.'[21] For example, research conducted in Western Cape in 2000 shows that socioeconomic identity shapes the level of loyalty that people have toward their local government.[22] What is interesting to note is that in some cases the poor ended up creating 'anti-political' community

organisations to deal with those issues that were not addressed by local governments. These forms of associations, which are non-political but simply committed to work for development, are often seen as the alternative to a highly politicised and fractioned local arena.

Secondly, the mechanisms for participative governance, referred to as 'invited spaces,'[23] are, in reality, not supposed to interfere with municipalities' powers and 'claimed spaces,' such as protests, and are often considered a threat by municipalities.[24]

Moreover, local governments may play a relevant role as far as where to debate the reshaping of identities. Municipalities possibly play a vital role for the re-aggregation of interests and the reshaping of identities,[25] in particular in urban environments. The continuous flow of people into urban informal settlements may drive the marginalised township inhabitants and newcomers sharing common problems, such as the lack of service delivery, to gradually identify themselves into the municipal government, which provides spaces for them to express their concerns and solutions to their shared needs.

In addition, representation and accountability may possibly benefit from the introduction of a constituency-based local government electoral system, which would reshape parties' influence over candidates' choice and, ultimately, allow people's selection.

Finally, it is useful to reflect on the role of municipalities in recognising how apartheid affected South Africans' entitlements, and allowing empowerment for the same people. The interviews conducted in Eastern Cape witness a situation where many South Africans, including young people, still live in extremely poor conditions and rely on social grants for survival. The impression is that they do not care about improving their social conditions, but the reality is that they are probably not given the instruments to do so.[26]

### Elites' capture of the local political space

However, beyond the provisions for participation and representation, local elites capture the political space at the local level.

In Ghana, decentralisation is an instrument of government which is used to co-opt relevant actors by giving them a position and a role within the institutional 'machine.'[27]

What happened in South Africa is that the post-apartheid decentralisation system had to absorb the Bantustans' leaders and bureaucracies, together with high profile ANC personnel, into the new institutional framework. [28]

In both cases, urban and rural-based local elites are the ones employed in local government, or are those who run local NGOs.[29] Moreover, the praxis of local elections is highly politicised. In Ghana, local elections, even if not partisan, are usually affected by government's pressures. Similarly, in South Africa, it looks like many people feel threatened and believe that somebody would know if they should not vote for the ANC.[30]

Despite their potential for representation and participation, opposition parties are not concerned about what goes on on the ground, and cannot satisfactorily provide critical inputs or alternative solutions for development. Consequently, one may draw the conclusion that political parties in South Africa are simply further elites who want to reproduce themselves through power.[31]

## Level of Local Governments' Autonomy from the Centre

### Fiscal dependence from the centre

In order to assess the degree of local governments' autonomy from the centre, it is useful to reflect to what extent they are fiscally dependent on the centre.

In both countries, the reality is that local governments are not able to levy taxis, and end up depending on central transfers - the District Assemblies Common Fund in Ghana and the Equitable Share Formula in South Africa.[32] The inability to raise revenue is not only due to poverty, but also to a missing civic culture which matches the crisis of local governments' legitimisation.[33] Beyond the dependence on central transfers, local governments' budget is usually not sufficient to cover local needs, but only to 'prioritise' interventions.[34]

### Allocation of functions versus decentralisation of skills and resources

The functions that are really devolved to Ghanaian District Assemblies are those of raising revenues and administering justice. District Assemblies are supposed to identify problems, but the design and implementation of services are performed by the decentralised ministries.[35]

Municipalities in South Africa are expected to provide free basic services and other so-called 'community services' to deal with waste management, and to play minor roles in the provision of other relevant services, for example, housing. In both cases, municipalities lack the skills and resources needed to perform their roles.[36]

Apart from the lack of skilled personnel, we also have to acknowledge the importance of leadership. Some relevant CSO actors have been campaigning for the necessity of identifying 'indigenous leaders,' local people with vision and leadership skills who should be empowered and used to make changes.[37]

Further, roles and responsibilities are not always allocated in the most efficient way.[38] For example, there is a common understanding that functions such as housing, for which the main responsibilities are allocated at the provincial and national level, should be municipalities' responsibilities. At the moment, municipalities act only as housing building and distributing agents. However, they are the first to be affected by grievances when people have any problems or complaints about housing related issues. In addition, it is a shared opinion that there is no need for the provincial sphere of government, and that the roles of Districts and Provinces are mainly shaped by the apartheid legacy.[39]

### Central control mechanisms

We cannot neglect to mention the existence of central control mechanisms over local governments. As observed, it is quite clear that decentralisation in Ghana is ultimately promoted to control the territory.[40] The government's interest is, in particular, that of controlling the funds that are channeled from foreign donors to the local level. As a matter of fact, participative and decentralised development mechanisms are required by PRSPs, and it is a government's choice of having a non-partisan local governments' basis which, in this case, allows central control.

In the South African case, the law foresees provincial supervision and intervention over Municipalities which do not fulfill obligations, such as the approval of budget, or go through financial crisis. Municipalities are also asked to report quarterly about their performances. However, while the low level of performances are usually justified by budget constraints, the general impression that Provinces and the government are neither operating enough control nor taking provisions against non-performing and corruption affects municipalities.

## Service Delivery Performances

### The level of efficiency in service delivery

While considering the efficiency in municipalities' delivery performances, a relevant aspect to be considered – which is usually poorly researched into - is the way local governments may define 'poverty.' As a matter of fact, what often happens in Ghana is that urban elites may give priority to the provision of infrastructures and services without worrying about making tariffs affordable, or do not pay the necessary attention to ensure local livelihoods or social cohesion dynamics.[41]

Among the critical aspects that affect efficient delivery in South Africa is the fact that the country is characterised by both huge pockets of urban poverty and marginalisation - concentrated in formal and informal settlements at the periphery of big urban conglomerates - and a high level of rural poverty and exclusion which affects people living in very remote, poorly urbanised areas. The government has launched many initiatives to support local governments but it is questionable to what extent these initiatives are properly integrated, and to what extent reliable monitoring and evaluation mechanisms are in place.

In this article perspective, another critical aspect to be inquired into is to what extent opposition rule at the municipal level can produce alignment with local needs and better delivery performances levels. The first impression is that municipalities run by an opposition party, such as the Democratic Alliance (DA), may perform better than others thanks to the fact that its electorate and constituencies, being mainly white, have not been affected by the previous regime. For this reason it would be interesting to compare DA delivery performances with opposition led municipalities; performances in former Bantustans areas, for example, Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) performances in Kwa-Zulu Natal; and to compare these results to the performances of coalition led municipalities in the Western Cape. However, if opposition parties running municipalities could take people's needs seriously and make sure that resources, even if limited, are used properly, this would make the difference and people would see a reliable alternative in those parties.[42] Chiefs' level of involvement and cooperation at the local level should be also considered as a factor which may facilitate delivery.[43]

### Interactions between local governments and CSOs in service delivery

It is interesting to consider the level of interaction between municipalities' activities and self-help or civil society initiatives. What can be observed at the local level in Ghana is a sort of 'competition' in service delivery. Usually, District Assemblies are not the most capable actors to provide a service, compared to the huge resources that international donors channel through CSOs or Community-based

Organisations (CBOs), or to deeply traditionally rooted self-help mechanisms.

On the contrary, as discussed, the situation in South Africa is quite different. Dispossessed apartheid affected groups are still living in extremely poor conditions and feel 'entitled' to get from the government what they have been officially denied for long. For this reason, only in some areas and among specific socio-economic groups may one find associative initiatives that can be capitalised by municipalities for urban management and service delivery, for example, by building efficient private-public partnerships.[44] Moreover, municipalities are also missing methods that can valorise local resources and indigenous sustainable livelihoods.

### Interactions between representatives and officials, and accountability mechanisms

It is also useful to focus on the interactions between councils and officials, and on the ways they are held accountable. The Ghanaian experience witnesses a very poor level of interaction between local governments and branches of line ministries displaced on the territories in charge of providing services. Moreover, the line ministries represent simply an arm of the national bureaucracy at the local level, and keep being accountable to the centre.

What is interesting to note in South Africa is that some big municipalities are starting to develop alternative service delivery programmes aimed at taking officials closer to urban marginalised areas, such as townships. [45]

At this stage, one may have realised that people do not have many mechanisms to hold municipalities accountable. Certainly, one of these mechanisms is the vote.[46] However, people may wrongly believe that simply because they elect representatives, these representatives will deliver. To make sure that representatives follow their mandate and that what they do is in line with people's priorities, there is a strong need for grassroots' involvement and participation in the local political arena.[47] Some political figures themselves envisage the importance of having a vibrant, non-political civil society.[48]

### Conclusion

In conclusion, the review of the mechanisms of decentralisation will definitely affect South African political parties' legitimisation mechanisms at the local level. Moreover, one may conclude that development is never really 'apolitical.' As the article shows, for example, in Ghana, where there

is a non-partisan local political system, the ruling party is ultimately taking decisions for everybody. Similarly, in South Africa, the 'dominance' of the ANC restricts the autonomy of the local sphere of government. On the contrary, development has to be 'political,' in the sense that people must be given the chance to choose among different development agendas. The article has not only acknowledged the potential of representation and participation that properly behaving political parties may take to the local area, but also the relevance of having a non-political vibrant civic movement.

Finally, beyond the need to defend entitlements, what seems to be missing are empowering mechanisms which may allow people to 'own' local governments' mechanisms.

### Recommendations

Therefore, to avoid wasting the opportunity given by the policy process of review on decentralisation, and in order to participate in an informed way, political and CSO actors should further reflect on at least the following key issues:

- Which instruments could be used to collect reliable data on the grassroots' perceptions of poverty and needs.
- Which 'claimed spaces' could be used to foster representation and participation, and how municipalities can ultimately be able to play their vital role for the re-aggregation of interests and the reshaping of identities in urban environments.
- What further mechanisms people may be provided with in order to allow them to make local governments accountable.
- Which local governance mechanisms should be supported to valorise local resources and sustainable livelihoods, and how to empower the grassroots for them to 'own' local governments' dynamics.
- To what extent opposition rule at the municipal level can produce alignment with local needs and better delivery performances, and how political parties can make good use of their potential for representation and participation.

### Notes and References

1    The interviews conducted from the beginning of September 2008 up to now in Gauteng and Eastern Cape with different actors of the political and social local arena, together with common citizens, witness a possibly scarce submission of inputs and are not always informed awareness of what is going on at the Department of Provinces and Local Governments

(DPLG) level. Nobody seems to be paying due attention to the on-going policy process of review on decentralisation, the mechanism that more than others will affect the same political arena legitimisation. After the collection of inputs at the end of 2007, the drafting of the Green Paper by the DPLG is going on silently. It can be easily understood that, being a relevant policy document, it will most probably be completed only after the forthcoming national elections will have shaped the new power equilibrium.

2   F Rank, K van Rooyen & C Molele, 'Hungry for change,' *Sunday Times*, 2 November 2008.

3   The article will refer to the data collected by the author in Ghana between January and April 2006, as an affiliate student at the Institute of Africa Studies at the University of Legon in Accra.

4   G Crawford, 'Democratic decentralisation in Ghana: issues and prospects,' 2004, http://www.polis.leeds.ac.uk/assets/files/research/working-papers/wp9crawford.pdf

5   D Olowu & J S Wunsch, (eds.), *Local Governance in Africa: the Challenges of Democratic Decentralisation*, London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2004, p 1.

6   Professor Vilakasi, in an interview on 9 October 2008 in Tshwane, argues that such a synthesis can happen only by giving voice to those on the grassroots who do not have voice. Among his recommendations is that of recognising indigenous religions and having local newspapers in indigenous local languages, as an instrument to create awareness and, ultimately, foster participation among all South Africans.

7   They range from ethnic affiliation to family linkages, traditional affiliation, geographical belongings, churches, self-help initiatives, interests-based forms of association, Community-based organisations, local and international, and non governmental organisations.

8   Because of the influence of the Akan kingdom, one of the most important West African pre-colonial kingdoms, chieftaincy in Ghana is still a very relevant institution, notwithstanding the different characters or powers that the institution assumes in various parts of the country. Similarly, in rural South Africa, as witnessed by the interviews conducted in Lusikisiki, traditional relations remain the strongest form of affiliation the grassroots feel they belong to.

9   Interview with Gift Moerane, 10 November 2008.

10   Trudy Thomas, 2008, an interview with Paul van Hoof, 10 October 2008. In this sense, it is relevant to reflect on the state of the ANC transformation from liberation movement to political party and its challenges. It is a shared opinion among scholars and activists that, in its 'physiological' transformation to political party, the ANC has begun embodying only some particular interests and lost the contact with the grassroots as a whole.

11   Republic of Ghana, Local Government Act, Accra: Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development, 1993 and Republic of South Africa, White Paper on Local Government, Tshwane: Department of Constitutional Development, 1998.

12   Republic of Ghana, the New Local Government System, Accra: Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development, 1996. Apart from the weaknesses of Unit Committees, District Assemblies are unskilled and under resourced and, ultimately, not able to accomplish their task of poverty alleviation.

13   PRSPs are not necessarily even passed by Parliament.

14   Republic of South Africa, 1998.

15   EL Nel & CM Rogerson, 'Pro-Poor Local Economic Development in South Africa's Cities: Policy and Practice,' *Africa Insight*, 2005, Vol. 35, No. 4, December.

16   The interviews conducted in Ghana in 2006 with various local and development actors show that the more common definitions cannot convey the complexity of the concept, but simply refer only to the geographical, electoral or administrative dimension.

17   Republic of Ghana, 1993.

18   KN Adomako-Acheampong, 'Why DCEs Should Not Be Elected,' *Daily Graphic*, 23 January 2006. The author states that "governance at the district level is an integral function of the Presidency to be exercised by a trusted confidant of the President."

19   Republic of South Africa, 1998.

20   Interview with Athol Tollip, 13 October 2008. What opposition parties say of themselves is that they encounter difficulties in making their voices heard because of their limited resources and the ANC power. These factors hinder them from being able to provide alternative inputs and take initiatives for the people. Interview with Charlie Vukaphi, 17 October 2008. However, people's perception is that local council meetings are only about personal issue related in-fighting.

21   Trudy Thomas, 2008.

22   S Bekker & A Leilde, 'Residents' Perception of Developmental Local Government: Exit, Voice and Loyalty in South African Towns,' *Politeia*, 2003, Vol. 22, No. 1. What comes up is that diverse socio-economic groups feel different affiliations and participate with various level of engagement in local governments' affairs. The middle-income minority appeared to be the group keener on engaging with their municipalities. The poor wanted to get involved because of poverty marginalisation, and the affluent seemed not to be interested in civic involvement; S Bekker & A Leilde, 'Residents' Perception of Developmental Local Government: Exit, Voice and Loyalty in South African Towns.'

23   'Invited spaces' are, for example, budget and IDP forums, etc.

24   JJ Williams, 'Citizenship, Community Participation and Social Change: The Case of Area Coordinating Teams in Cape Town, South Africa,' *IDS Bulletin*, April 2004, Vol. 35, No. 2, p 24.

25   For example, the reflection about the relevance of traditional relationships and powers.

26   Paul van Hoof, 2008. One of the main concerns while conducting interviews in South Africa has been to what extent municipalities are able to capitalise on what civil society is already doing in terms of self-help initiatives to provide services, build cohesion and ensure survival on the ground. However, as the article already reported, the level of people's association on the ground strongly varies according to the area and the socio-economic group. It is a shared opinion that the government has a responsibility in empowering people to help themselves and in introducing incentives for them to exit the indigent level. Probably, these institutional responsibilities to empower citizens and enable them to contribute to providing for themselves plays a relevant role in determining the success of self-help initiatives.

27   For example, chiefs, cash-crops economy's elites, CSOs.

28   M Wittenberg, 'Decentralisation in South Africa', May 2003, http://sticerd.lse.ac.uk/dps/decentralisation/southafrica.pdf. The article describes the highly decentralised system which was used to control and rule the country during the apartheid regime. Moreover, it explains to what extent the dysfunctional role of Districts and Provinces is rooted in the apartheid system legacy.

29   T Binns, G Porter, E Nel & P Kyei, 'Decentralising Poverty? Reflections on the Experience of Decentralisation and the Capacity to Achieve Local Development in Ghana and South Africa,' *Africa Insight*, December 2005, Vol. 35, No. 4, p 21.

30   Interview with Marina Marchetti, 14 October 2008.

31   Paul van Hoof, 2008.

32   It is relevant to note that the Equitable Share Formula is still based on the 2001 census.

33 The fact of not having viable municipalities is rooted in demarcation conflicts in Ghana and in post-apartheid municipalities' amalgamation in South Africa. In addition, people do not feel like paying taxes to an institution which does not deliver.

34 T Binns, G. Porter, E Nel & P Kyei, 2005. For these reasons, some scholars speak of decentralisation in terms of 'decentralising poverty.' Another relevant aspect to reflect on is the level of conditionality that the central government applies to its transfers in South Africa, Republic of South Africa, 1998. For example, a considerable part of the Equitable Share Allocation to municipalities is supposed to cover the provision of free basic services, the way the bigger part of the Equitable Share Allocation to Provinces is thought to pay the stipends of the health and education sector. However, the same Provinces, for example, can exercise a high level of discretion in using the remaining part of central transfers that are usually invested in supporting secondary departments.

35 Interview with Thomas Aidoo, 27 January 2007.

36 This is not only due to political appointments but, in the South African case, also to amalgamation and the associated inevitable transition and learning costs.

37  Gift Moerane, 2008.

38  It is worth noting that within the South African decentralisation model, municipalities are considered a 'sphere of government,' having the same relevance of the provincial and national spheres, Republic of South Africa, 1998.

39 M Wittenberg, 2003.

40 J Hearn, *Foreign Political Aid, Democratisation and Civil Society in Ghana in the 90s,* Accra: CDD-Ghana, 2000. What is interesting about Ghana is the scholars' belief that there has been an effort from the international financial institutions to use vibrant CSOs as the channel through which to implement the neo-liberal agenda. The success of structural adjustment in Ghana, which was allowed by Rawlings' authoritarian government cooperation, is now pursued through financial support to CSOs, and ultimately through liberal democracy.

41 PO Kyei, 'Decentralisation and poverty alleviation in rural Ghana: perspectives from district elites and voices of the rural poor,' 30 September 2000, http://unpan1.un.org/intradoc/groups/public/documents/idep/unpan003042.pdf

42 Gift Moerane, 2008.

43 The article has already pointed out that, in both Ghana and South Africa, local governments' difficulties in meeting people's needs result in a crisis of legitimisation. Citizens would ask themselves why they should pay taxes to and recognise an authority which does not speak for them and cannot provide what they need, and would continue honoring other forms of affiliation they feel more close to, or that can somehow give answers to their problems.

44 The legacy of apartheid ultimately prevents people from being co-actors for development at the local level, as foreseen in the participative local governments.

45 For example, the City of Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality has an Alternative Service Delivery system. However, it is still to be proved to what extent these mechanisms are able to interact with Ward Committees in order to improve service delivery processes. It is quite curious to realise, during the interviews conducted in the country, that the only interaction some opposition political parties' representatives at the local level have with the grassroots, and the only way they are informed about their needs is by asking the line departments of the ministries deployed on the territory.

46 Athol Tollip, 2008.

47 Gift Moerane, 2008.

48 Interview with Daya Appavoo, 19 October 2008. The interviewee encourages the development of a space for dialogue together with mechanisms to create self-esteem in previously disposed and intellectually alienated South Africans, which may ultimately make them more pro-active and involved. He refers, in particular, to the relevance of indigenous religions and to their ability to free people's subconscious thinking, which may ultimately help them to put pieces of personal and collective history in order and recuperate self-esteem.

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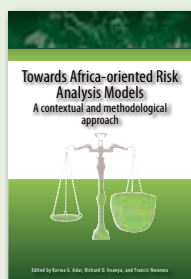Compiled by GIS and
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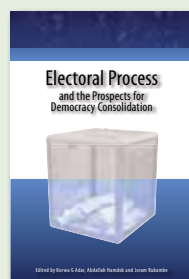### Africa In Focus
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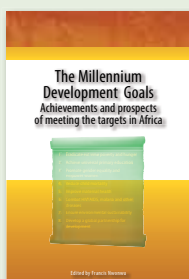### Electoral Process and the Prospects for Democracy Consolidation
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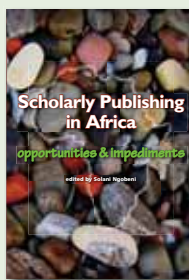and Culture**

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