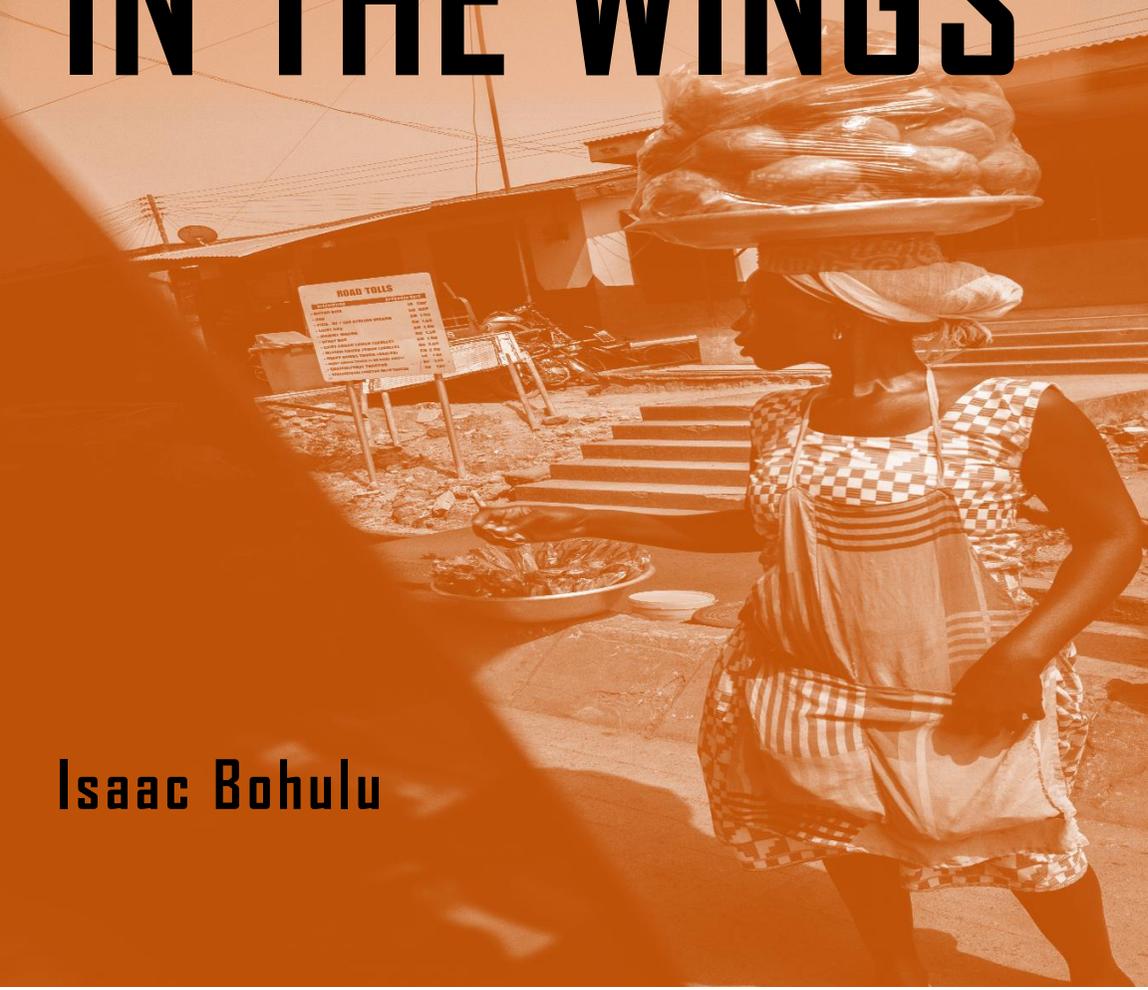




IN THE WINGS



Isaac Bohulu

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All enquiries should be directed to beyela127@gmail.com

Creator: Isaac Bohulu

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Dedication

To:

*Present and future
generations of people
whose livelihoods depend, largely,
on the output of the state*

IN THE WINGS

“Let’s talk about our district assembly system today, my son.”

“Ok, grandpa. I remember your assertion early on that our district assembly system is weak.”

“It is indeed, my son. You see, the purpose of the district assemblies is to bring development to the localities in our country.”

“How can you say that, Grandpa? Local development is the job of our parliamentarians, isn’t it?”

“And who told you that, my son?”

“But that is what our parliamentarians make us believe. Otherwise, why do they make so many promises to develop their localities when they are seeking election?”

“You have raised a very important issue, my son. It’s one of the absurdities of our democracy. parliamentarians are basically lawmakers; it is not their primary duty to develop their localities.”

“So, why do they make so many promises to the electorate, Grandpa?”

“Well, that’s for our MPs to answer. Parliamentarians know clearly that their primary duty is not local development. Why they make promises to that effect is for them to explain.”

“But Grandpa, why do we have the MPs’ common fund? Wasn’t that fund set up purposely for our parliamentarians to develop their localities?”

“My son, that’s a very valid question. But once again, it is parliament which should answer that question. I fail to see the justification for the MPs’ common fund because it is not the duty of parliamentarians to develop their localities.”

“Perhaps it’s a way to enable our MPs to fulfil some of the promises they make; what do you say, Grandpa?”

“Whatever it is, the responsibility for the development of the localities falls squarely on the district assemblies, not on parliamentarians”

“Hmmm; this democracy of ours!”

“And thinking about it, you are right; MPs probably take the common fund to justify the false image they have created for themselves as agents of local development”

“So Grandpa, is the electorate justified when it accuses MPs of not bringing development to their areas?”

“The answer is ‘yes’ and ‘no’, my son”

“Please explain, Grandpa”

“The best MPs can do for their localities is to lobby for projects which fall beyond the ambit of the districts assemblies. On that score, if an MP is not able to lobby for any projects, he could be accused of being a failure. That’s a ‘yes’. Anything else is a ‘no’ because the development of the localities is solely the responsibility of the district assemblies.”

“Then MPs should stop parading themselves as agents of local development, and refrain from making promises.”

“You couldn’t have said it any better, my son. Consider the heightened expectations MPs create in the localities with the promises they make; expectations

they cannot satisfy. Why do they always put themselves under such pressure?”

“Hmmm, I guess I should allow you to make your point, grandpa. Please let’s get back to the district assemblies”

“Ok then, answer this question: do you know the number of district assemblies we have in this country?”

“Are you talking about the metropolitan, municipal, and district assemblies, grandpa?”

“Yes, just that; but let me use ‘district assembly’ for all of them for simplicity.”

“Ok, grandpa; I have no idea.”

“You don’t? Well, let me tell you: in the late 90’s we had 110 district assemblies. The number in 2012 was 216” now the number is 261.

“261 district, municipal, and metropolitan assemblies Grandpa?”

“Yes; we have 261, my son.”

“And what have they done to develop the districts? There should, by now, be significant increases in the levels of development in the districts.”

“You have taken the words out of my mouth, my son; sadly, that is not the case. Many localities in the districts have seen little or no change since the inception of our 4th Republican Democracy.”

“Look at our district, for example, grandpa; our roads are atrocious, and people have grave difficulty transporting basic foodstuffs to the market.

“And my son, the only hospital is 75km from here and, in the rainy season, vehicles cannot ply the road that leads to it; yet we have had a district assembly for close to 25 years.”

“That is very sad.”

“And the situation is not limited to our district only. I see similar situations in many districts of this country on TV, and read about them in the newspapers.”

“Grandpa, it’s the difficult circumstances in our districts that force the youth to abandon their villages and

towns for the cities, in search of economic opportunities.”

“Exactly; and you cannot blame them; there is very little economic opportunity in the districts.”

“But Grandpa, it’s a little better here. At least, there are public latrines in this village. In the city, many people don’t have toilets; they defecate into polythene bags and throw them like missiles into the bushes and gutters. It’s an eyesore.”

“So, you see my son; we have an elaborate local government system, but it delivers very little by way of improving the livelihoods of the mass of our people. Yet our Constitution touts the district assemblies as agents of development.”

You are right, grandpa; and I wonder why that is so. Why have the district assemblies, in their various forms, performed so poorly?”

“Three main reasons account for their poor performance. First, our governments have only paid lip-service to local development; economic resources and opportunity remain centralized.”

“That’s a good point; much of what we do is centralized in the national capital. You cannot get many things done if you don’t move to the capital.”

“Second, the metropolitan, municipal, or district chief executive does not feel obligated to the people in the districts. His obligation and allegiance go to the president and the ruling political party, and he actively pursues their interests, rather than those of the people in the districts.”

“Grandpa, the point you just made brings out the inconsistencies in our local government system. The district assemblies are supposed to be free from political party influences, yet the President appoints to the assembly, a district chief executive who, clearly, is a political party person. That’s absurd.”

“I see that you are already fired up, my son.”

“Hmm, Grandpa; some things in this nation make one wonder”

“Well, nevertheless we must talk about them. That’s the only way we may improve things. Now, the third reason for the poor performance of the district

assemblies is that the people are not actively involved in the development of the districts.”

“Yes Grandpa; you made this point at the very beginning.”

“I am glad you remember. Now, let’s see how these three factors affect the development of the districts. First, let’s consider lip service to local government”

“Ok; let’s go, Grandpa.”

“Do you know why I say that our governments have paid lip service to local development?”

“Well.... not exactly, grandpa.”

“The reason is that our governments have denied the assemblies the funds required to deliver development to the districts.”

Our governments have denied the assemblies the funds required to deliver development to the districts

“But Grandpa, there is the district assemblies’ common fund. Surely that is a good source of funding for the district assemblies.”

“You are right my son, that fund exists. But, if it provided sufficient funding, why haven’t the districts seen the levels of development we expect?”

“Well grandpa, you have a point; please continue.”

“When you go to the city, find that out for yourself; the truth is that the districts don’t receive adequate funds to enable them to deliver the development expected of them. They have to generate supplementary funds from their operational areas.”

“Hmmm, I am listening grandpa.”

“Now, do you know where the district assemblies generate the additional funds from?”

“From tolls and levies on the people and businesses, I guess.”

“You are right; that has been the major revenue source, outside the common fund. But tell me; what kind of business activities exist in many of the districts of this country? Take our district for example.”

“Nothing significant, grandpa; only petty trading and subsistence farming”

“And how much money can the district assemblies hope to levy on petty traders and subsistence farmers?”

“I wonder, grandpa.”

“It’s nothing to write home about; indeed, the amount raised may only be sufficient to pay the salaries of the staff of the district assemblies.”

“And you can be sure that corruption among collectors eats into the income from those sources.”

“Exactly”

“But Grandpa, this situation is likely to continue for a long time. I don’t see how that can change.”

“That’s exactly the reason I am talking to you. Things don’t have to stay the same. If the district assemblies are to perform their developmental functions, they must have access to sufficient funds.”

“You may say so, Grandpa; but what can be done to change the situation?”

“I will answer you this way. Tell me; the economic resources of this country, where are they located?”

“I don’t think I understand your question, Grandpa”

“I will restate it. Tell me; the gold, diamonds, bauxite, manganese, cocoa, timber, Shea nuts, and all such resources, where do we find them in this country?”

“Oh, that; in the districts, of course, Grandpa.”

“And where do the revenues from those resources go to?”

“To the government; directly to the central government”

“And how much of that revenue returns to the districts?”

“I am not sure, Grandpa; but I don’t think much of it finds its way back to the districts. The district assemblies’ common fund is only 10% of government revenues.”

“You are right, my son; not much. The revenues generated from the districts trickle back to them in small drops. Now, can you imagine the difference it would make if the districts received a reasonable share

of revenues generated from the resources in their areas?”

“I believe the districts could see more development because they would be in a position to do much more.”

“Exactly, my son; the districts would see more development; and you know what that would mean?”

“What, Grandpa?”

“My son, if the districts see more development, what will that mean for the central government?”

“Well, it’s obvious; the burden on the central government will be reduced, Grandpa.”

“You asked me, a while ago, what can be done to change the situation; do you now have your answer?”

“Hmmm... are you advocating for the districts to receive a direct share in the revenues generated from the economic resources in their areas, Grandpa?”

“That should be the case, my son. To make the district assemblies truly agents of development, we must craft a system that ensures that they receive a reasonable

share of the revenues generated from the economic resources found in them.”

We must craft a system that ensures that the district assemblies receive a reasonable share of the revenues generated from the economic resources found in them

“Grandpa; that is a difficult one; do you have a formula for sharing those revenues?”

“Yes, I have; I think the district assemblies must receive 40% of national revenues.”

40% of all revenues generated from our economic resources should be earmarked for the district assemblies

“Wait Grandpa, wait; I need to understand something. Are you saying that if our district, for example, produces cocoa, gold, diamond, and other resources, it alone should have 40% of the revenues generated from those resources?”

“That will be the ideal, but we cannot do that because some districts have very little by way of resources.

Doing that will skew the development of this nation too much in favour of the well-endowed districts.”

“Ok; so you are suggesting that 40% of all revenues generated from our economic resources should be earmarked for all the district assemblies?”

“That is so, my son.”

“Ok, that is clear to me now. So, the districts get 40% of the revenues, then what?”

“There is a formula for sharing the district assemblies’ common fund. That formula can be improved to take into account the quantum of revenue generated from each district. A district that generates more revenues should receive a share that fairly reflects its output.”

“Hmmm, Grandpa; this arrangement should strengthen the financial base of most district assemblies.”

“Yes, it should; and it could even stimulate the assemblies to generate more revenues.”

Stimulate them to generate more revenues; how Grandpa?”

“The knowledge that the more revenues a district generates, the more revenues it receives, can be a catalyst for the assemblies to promote the development and growth of industry in their districts.”

“Hmmm”

“It could also stimulate entrepreneurship. The districts can promote the development of cottage value-addition businesses to generate more revenues. The assemblies will no longer sit and wait for hand-outs from the central government; their destinies will be in their own hands.”

“Hmmm, I see; when that happens, any district assembly that is not delivering will not have the central government to blame; right?”

“Exactly; non-performing assemblies will be exposed, and the people will kick the local authority out. This arrangement will make the assemblies answer to the people in the districts. But my son, there are more serious reasons why the districts should receive 40% of national revenues.”

“Hmm, I am listening, Grandpa”

“Giving the district assemblies 40% of national revenues is the fair thing to do.”

Giving the district assemblies 40% of national revenues is the fair thing to do

“And why do you say that, Grandpa?”

“My son, tell me something; what do towns like Obuasi, Akwatia, Tarkwa, Nsuta, Dunkwa-on-Offin, Prestea, Kade, or Awaso, have in common?”

“They are mining towns.”

“And what can you say for those towns in terms of development?”

“Not very much, Grandpa; it appears that the many decades of mining in those towns brought little development to them. It’s really sad.

“And that’s exactly my point; a greater share in national revenues should eliminate such situations in the future.”

“I agree with you Grandpa. Look at the Western Region of this country. It produces a bulk of our economic resources, but it has some of the most atrocious roads in this country. That should change.”

Yes, the same goes for those districts along the Volta River which, having borne the brunt of the construction of the Akosombo dam, have nothing to show for by way of development.”

“You are right, grandpa. This arrangement will end the ‘Robbing-Peter-to-Pay-Paul’ approach to development in this nation. Yet, I have an uncomfortable feeling about your proposal. It will deprive the central government of a huge chunk of revenues; in fact, it will create a deep hole in its revenues.”

“Yes, and you can add that it will cripple the government’s ability to deliver its mandate to the people,” Grandpa said sarcastically.

“So, that discredits your plan, doesn’t it?”

“No, it doesn’t; the benefits of giving 40% of national revenues to the district assemblies far outweigh the perceived shortcomings.”

The benefits of giving 40% of national revenues to the district assemblies far outweigh the perceived short-comings

“Are you sure Grandpa; and what are the benefits you talk about?”

“First, the perceived hole in government revenues will force our governments to check and eliminate wastage in the government machinery.”

“That’s an important point, Grandpa; the wastage of state resources is staggering. Look at all the high-end 4x4 vehicles that our government officials drive. I have even heard that some chief executive officers of state-owned enterprises have as many as three official vehicles at their disposal, all fuelled and chauffeured at the expense of the state. I often ask myself how many bags of cocoa produced by our mostly deprived farmers go to fund such nauseating extravagance.”

“You almost took the wind out of my sail, my son’ and you bring me to the next benefit that will accrue to this nation from giving 40% of state revenues to the district assemblies.

It will force the state to look critically at the allowances regime that provides high level public sector workers, ministers, parliamentarians, and political party hangers-on with vehicles, vehicle maintenance allowance, fuel, water, accommodation, telephone, electricity, travel allowance, entertainment allowance, allowances for attending official meetings, the repeated payments of end-of-service gratuity to parliamentarians, the overly generous gratuity payments to past presidents and high public officials, and so forth. This largesse is happening in a nation that struggles to build schools and hospitals for its people. I don't understand it"

"But public servants deserve these allowances, don't they, Grandpa? I think they deserve to be comfortable while they work for the state."

"You are right; they do. But I think this nation is walking in the same allowances regime that was crafted to milk the wealth of this nation in colonial times. The levels of remuneration and allowances paid to politicians and high-level public servants amount to 'slapping the people in the face'."

"What are you saying, Grandpa?"

“Let me ask you; when a man has a wife and children, or some family relations living in his house, should the state provide him with, and pay for, a gardener or cook, just because he is a minister of state or a high state official? Again, must one public servant have three official vehicles at his disposal, all chauffeured and fuelled at the expense of the state, when all he/she needs to get to work is one vehicle?”

My son, the people who create the wealth of this nation get by on very little, and it seriously amounts to insulting them when we treat politicians and high public servants, who have been trained at the expense of our people, like kings and queens by paying them ‘huuhudious’ allowances.”

“Ei Grandpa, you are using the language of the young people. You mean to say that some of the allowances are outrageous; HmMMM.”

“Indeed. The state should critically examine the allowances regime for high public servants to reduce the wastage in the government and public services machinery.”

“I agree, Grandpa.”

“And there is more. The lack of easy money for the government to spend will force it to cooperate fully with our anti-corruption agencies to check corruption in all sectors of the economy.”

“You are right; corruption is one factor that drains the economy of needed resources. It will be great to see our governments actively supporting the fight against corruption.”

“I am not done yet, my son. Giving 40% of national revenues to the district assemblies will force our governments to put the loans they contract on behalf of this nation to much better use.”

“You are so right, Grandpa; our governments have taken so much in loans, and yet we don’t see commensurate results. That should surely change.”

“So you see, my son; giving 40% of national revenues to the district assemblies cannot be a bad idea. It will force the state to push for the judicious use of state funds and loans by the government. It will also force the state to curtail the inordinate spending of our limited resources on government extravagance and public

sector largesse, and put more fire in the fight against corruption.

“Well said, Grandpa; I now see that sharing national revenues with the district assemblies isn’t such a bad idea after all.”

At this point, Grandpa got up from his seat, stretched feebly, and headed for this room. I brought up the next point on his return:

“Grandpa, we have addressed the problem of inadequate resources in the district assemblies. But you said also that economic opportunity is concentrated in the cities.”

“That is so, my son; you can see that for yourself. Take this village; what is the main economic activity here, apart from farming and trading? It’s the same in many other districts. Along the coast, fishing and fish processing are the main economic activities.”

“And much of the economic activity in the districts is small-scale and subsistent in nature, bringing in only small incomes”

“And that’s the point. Many district assemblies don’t have a good base for tax income. They cannot raise sufficient revenue from levies because the economic base is weak.”

“Hmmm”

“But consider this, my son; the districts hold enormous potential for economic growth.”

“Potential; which potential, Grandpa?”

“You don’t see the potential? Now tell me: in which areas of this country does food rot on the farms?”

“In the rural areas, Grandpa”

“And where are the rural areas located?”

“In the various districts of this country, Grandpa.”

“Tell me again; where do we have the poorest housing in this country, my son?”

“In the rural areas; I mean the districts.”

“And where are healthcare facilities, sanitation facilities, and schools, needed most?”

“Grandpa, in the districts”

“And in which parts of this country can our tourist sites, colonial legacies, and culture be found?”

“In the districts, Grandpa; but what’s your point?”

“My point is that all the needs and untapped resources that exist in the districts represent a great potential for development.”

All the needs and untapped resources that exist in the districts represent a great potential for development

“Oh, you are suggesting that the districts have needs and resources, and those present opportunities to improve economic activity in their areas.”

“I thought you were not going to wake up my son; that’s exactly my point. The districts hold the key to an economic boom in this country.”

“You are right Grandpa; but how can we exploit those resources in practical terms?”

The district assemblies should seek partnerships with private individuals and organizations to develop their areas.”

“Partnership; in which areas, Grandpa”

“In all areas, my son; let’s take the area of post-harvest losses.”

“Ok, I am listening”

“In the area of post-harvest losses, the district assembly can identify agricultural products with good potential and seek to promote them.”

“Promote them how?”

“They can identify appropriate technology that adds value to those products through processing.”

“And who will do the processing; the district assembly?”

“That is where the partnership comes in my son. The assemblies can team up with private individuals or companies to operate businesses to add value to those products.”

“You are right grandpa. Look at all the food that goes to waste because of poor access to markets. And besides, processing can be a source of employment for the local youth.”

“And that is only one example. Look at the houses people in our villages live in. Our district assemblies can improve the quality of these houses through similar partnerships.”

“That’s an interesting area, Grandpa. The majority of rural houses could do with a lot of improvement. But I am wondering how that can be done?”

“Have you heard about soil bricks?”

“Oh Grandpa; the one moulded from clay? Of course”

“No, I am not talking about that one. The bricks I am talking about are made mostly from sub-soils and small amounts of cement. With appropriate equipment and training, quality bricks can be produced which are fit for the building of homes, offices, and schools.”

“Yes, you are right; I once read that soil bricks are used widely in Asian countries and in South Africa. I didn’t give it much attention though.”

“But this nation should. Our district assemblies should look at soil bricks to improve rural housing.”

“You are right Grandpa. I read also that soil bricks are cheaper because they are not fired, and that houses built from them are much cooler inside.”

“That is true, and that is why the district assemblies should adopt the soil brick technology in their housing development. They should promote the establishment of soil brick businesses and support those businesses by using only soil bricks in the building of offices, schools, and hospitals.”

“And Grandpa, they can also encourage the citizens to use soil bricks for their homes.”

“Exactly; and in that regard, two or more district assemblies can collaborate to set up one or two soil brick companies to serve their districts.”

“A very interesting idea, Grandpa”

“The assemblies can support the soil brick businesses by providing them with guarantees to acquire the requisite soil brick technology; that’s the partnership I am talking about.”

“Another area in which this sort of partnership will be most beneficial is in the area of healthcare.”

“Yes, let’s hear it.”

“I believe that two or more districts with common boundaries can collaborate to establish hospitals or clinics which can be run by private healthcare personnel.”

“A brilliant idea my son; and such hospitals can be encouraged to introduce herbal medicine into their systems.”

“Grandpa, the districts also need to look at the education of the youth. They should consider giving scholarships to deserving students. Through that, they will be developing a pool of locals to work in the companies in which the assemblies have interests.”

“I am glad that you see how development can come to the districts, my son. This nation needs to adopt serious and pragmatic approaches towards exploiting the economic potential of the districts. That is the key to removing the lack of economic opportunity in the districts.”

“Yes, Grandpa; if such initiatives are extended to the area of sports, we can unearth a lot of athletes and footballers, and that can be a great source of income for the districts.”

“You are right my son. Such initiatives can be extended into every sector.”

“Grandpa, I am already seeing that businesses in cocoa, fish, food processing, and cold stores, can spring up in many districts of this country.”

“Not only that. We can have businesses in rural housing, schools, hospitals, entertainment, sports, tourism, and bio-energy. The potential is just enormous.”

“You are right, Grandpa; but I am beginning to think that things will not be as easy as we have painted.”

“No doubt about that; no business endeavour is a bed of roses, my son. But that doesn’t mean the idea should be discarded. Progress may be slow in coming, and there will be some failures, but with time and more experience, the assemblies will realise the real benefits of those initiatives.”

“You are right, Grandpa; we should be driven by the possibility of success rather than by the fear of failure.”

*We should be driven by the possibility of success
rather than by the fear of failure*

“You got it, my son. If our district assemblies are welcoming, they can attract more investors into the districts.”

“Yes Grandpa; but is there any role the state can play in all this?”

“Yes, the state council could catalyse development in the districts”

“Catalyse; how?”

“It could stimulate the various districts by instituting awards for superior performance.”

“Ok; you are suggesting that the state council should engender competition among the district assemblies, as a means of promoting development in the districts.”

“Exactly; but the state council can do something more. It can promote the siting of more investments in the districts instead of in the major cities.”

“Grandpa, I now realize that delivering development to the districts is not beyond our reach. With visionary and committed leadership we can get there sooner than we think.”

“Exactly my son; and that brings me to the second reason for the poor performance of our assemblies.”

“Grandpa, you said earlier, that the metropolitan, municipal, or district chief executive does not feel obligated to the people in the districts.”

“Yes, that is so; but let me start from the beginning. Our district assembly system appears very well structured, but in reality, the structure is ineffective.”

“And why is that Grandpa; why do you say the district assembly structure is ineffective?”

“It’s because real power in the district rests with the chief executive.”

Grandpa, are you saying that our district assembly system doesn’t work as it should because power is concentrated in the DCE?”

“Exactly; and I will lead you to that conclusion.”

“Ok Grandpa, let’s go.”

“You must be aware that the assemblies are made up of 70% elected members and 30% appointees of the president.”

“Yes, Grandpa. The president also effectively appoints the chief executive of the assembly. And I know also that the MPs from the districts are members.”

“Now, many of the people elected to the district assemblies make very little contribution to the work of the assemblies.”

“Hmmm”

“All they do is to sit through meetings, take some refreshment thereafter, and go back home.”

“It’s not surprising Grandpa; even in parliament, some members hardly speak in open assembly.”

“So, you see, the impact of many elected members on the assembly is minimal.”

“Ok Grandpa; what about the appointed members of the assemblies?”

“Yes, many of the appointed members are either accomplished, elderly, or retired persons in their communities”

“Hmmm, yeah”

“Persons of such calibre do not usually want trouble, so they steer clear of controversy. They therefore tend to keep quiet and allow the power brokers in the assembly to have their way. So, you can see that their impact in the assembly will not be felt.”

“Ok Grandpa, but that leaves the district chief executive and the MPs who are members of the assembly”

“Yes, let’s consider the MPs. You see, these MPs live and work in the capital, don’t they?”

“Yes, Grandpa; I wonder whether they are able to attend district assembly meetings.”

“Of course, some do, though not regularly. But for those who do, there could be a pretext for attending.”

“A pretext; which pretext?”

“They could be present at the assembly meeting to collect their share of the MPs’ common fund, which is paid through the district assembly.”

“Oh, I see”

“And since they have no voting rights in the assembly, they may not be very motivated to make any serious contributions to the assembly.”

“You are right; and there may be another reason for that, Grandpa. You know that there is a lingering animosity between DCEs and MPs. An MP may not want to spend any length of time in a meeting with a powerful ‘enemy.’”

“I didn’t think about that, but you are right. And that means the contribution of the MPs to the work of the district assemblies could be minimal.”

“Hmmm, that leaves the DCE.”

“Yes, real power in the district assembly resides in the district chief executive. He controls the budget and determines which project will be carried out and which will not.”

“Grandpa, are you sure that the same situation exists in the metropolitan assemblies?”

“Well... , the situation may not be wholly true in the metropolitan assemblies. I think in those assemblies the representation is often better. But even there, the metropolitan chief executive calls the shots.”

“Ok, Grandpa; and I am beginning to suspect why that is so.”

“Yes?”

“I think it’s because the DCE is an appointee of the president.”

“Exactly, my son; the district chief executive is a political party person in a non-partisan assembly.”

The district chief executive is a political party person in a non-partisan assembly

“Yes, Grandpa; and I believe he sees his allegiance as going more to the president.”

“You hit the nail right on its head, my son; the district chief executive dances to the tune of the president. He owes his position to the president. Indeed, he may not feel any obligation towards the people he is supposed to serve and, in many cases, may not give proper respect to them.”

“Grandpa, that brings to mind the case of the ‘*tweaa* DCE’”

The word “*tweaa*” is a remark used by the Akans of Ghana to show strong disagreement. This word came into popular usage a few years back, following the happenings at a public gathering at which a district chief executive was making a speech. As the district chief executive delivered his speech, someone in the audience suddenly shouted “*tweaa*” to his hearing.

Feeling affronted by that remark, the district chief executive went off his prepared speech and asked with indignation: “Who said *tweaa*, who said *tweaa*, are you my co-equal?” The “*tweaa*” remark so incensed the district chief executive that he abandoned the gathering and drove away in his car, against much pleading from his assistants. This became a nationwide

joke, and that district chief executive earned the name “tweaa DCE”.

“Yes, my son; if that person had any respect for the people he was addressing, he would have behaved better. As it turned out, he was the president’s man and he told everybody to ‘go to hell’.”

“You are right, Grandpa; but I have a question: what is wrong if the district chief executive calls the shots in the district assembly? He needs to be in control, doesn’t he?”

“My son, an overwhelmingly powerful district chief executive will turn out to be a dictator and that doesn’t bode well for the assembly. Don’t forget that the district chief executive is essentially a political party person.”

“Are you thinking of political manipulation, Grandpa?”

“Not only that; too much power breeds corruption and impunity, and defeats the democratic principles envisaged in the district assembly system.”

“And what is your solution, Grandpa? You always seem to have one.”

“I think the power of the DCE must be diffused to promote good governance and enhance performance.”

“You want to diffuse the power of the DCE; how, Grandpa?”

“First I think we should improve the capacity of the assembly members; that will improve the quality of debate during meetings of the assembly.”

“Are you thinking of training for the assembly members, Grandpa?”

“Not exactly that, my son; I am actually thinking of improving the calibre of persons who contest in the district assembly elections.”

“Hmmm, Grandpa; some may consider that an insult; are you saying that the current crop of assembly members is not good enough?”

“No, my son; I am not insulting anybody. But a certain proverb says ‘In the land of the blind, the one-eyed man is king.’ I am just saying that we could improve what is on the ground.”

Ok; and how do you propose we improve the human resource capacity of the assemblies, Grandpa?”

“To start with, I think the system should be made to attract as many of the best brains available as possible.”

“Grandpa, you have said the same thing: ‘improving human resource capacity’ and ‘attracting the best brains’ is the same thing. My question is; how do we do that?”

“We must make the district assemblies the starting point for a career in parliament.”

“Huh?”

We must make the district assemblies the starting point for a career in parliament

“Any person who aspires to be a member of parliament must be required to serve in a district assembly first.”

“You made this point early on Grandpa, but it was to reduce the politicization of parliament, but I think I know another reason why it is necessary. The district assembly elections have not been well patronized because the real focus has always been on parliament.”

“Yes, my son; and that’s because our people think that the development of their districts depends on their members of parliament.”

“But that’s very sad. If local development is the responsibility of the district assemblies, it would seem right to focus more on the district assembly elections, rather than on elections to parliament. We are doing things upside down, Grandpa”

“I am glad you are seeing my point, my son. Making the district assemblies the gateway to parliament will attract all aspiring members of parliament to the district assemblies. The focus would be in the right place, and we would be doing things the right way up.”

“Yeah Grandpa; that will surely improve the human resource base as you said.”

“Exactly; it will. But for me, one term in the assembly should not be a sufficient condition to qualify for parliament; a person must serve two consecutive terms before he/she qualifies to contest in elections for parliament.”

A person must serve two consecutive terms before he/she qualifies to contest in elections for parliament

“Two terms, Grandpa; why two terms?”

“Two consecutive terms are necessary to ensure that those who gain entry into parliament truly understand the real needs of the people in the districts. It will also prevent a ‘hit-and-run’ situation, where an individual hits the assembly just to qualify for parliament, without actually serving the people in the districts.”

“Oh, you want some seriousness attached to all this. And I guess you still maintain that such people should not be elected on the ticket of political parties?”

“Of course, I want some seriousness in all this; the district assemblies need serious attention, my son. And yes, people should enter the district assemblies on their own merits, not on the ticket of political parties.”

“So, Grandpa, you think that one way of diffusing the power of the district chief executive is to improve the human resource capacity of the district assemblies? What else should be done?”

“I think the district chief executive should be elected by the people; he should not be appointed by the president.”

The district chief executive should be elected by the people; he should not be appointed by the president

“Yes, I have heard that before, Grandpa; but people say that the district chief executive should be elected on the ticket of political parties.”

“No, that’s not a good idea; a candidate for district chief executive should be elected on his own merit, and should not be sponsored by any political party.”

A candidate for district chief executive should not be sponsored by any political party

“And why not, Grandpa?”

“For the same reasons why members of parliament should not be elected on the ticket of political parties. Otherwise, the district chief executive will be in office only to advance the interest of his or her party. The

district chief executive must be directly accountable to the electorate, not to political parties or the president.”

“But Grandpa, will the election of district chief executives be sufficient to solve the problem?”

“Yes, to a large extent. Elected district chief executives will feel obligated to their people. At least, they will be patently aware that unless they perform, they will be kicked out of office; that should propel them into action.”

“Yeah, Grandpa; but, who will call a non-performing district chief executive to order? The people will have to wait till the next election before they can kick him out of office.”

“That’s an excellent question my son, and this is where I mention the next improvement to the district assembly structure. There should be a supervising authority over every district chief executive to monitor performance.”

“A supervisory authority; like what the state council will be over the president?”

There should be a supervising authority to monitor performance of every district chief executive

“Exactly, my son; let’s call the supervising authorities metropolitan, municipal, or district councils as the case may be.”

“Hmmm; and what will be the function of those councils, and how will they relate to the chief executives of the districts”.

“It will be very similar to what has been spelt out for the state council and the president of the republic. The district councils will ensure that their respective executive committees prepare the development plans for the districts in accordance with the national development planning system.”

“I see. That should put some pressure on the executive committees to do their work.”

“You are right. The councils will also ensure that the development plans approved by the NDPC are

executed according to budget, standards, and schedules.”

“That’s another good point, Grandpa. I like that. It should check the shoddy execution of contracts.”

“The councils will also review the performance of the district chief executive and his executive committee every six months, and provide suggestions for improvement. Such suggestions should be obligatory, to be followed by the district chief executive.”

“So Grandpa, will the district councils have the power to remove the district chief executive from office?”

“Not directly, except through a vote of no-confidence brought before the general assembly of the district authority.”

“So Grandpa, what happens if a vote of no-confidence is passed in a chief executive of a metropolitan, municipal, or district assembly in the course of his term?”

“The district council will call for a fresh election to be taken in its area of authority to elect a new chief executive.”

“And will the new chief executive be serving out the remaining term of his or her predecessor?”

“No, my son; the new district chief executive will start a new term, or until he or she is likewise replaced. Essentially, the relationship between the district chief executive and the district councils will be similar to the relationship between the president and the state council.”

“And who should qualify to be on the district councils, Grandpa?”

“The metropolitan councils can be constituted from the following categories of persons:

- i. *A representative of the chiefs in the metropolis nominated by the regional house of chiefs*
- ii. *A former metropolitan chief executive*
- iii. *A former metropolitan chief farmer/fisherman*
- iv. *An educationist*
- v. *A representative of the metropolitan road transport unions*
- vi. *A representative of women leaders*
- vii. *A representative of civil society organizations”*

“Hmm, interesting Grandpa; and what about the municipal councils?”

“They can have the following:

- i. *A representative of the chiefs in the municipality*
- ii. *A former municipal chief executive*
- iii. *A former municipal chief farmer/chief fisherman*
- iv. *A female educationist*
- v. *A representative of the municipal road transport unions*

“Ok, and finally the district councils?”

“They can have:

- i. *A representative of the district house of chiefs*
- ii. *A former district chief executive*
- iii. *A former district chief farmer/chief fisherman*
- iv. *A female educationist*
- v. *A representative of the district road transport unions.*

“I see grandpa”

“Let me add that membership to these councils should be by election. Nominations for these positions should be received, and vetted by committees of the various assemblies. Those who go through the vetting should then be voted on by the assembly members meeting in a general assembly.”

“That is well thought through, Grandpa; and how long should the district council be in office for?”

“Nine years, just like the state council”

“Ok, Grandpa. Are there any other improvements that can be made to the district assembly system to make it more effective?”

“I can think of two more improvements, my son.”

“Uh-huh”

“Under the current arrangement, the district chief executive is required to work with an ‘executive committee’. I think we should strengthen the executive committees of the assemblies”

“And how should we do that, Grandpa?”

“I think the executive committee of the district should be made up of the chief executive and the technical people working in the authority. The assembly members should not serve on the executive committee.”

“This is similar to not allowing MPs to be ministers of state, Grandpa.”

“Exactly; and for a complete separation of powers, a district chief executive should not be a member of the general assembly of the district authority.”

“You have just introduced another issue, Grandpa.”

“Yes, you see; the district chief executive should be the executive head of the district authority; but he should not be a member of the general assembly of elected members. The general assembly should be made up of the presiding member and the elected assembly members. That will make for a complete separation of powers.”

“Ok Grandpa, so back to the executive committee; which ‘technocrats’ should serve on the executive committees of the district authority?”

“For the metropolitan authority, the following can be considered:

- i. *The metropolitan chief executive*
- ii. *The metropolitan finance/budget officer*
- iii. *The metropolitan planning officer*
- iv. *The metropolitan director of health services*
- v. *The metropolitan agricultural officer*
- vi. *The metropolitan engineer*
- vii. *The metropolitan fire commander*
- viii. *The metropolitan environmental officer*
- ix. *The metropolitan social welfare officer*
- x. *The metropolitan director of education*
- xi. *The metropolitan disaster management officer”*

“That makes 11 members for the metropolitan executive committee; what about the municipal and district executive committees, Grandpa?”

“The municipal executive committee can have 9 members as follows:

- i. *The municipal chief executive*
- ii. *The municipal finance officer*
- iii. *The municipal planning officer*
- iv. *The municipal director of health services*

- v. *The municipal agricultural officer*
- vi. *The municipal engineer*
- vii. *The municipal director of education*
- viii. *The municipal environmental officer*
- ix. *The municipal social welfare officer*

And, the district executive committee can have 7 members as follows:

- i. *The district chief executive*
- ii. *The district finance officer*
- iii. *The district planning officer*
- iv. *The district director of health services*
- v. *The district agricultural officer*
- vi. *The district engineer*
- vii. *The district director of education”*

“That seems good enough. I guess these persons are well-placed to push the development agenda of the districts, Grandpa.”

“Not only that; it will spread the balance of power, and check corruption, my son.”

“And what is your other improvement; you said you had two?”

“Yes; that has to do with the functions of the elected members, sitting in a general assembly.”

“Wait Grandpa, a question just struck me; you said the district chief executive should not be a member of the general assembly of the district authority. So what overall structure are you envisaging for the district authority?”

“I was keeping that for the last, but let me answer you in this way; I think the metropolitan, municipal, or district authority should have a three-tier structure:

- i. *the general assembly made up of all elected representatives from the various electoral areas;*
- ii. *the metropolitan, municipal, or district council; and,*
- iii. *the metropolitan, municipal or district executive committee, made up of the elected chief executive and the specified technical minds working in the district authority.”*

“Ok, that’s clear enough. So we have discussed the various councils, the chief executives, and the

executive committee; now you can continue with the functions of the general assembly.”

“I think the functions of the members, sitting in a general assembly, should be sharpened to make them more specific.”

“Uh-huh; and what specific functions do you envisage, Grandpa?”

“I think the assembly members, meeting in a general assembly, should:

- 1. pass bye-laws to regulate life in their respective areas of jurisdiction;*
- 2. receive and consider for approval, the development plans for the metropolis, municipality, or district, and approve budgets submitted by the executive committee;*
- 3. elect the members of the metropolitan, municipal, or district, councils;*
- 4. consider, and vote on, a motion of no-confidence in the metropolitan, municipal, or district chief executive brought before it by the metropolitan, municipal, or district council as the case may be;*

5. *elect eligible persons to represent their constituents in Parliament;*
6. *participate in the election of members of the state council.”*

“That seems ok. But Grandpa, why do you want the functions of assembly members to change?”

“My son, I am not changing anything. Assembly members have various functions in their communities. That shouldn’t change. I am only calling for a sharpening of the functions they perform when they meet in a general assembly.”

“Ok Grandpa; you have made some serious points on the district assemblies. You want the chief executives of the districts to be elected, but not on political party tickets.

You also want the executive committees to be made up of the chief executive and the technical persons who work with the district authority. Then you want councils to be established to have supervisory authority over the executive committees. I hope I got that right?”

“Yes, you did my son; I also said that the executive committees should be separate from the general

assemblies. You see, all this is intended to improve the performance of the district assemblies, and make them more responsive to the needs of the people.”

“Ah yes, I almost forgot; you also want the assemblies to be given 40% of national revenues to improve their financial capacity, right Grandpa?”

“Yes, you are right. I said also that the district assemblies should be the starting point for a career in parliament.”

“Yes, I remember that, grandpa. And you even want the assembly members to serve for two consecutive terms before they qualify for election to parliament.”

“Exactly; there should be no ‘hit-and-run’ assembly members.

“Yeah, Grandpa; I remember that term very much. But what will all these changes you are proposing achieve?”

“What they will achieve? A lot”

“Uh-huh”

“Making the assemblies the starting point for a career in parliament will improve the human resource capacity of district assemblies, and lead to better decision-making.”

“Ok”

“Then, the various district councils will check corruption and moderate the power of the chief executives.”

“And Grandpa, I think the infusion of 40% of national revenues into the district authority will boost local development, right?”

“Exactly, my son; and don’t forget that the assemblies will be pushed to catalyze the development of private enterprise to generate more revenue.”

“And grandpa, if all these happen, it will reverse the exodus of the youth from the districts to the cities; what do you say?”

“Yes, very much so, my son; those in the cities will leave the harsh life and go back to their districts, where they are more likely to find work.”

“Interesting stuff, Grandpa, interesting; how I wish we can implement all these changes.”

“We should, my son; it will be in the interest of the people in the districts, who are in the majority. You see, the metropolitan, municipal, and district authorities hold the key to the development of this nation. The more attention we pay to them, the better and faster this nation will develop.”

“I agree completely, Grandpa; I sincerely do.”

“Well, that’s enough for today, my son. I think we should continue tomorrow.”

END OF PART 6