# **CREATION OF NEW REGIONS IN GHANA IS NO PANACEA TO UNDERDEVELOPMENT: A CASE STUDY OF NOTHERN REGION.**

1. **BACKGROUND**

The concept of development and underdevelopment has been an albatross in many third world countries. *Hitherto*, countries in the developing world have been struggling to initiate and implement policies that will improve the quality of life of all citizens in a manner that reflects the principles of equity, equality and fairness. Many developing countries despite their significant resource endowment continue to wallow in objectionable poverty and its associated consequences. A situation which many scholars and international organisations have attributed to *inter alia*; corruption, mismanagement, lack of sound economic policies, low level of technological development, overdependence on donor agencies, political instability and inadequate domestic skilled labour for the efficient and effective exploitation of natural resources.

The evolution of the concept of development for the past six decades is a reflection of the changing needs of every society. Development as argued from the perspective of ‘‘economic growth’’in 1960s has evolved to include infrastructural transformation, redistributive justice and more recently sustainable development.

Globally, countries have come to appreciate the fact that development should not be limited to economic growth but should include a deliberate attempt towards providing social and economic opportunities to all groups and individuals to improve their quality of life while at the same time establishing measures to ensure that the future generation are not denied of their right to meet their own needs.

Principally, development according to Dudley Seer must encompass addressing issues of poverty, unemployment and inequality. Provision of basic necessities (food, water, shelter and security), self-esteem, literacy, freedom of expression and the right of every citizen to effectively participate in the governance process are all issues of grave concern as far as development is concerned. It is generally agreed that development should be seen as a process but not an event. As such Rostow in his famous theory ‘‘the stages of growth development’’ in 1960 presented five main stages for which every country is expected to go through to become developed. He identified these stages as traditional society; precondition to take-off; take-off; drive to maturity and age of high mass consumption. I agreed with Julius Nyirere when he opined that development is about making the people happy and content.

Ghana as a country has been struggling to improve the quality of life of its citizenry. The prospects were high after political independence from the British. The country’s first president after gaining independent embarked upon what many described as unprecedented infrastructural and industrial development. The construction of the Akosombo dam, Komenda sugar factory, Kumasi shoe factory, and myriad of import substation industries that were intended to provide goods not only for the domestic market but for export. Social intervention policies such as free education in northern Ghana, allowance for training colleges just to mention a few were among President Nkrumah’s top most priorities.

Consequently, Ghana became the ‘‘rising star of Africa’’ and the country was instrumental in contributing towards the decolonisation struggle across Africa and beyond. *The independence of Ghana according to President Nkrumah was meaningless unless it was linked up with the total liberation of the whole African continent*. This was to emphasize the role of Ghana in the emancipation of the rest of African countries that were still under colonial rule. And indeed history has not failed in rewarding Ghana in this regard.

1. **OVER SIXTY YEARS OF INDEPENDENCE**

Today, after 60 years of independence, notwithstanding some milestone achievements, Ghana is ranked one of the poorest countries in the world with scores of its citizens wallowing in abject poverty. The Economist may be delighted in quoting the growth in GDP or per capita income especially during the past decade, but this arguably has not reflected in the lives of the ordinary citizen. Living according to the ordinary Ghanaian is tough like never before and the least said about it the better. As if that is not enough, the country is engulfed with filth especially in the urban areas placing Ghana as one of the dirtiest countries in the world.

This phenomenon compels some sections of the public to keep asking if indeed the black man is capable of managing his own affairs as posited by Dr Kwame Nkrumah. The economy of Ghana is highly dependent on foreign aid. We borrow money to finance national budget annually, to build roads, schools, hospitals, and in some cases construct factories. As a result, the country has become severely indebted to countries like China and other developed countries.

1. **CREATION OF NEW REGIONS**

It is instructive to note that the size of regions and the spatial distribution of people across Ghana has little or nothing to contribute to the debate of underdevelopment in Ghana. The idea of creating new regions became a major campaign promise by the two major political parties that is the New Patriotic Party and the National Democratic Party during the 2016 election campaign.

The President Nana Addo Dankwa Akuffo Addo upon assuming office constituted a commission of enquiry to look in to petitions in pursuant of the need to create additional regions from the existing ten administrative regions. According to the government, six additional regions are to be curved from four of the existing ten regions based on the recommendations of Justice Brobbey Commission of inquiry. The Oti region is expected to be created from the Volta region, Western North is expected to be carved from Western region while the Brong Ahafo region is expected to be divided in to Bono East and Ahafo. The northern region which is the largest region in Ghana in terms land mass is expected to see two additional region being carved from it namely the Savannah and North East. Ghana will have a total of sixteen administrative regions should this intention be successful.

This new development has resulted in to a contradictory reactions from the public. Some people are of the view that creation additional six regions in Ghana is unnecessary and amount to waste of scarce resources which could be channelled in to providing the basic needs of the people to improve upon their wellbeing. The opponents argue that the exercise will come with a huge financial burden. They maintain that aside the referenda that are to be carried out in the affected areas, the new regions will require creation of government institutions and agencies that are required by law to be established at the regional level. On the contrary, the proponents believe that creation of new regions is a necessary requirement to propel socio-economic development in the regions in question. They further argue that the disintegration will ensure convenient administration as governance will be brought the grass root which will in turn decrease the expected number of hours or distance that people have to cover to access certain vital services which are only available at the regional offices. A claim which the opponents rejected on the ground that it is insignificant as this problem can be solved by a deliberate transformation in road network in the regions under review.

1. EVOLUTION OF REGIONS IN GHANA.

It is historically significant to note that the ten regions of Ghana as we have today is an outcome of series of annexation and divisions between 1900 and 1983. According to Gwillim Law (2015), in 1900, the coastal region of Ghana had been colonized by the United Kingdom as the Gold Coast. In 1901, Ashanti, already a British protectorate, was annexed. The Northern Territories Protectorate followed in 1902. Trans-Volta Togoland became affiliated with Gold Coast in 1922 until 1956 when it formally became part of the Gold Coast.

 In 1957, when the Gold Coast was renamed Ghana at independence, Ashanti Protectorate became Ashanti region; Gold Coast colony (capital Accra) split into Eastern and Western regions; Northern Territory protectorate and northern part of Trans-Volta Togoland trust territory became Northern region; remaining part of Trans-Volta Togoland, plus Anlo and Tongu local council areas of Gold Coast colony, became Volta region. Further divisions were to take place in the subsequent years, Ashanti region split into Ashanti and Brong-Ahafo regions in 1959 and in 1960, the Northern region was divided into Northern and Upper regions. Western region was split into Western and Central in 1971. In 1982, Accra was carved out of Eastern region to constitute Greater Accra and the Upper region was divided into Upper East and Upper West regions in 1983.

The regions are subdivided into 216 districts, of which 6 are metropolitan districts and 41 are municipal districts as documented by Gwilim Law (2015), the ordinary districts have urban councils, town councils, and area councils under them. The metropolitan districts are divided into sub-metropolitan districts, which are further subdivided into town councils. The municipal districts are divided into zones. Unit committees are the lowest level of local government, subsidiary to all of the entities already mentioned.

In November 2017, the minister for Local Government presented a Legislative Instrument to Parliament proposing the creation of 38 new districts. The LI when passed will bring the total number of Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies to 254. The purpose of creating MMDAs is to ensure effective local government and decentralisation. Decentralisation is a tool of public administrative reform that involves the transfer of functions and powers, skills and competencies and means and resources to local levels of governance, normally structures of local government, though in some jurisdictions, the transfer is to other spheres of governance. (Ahwoi, 2010). Since its introduction in the early 1980s, decentralisation has been an integral part of the governance structure of Ghana. In fact the entire chapter 20 of the 1992 constitution is devoted to local government and decentralising.

1. **FOCUS ON NORTHERN REGION**

Fast forward, the Northern region as mentioned earlier is one the regions to be divided into three different regions namely the Savannah, North East and Northern region. The region is the largest administrative region in terms land mass. The 2016 poverty revealed that the Northern region now makes up the largest number of poor people of among the ten regions of Ghana (1.3 million). 47 percent of men in the region have no education, only 27 percent of women are literate, almost a quarter of students do not complete primary school, 111 of every 1,000 children born die before the age of five, 82% of children are anaemic, one-third are stunted, and one-fifth are underweight. (Alston, 2018). There is a growing evidence to suggest that the level under- development in Northern Ghana is as a result of lack of concerted effort to channel resources geared towards creating social and economic opportunities in the region. For instance, UNDP 2018 report noted that, for the period 2005 to 2011, out of a total of approximately US$21 billion of inflows, the three regions of Northern Ghana attracted a mere 1.7%, whereas Greater Accra accounted for almost 46%, and the Western and Ashanti regions accounted close to 34% and 15% of the total respectively as the economies of agglomeration continued to favour the more developed regions.This is similar to an earlier claim by Songsore, (2011) that between 1994 and 1999, only 1% of all private capital flows coming through the Ghana Investment Promotion Centre (US$1.5 billion) went to Northern Ghana, whereas the Greater Accra Metropolitan Area alone attracted 79%.

***The 2018 Northern Ghana development report by UNDP identified the following key finding:***

1. Human development outcomes are low compared to national averages. For 2014, the HDI for the Northern Ghana was estimated to be 0.116 compared 0.575 for the national level.

2. The Northern, Upper East and Upper West regions have long had the highest poverty headcount ratios

3. Connectivity within the zone is also a huge challenge despite significant progress in road infrastructure.

4. Significant infrastructure gaps prevent ICT based skills and services potential from being realized in the zone.

5. The North has the majority of deprived districts in the country. Retention of staff, distance of schools and provision of infrastructure are challenges.

6. The poorest staffed region in the country is the Northern Region (NR). For example, the region’s nurse to population ratio (1:1,255) was much lower than the national average (1:959 7.The Northern Region had the highest rate of youth unemployment.

8. Inadequate connection to the grid and unreliable power affect business growth and peoples’ wellbeing

9. Small-scale and artisanal mining, often illegal and most often unsustainable has emerged as a coping livelihood strategy in parts of the North.

 10. One of the key challenges for regional or district level transformational planning is the lack of systematic information on almost all facets of development in the North.

11. Women’s economic involvement is most often limited to low productivity activities which provide little opportunity for them to move up the ladder*.*

Undoubtedly, the above key findings by the UNDP paint a gloomy picture about the Northern part of the country. To solve this problems, deliberate system of policy is required with solid political will and resource mobilisation which must be beyond the rhetoric. The division of northern region, I emphasize cannot be the panacea to the magnitude of underdevelopment. It is important to note that the impression being created is that once these regions are created, socio-economic development will manifest. It is rather mind boggling to suggest that for some parts of Ghana to develop, they must be further divided. That to me is a lazy man’s approach to development. Creation of new regions cannot be an end in itself. If it were an end in itself, the Upper West region after it was carved out of the then Upper region in 1983 would have experienced massive development

Indeed available data indicates that the Upper West region is poorest region in Ghana. The region is ‘blessed’ with dilapidated roads and inadequate health facilities. Health care professionals are inadequate and so many people have to be referred to Tamale to access some vital services which are not available in the region. Apart from the regional capital, many of the roads in the region are in a deplorable state. The establishment of the University for Development Studies and other tertiary institutions have been positive in attracting people to the region. There is no single factory in the region that is noted for the production of goods apart from few shear butter processing factories. Agriculture which is the major source of livelihood in the region is predominantly rain fed and traditional. This situation results in high rate of migration to the southern part of the country with Kumasi and Accra featuring as the major destinations.

It is important to note that regions can develop irrespective of size. It is not about the size of an area but the availability resources and the political will to channel these resources in to creating equal opportunities for the people to benefit from.In fact Ghana can develop even with five regions. There is no empirical evidence to suggest that the little development in some areas of the country is as a result of their size. While the suggestion that the division of the northern region will ensure administrative convenient cannot be entirely overlooked, it is imperative to mention that effective decentralisation across Ghana as stipulated in the 1992 constitution is equally a better alternative to solving this problem.

1. THE WAY FORWARD

Government should consider empowering the Northern Development Authority by making available adequate resources to enable it to deliver. This will require a strong political will. There must also be constant monitoring and evaluation to track the progress and performance of the authority using verifiable indicators to avoid reoccurrence of the massive corruption that engulfed SADA.

Creation of employment opportunities is a necessary condition for development hence the government’s policy of one district one factory should be seen manifesting in the region. This will help reduce the rural urban drift menace.

Agriculture remains the major source of livelihood in the region, government must scale up efforts towards enhancing crop and production. Here, the one village one dam policy should not remain in its conception stage. There is the need for government to involve community members in developing proper exit strategy that will promote effective management of the dams to ensure prevent potential occurrence of conflicts. Continuous research into drought resistant crops, provision of subsidized inputs as well as increasing the number of extension services are all measures worth consideration. The importance of an effective stakeholder engagement and analysis especially before, during and after the implementation of this policy will cannot be overemphasized. Failure of government to manage the various potential conflicting interest relating to the construction and the utilisation of the various dams will result in dire consequences that will affect the realisation of the overall goal of the policy.

Finally, development in the Northern region will not be possible without investment in the transport sector. There is therefore an urgent need for massive investment in road infrastructure to promote accessibility within the region.

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