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Promise and Reality of Decentralization

**The Case of Farmers' Access to Agricultural Advisory Services in the
Sunyani Municipality of Ghana.**

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the extent to which decentralization has affected farmers' access to agricultural advisory services in the Sunyani Municipality of Ghana. Specifically, it focuses on how political and organizational factors, which are intermediate outcomes of decentralization, affect the availability and relevance of advisory services. The study follows a qualitative research design employing qualitative methods of data construction. A total of 26 semi-structured interviews and 3 focus-group discussions with government officials and farmers were conducted in three farming communities in the study area.

Using the soufflé theory of decentralization as a conceptual model for the data analysis, the results indicate that though there is some political commitment to decentralize, decentralization has not led to strengthened institutional capacity, effective stakeholder participation, accountability and adequate funding. This has made extension services almost unavailable in the study area. The study shows that decentralizing service delivery by itself cannot lead to improved access. A careful mix of political and organizational ingredients is required for successful decentralization outcomes.

Keywords: Access, Availability, Relevance, Institutional Capacity, Stakeholder Participation, Accountability, Funding, Agricultural Extension Agents, Department of Agriculture, Nkrankrom, Abesim, Kuffuor Camp.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AEA(s)	Agricultural Extension Agent(s)
CSO(s)	Civil Society Organization(s)
DA	District Assembly
DDO(s)	District Development Officer(s)
DOA	Department of Agriculture
FBO	Farmer-Based Organization
FGD	Focus-Group Discussion
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GSS	Ghana Statistical Service
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
IMCCD	Inter-Ministerial Coordination Committee for Decentralization
L.I	Legislative Instrument
LGS	Local Government Service
MA	Municipal Assembly
MLRGD	Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development
MoF	Ministry of Finance
MOFA	Ministry of Food and Agriculture
NGOs	Non-governmental organization(s)
PNDCL	Provisional National Defence Council Law
RCC	Regional Coordinating Council
RELC	Research-Extension Linkage Committee
SMA	Sunyani Municipal Assembly
T&V	Training and Visit
UES	United Extension System

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- The 1992 Constitution of the Republic of Ghana
- Local Government Act, 1993, (Act 462)
- Local Government Service Act, 2003 (Act 656)
- Local Government Legislative Instrument, 2009 (L.I. 1961)

1. Introduction

In the 1980s, many researchers and academics advocated for decentralization in response to the revived global interest in governance and the necessity for human-focused approaches to development (Work, 2002). The widespread displeasure with overly centralized planning and administrative functions and the failure of centralized governments to create proper incentives to serve as catalysts for economic growth justified the need for decentralization (Agrawal and Ribot, 1999; Crook and Sverrisson, 2001; Larson and Ribot, 2004; Lai and Cistulli, 2005; Cheema and Rondinelli, 2007). State failure was particularly illustrated by the poor performance of the agricultural sector in many developing countries (World Bank, 2000). In some countries, decentralization policies were implemented as a response to changing funding requirements of multilateral organizations and aid agencies (Cheema and Rondinelli, 2007).

Consequently, over the last three decades, decentralization reforms have been pursued in many sub-Saharan African countries to improve governance efficiency and ensure that policies are more tailored to the needs of local people. The pursuit for decentralization is largely based on the proposition that local governments are closer to the people and therefore able to better appreciate local needs and preferences (Crook, 2003; Obeng-Odoom, 2010; Cabral, 2011). A corollary to this notion is that decentralizing agricultural advisory/extension services delivery, for instance, will ensure that smallholder farmers have adequate access to information, skills and technologies to enhance their livelihoods and well being (Birner *et al.*, 2006).

In spite of decentralization's promise of improved access, evidence on how decentralization affects farmers' access to agricultural advisory services remains patchy (Birner and Resnick, 2010; Mogues and Omu-Baah, 2014). Studies that have been conducted to assess the impact of decentralization have focused on the general themes of poverty reduction and local development performance, health and educational services (Adamolekun, 1999; Bossert and Beauvais, 2002; Crook, 2003; Faguet and Sánchez, 2008). Those that have concentrated on agricultural extension services delivery have focused on the effects of decentralization on both public and private extension delivery

channels (for instance, Nambiro, *et al.*, 2006; Mugunieri and Omiti, 2007), and emphasized the ‘here and now’, thereby failing to capture change processes.

Using the Sunyani Municipality of Ghana as a case, this study contributes to existing knowledge on the effects of decentralization on farmers’ access to agricultural extension services. I have focused on public sector extension services delivery and drawn from the perspectives of both farmers and public agricultural extension agents using qualitative methods of data construction. The study also compares the *situation before and after decentralization*, thereby analysing a process of change. Its primary focus is to understand how political and organizational factors in decentralized systems affect farmers’ access to extension services.

In line with the aim of this study, the following research questions are explored:

- What political and organizational factors have affected the delivery of extension services in a decentralized system?
- To what extent have these factors affected the availability and relevance of agricultural advisory services in the study area?

From a broader context, Ghana is interesting for this study because attempts at decentralizing agricultural advisory services in Ghana have been aimed primarily at enhancing public extension systems by assigning the responsibility of service provision to local governments instead of central government ministries or departments. This is quite different from other jurisdictions in Africa, for example in the case of Kenya, where the attention has been on decentralizing government’s role and shifting the responsibility for the delivery of extension services to other institutions (Mugunieri and Omiti, 2007). I have also chosen to focus on the Sunyani Municipality of Ghana due to the fact that agriculture constitutes the major source of livelihood to a majority of people (over 45.9 per cent) in this municipality (SMA, 2012). Therefore the importance of agricultural advisory services for their activities cannot be overemphasized. Again, the municipality is ‘home’ to people from diverse ethnic groups and backgrounds in Ghana.

Following this introduction, I have divided the study into six sections. The succeeding section provides a contextual and historical background to the study. In the third section, a survey of existing literature on decentralization and agricultural services is conducted. The fourth section presents the analytical framework, while the fifth section outlines the methodology, data construction methods and their limitations. In the penultimate section, I have discussed the results of the study. Some concluding thoughts are shared in the last chapter.

2. Agricultural Advisory Services in Ghana: A Contextual and Historical Overview

Ghana is a West African country with an estimated population of about 24,658,823 (GSS, 2013). Agriculture (comprising forestry and fishing) remains the backbone of the Ghanaian economy, employing about 41.5 per cent of the economically active population aged above 15 years. The Ghana Statistical Service (2012) describes about 45.8 per cent of the country's households as agricultural, with 95.1 per cent of such households engaged in crop farming, 40.5 per cent in livestock rearing, and 1.1 per cent into tree planting. About 0.2% of these agricultural households are into fish farming. In 2014, agriculture's contribution to the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) was 21.4 per cent. Crop production is predominantly rain-fed and practised on small family farms, with majority of farmers still employing the use of rudimentary farming tools such as cutlass and hoe. This has in part resulted in average yields from farms remaining stagnant, with estimates indicating that average yields of most major crops are less than 50 per cent of possible yields (Asuming-Brempong *et al.*, 2006). Asuming-Brempong *et al.* (2006) argue that the seeming slow pace of agricultural development in the country is also attributable to the fact that lots of farmers do not have access to effective extension services. Hence, a number of steps have been taken over the years to address challenges in the delivery of agricultural advisory services and to ensure that all farmers have access to extension services.

Ghana employed an export-commodity development approach for developing agriculture before its independence from British colonial rule in 1957 (Okorley, 2007). Extension

services were targeted at supporting the production of cash crops such as cocoa, coffee and cotton for export to the neglect of food crop production which provided food and served as a major livelihood source for a majority of the rural population (Ntifo-Siaw and Agunga, 1994; Okorley, 2007). Thus access to extension services was largely limited to cash crop farmers. After independence (in the 1960s), the United Ghana Farmers' Cooperative Council (UGFCC) provided extension services and their activities were complemented by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) through its "Focus and Concentrate" project. Under both systems, cash crop farmers were offered advisory services and farm inputs (Asuming-Brempong *et al.*, 2006).

Food security concerns were raised in Ghana after independence, especially in the 1970s. In 1978, the country consequently directed its attention from the promotion of cash crops to food crop production and adopted a Ministry-based general extension approach. This was done to modernise traditional farming practices through the application of improved agricultural technologies and to develop all areas of rural agricultural life (Okorley, 2007). Under this approach, extension services were delivered to farmers through several independent departments such as crop, livestock, fisheries, agricultural engineering and veterinary services, under the Ministry of Food and Agriculture. The general extension approach was specifically aimed at developing agriculture in selected areas of the country; and it supported a limited number of 'progressive' farmers with inputs and technology, from whom other farmers were supposed to learn best farming practices (Amezah and Hesse, 2002; Okorley, 2007; Asuming-Brempong *et al.*, 2006). Hence, likewise previous arrangements in the 1960s a majority of farmers did not have direct access to advisory services.

In the early 1990s, the general extension approach was therefore highly criticized as being deficient and ineffective, top-down and pro-urban and was seen as favouring progressive farmers to the detriment of poorer farmers and women. The approach was also poorly managed since the different departments under the country's Ministry of Food and Agriculture designed and implemented separate extension programmes that lacked coordination at the district level (Okorley, 2007). During this same time, similar

concerns were raised in other countries such as Togo, Burkina Faso and La Cote D'Ivoire and India, which practised a Ministry-based general extension approach. This prompted the World Bank to advocate for extension reforms in developing countries in the 1990s (ibid).

In response to the World Bank's calls, Ghana adopted a new nationwide agricultural extension approach called the Unified Extension System (UES) and the training and visit (T&V) extension management approach in 1992 (Amezah and Hesse, 2002). Under the UES-T&V approach, the Ministry of Food and Agriculture (MoFA) was re-organized and extension work was unified and put under one department, the Department of Agricultural Extension Services (DAES) at the national level. Again, only specific agricultural commodities that were considered to be important to rural and national development were targeted (Okorley, 2007). This intervention also aimed at fostering strong linkages between researchers, extension agents and farmers to facilitate the transfer and extensive use of proven agricultural technologies to meet the local needs of farmers. The World Bank financed the UES-T&V approach through a National Agricultural Extension Project (NAEP) between 1992 and 2000, and was placed under the then Ghana government's policy framework called the Medium Term Agricultural Development Programme (MTADP) (MoFA, 2002; Okorley, 2007).

An evaluation of the approach in the pilot regions revealed that it did not improve access to extension services. Much emphasis was placed on building the capacity of extension agents to transfer more agricultural technologies while less attention was given to farmers' needs and what they actually required from the extension organisation (ibid). Notwithstanding the fact that most farmers became aware of improved agricultural technologies, farmers rarely adopted those strategies that required external inputs. Poor organizational management and implementation of the approach accounted for its poor performance (ibid). These necessitated the undertaking of further extension reforms by the Ministry of Food and Agriculture.

As a result of earlier extension approaches that had been adopted, the Ministry of Food and Agriculture (MoFA) had nine technical departments by the end of 1996. These were the Departments of Crops, Livestock, Policy Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation, Women in Agricultural Development and Veterinary Services (Amezah, and Hesse, 2002). These departments were operating unilaterally and providing different extension services for farmers in each of the country's 110 districts. The Ministry of Food and Agriculture at the national level controlled these departments at the national level, and extension officials were placed under the Directorate of Agricultural Extension Services (DAES). Extension programmes were planned based on the targets and standards specified by the MoFA at the national level (Okorley, 2007).

In 1997, a decentralized agricultural extension services delivery approach was adopted to improve the effectiveness of extension services. The policy aimed at creating an environment that would promote self-help, local responsibilities and ownership of extension programmes. Hence, the Ministry of Food and Agriculture (MoFA) devolved powers to the district level offices to enable them design and implement their own extension activities, and within the framework of national agricultural development policy, manage their resources (MoFA, 2002). Further steps to decentralize the provision of agricultural advisory services have been undertaken since 2012.

A summary of the approaches that have been employed prior to and after the country's independence in 1957 to improve farmers' access to extension services is provided in table 1:

Table 1: Summary of Extension Approaches and Policies to Improve Farmers' Access in Ghana (Before 1957-2012).

<i>Year</i>	<i>Extension Approach</i>	<i>Limitations</i>
Prior to 1957-1960	Provision of extension services to cash crop farmers	Neglect of food crop production. Access limited to cash crop farmers.
1970s	General Extension Approach	Limited to 'Progressive Farmers'; Top-Down and Neglected poorer farmers and women.
Early 1990s	United Extension System and Training and Visit Approach	Services not relevant to farmers' needs; low rate of technology adoption.
1997	Decentralized Agricultural Extension System	
2012	Strengthening decentralization. Local governments now responsible for service delivery	

Source: Author

Having provided the contextual and historical background of the study, I have presented definitions and discussed existing literature on agricultural advisory/services and decentralization in the next section.

3. Agricultural Advisory Services and Decentralization: A Survey of the Literature

The concepts of decentralization and agricultural extension services have evolved over time with several arguments put forward by authors to either justify their need or otherwise. This chapter defines these terms and provides an insight into the theoretical debates that border on agricultural advisory services and more especially decentralization. It also highlights theoretical arguments in favour of decentralized extension services delivery.

3.1 Agricultural Advisory/Extension Services

From the traditional perspective of training farmers and disseminating technologies in the 1980s and early 1990s, extension has more recently expanded to include helping farmers to form groups to deal with problems regarding the marketing of agricultural products and partner with a broad range of agricultural service providers (Birner *et al.*, 2006). Thus Birner *et al.* (2006:2) define agricultural extension or advisory services as “the set of institutions that support and facilitate people engaged in agricultural production to solve problems and obtain information, skills and technologies to improve their livelihoods and well-being”. This connotes a service orientation, distinct from the traditional models of top-down technology transfer.

Notwithstanding the broad range of agricultural services provided to farmers by extension officials, Anderson and Feder (2004) and Waddington *et al.* (2010) note that it is difficult to assess their impact on agricultural performance at the farm level since there are multiple factors that affect farm performance in complex ways. These factors may include climatic conditions, availability and prices of farm inputs, access to markets and farmers’ characteristics. Some available evidence nonetheless points to a positive impact on farmers’ productivity and technological adoption (Birkhaeuser *et al.*, 1991; Alston *et al.*, 2000). A more recent evaluation of the impact of agricultural extension services on grape production in Mendoza, Argentina by Cerdán-Infantes, *et al.* (2008) shows that in spite of insignificant treatment effect on yields, they had positive effects on productivity especially for those who recorded low yields prior to the implementation of the extension program. The research also shows increased quality of grapes particularly for large-scale producers. Owing to the importance of advisory services to farming activities, it is imperative that all farmers have access to extension services. Decentralizing extension services delivery is seen as the surest route to achieving this.

3.2 The Promise of Decentralization

Decentralization basically implies the transfer of planning and decision-making powers to lower bodies from a higher or central level of government (Rondinelli, 1981). Theoretical arguments in favor of decentralization are twofold: First, decentralization increases

administrative effectiveness and promotes managerial efficiency in the implementation of development programs and projects. Limitations of centrally controlled national planning are overcome through the delegation of greater authority to officials in the field. Officials of central ministries are relieved of repetitive tasks allowing them to effectively monitor project implementation (De Vries, 2000; Agrawal and Ribot, 1999). Second, decentralization brings government closer to local citizens both geographically and institutionally and hence ensures greater participation of people in development planning and management (Rondinelli and Nellis, 1986; Litvack and Seddon, 2000; World Bank, 2000).

As indicated in the introduction, attempts at decentralizing agricultural extension services have largely been inspired by the afore-mentioned advantages of decentralization. Advocates for a decentralized extension system argue that it reduces the role of government in agricultural extension, which has been culpable for inefficient service delivery thereby retarding agricultural growth (World Bank, 2000; Anderson and Feder, 2004). Again, local people are able to exert control over local extension activities through active participation in program planning, implementation and monitoring. This ensures that extension programs are relevant to local needs. Moreover, decentralization helps improve managerial and technical capacity and enhances communication channels. It also contributes to safeguarding the financial sustainability of extension services delivery as local level officials can employ a variety of innovative means to increase revenue for public extension. This might include restructuring ways of staff recruitment and management, the provision of incentives and motivation and making prudent decisions to match revenues and expenses (World Bank, 2000; Swanson and Samy, 2004).

One major study that has evaluated the impact of decentralization on extension services delivery shows some positive effects on farmers' access to extension services in Kenya as farmers from areas with higher decentralized extension demonstrated high level of awareness of different channels for extension services delivery (Nambiro *et al.*, 2006). Cohen and Lemma (2011) have also found similar results in Ethiopia.

In spite of the above advantages of decentralization some scholars have pointed out its limitations. Anderson and Feder (2004) posit that under decentralization there is the likelihood of political interference from the central government and extension staff may be used for other political activities such as electoral campaigns. The problem of financial sustainability might just be transferred to the local level instead of being solved. Additionally, decentralization may increase the spate of corruption since there will be a lot of people with some power to peddle, and these may hamper efficient service delivery. Corruption-avoiding strategies might increase cost and slow down program implementation. Subnational governments with larger revenue base can provide more local public services than those without such advantage. Again, inadequate local financial, administrative and managerial local capacity might lead to inefficiency, misappropriation and waste of public funds (Prud'homme, 1995; De Vries, 2000; Barrett *et al.*, 2007; Okorley, 2007; Akramov and Asante, 2009; Manor, 2011).

Notwithstanding the above counter arguments against decentralization it is noteworthy that arguments for decentralization only present the potential of the occurrence of positive outcomes. As noted by Rondinelli and Nellis (1986:19), they are usually “a priori rationalizations based on plausibility”, and the likelihood of success is contingent on a number of factors, which are inherent in decentralized systems (Manor, 1999).

Andrew Parker in a 1995 policy research working paper for the World Bank titled ‘Decentralization: the way forward for rural development?’ shares this view and suggests that like a soufflé that requires the right combination of ingredients and heat to make it rise, successful decentralization programs need the appropriate combination of political and institutional elements to improve development outcomes. He therefore provides a conceptual model based on a soufflé theory of decentralization to analyze the impact of decentralization on broader rural development outcomes (Parker 1995:43,45). Okorley (2007) in building an operational framework for improving decentralized extension systems, builds on the soufflé model and incorporates all the relevant elements for successful decentralization. This framework, discussed in the next chapter, has been modified to guide the data construction and analysis of this study.

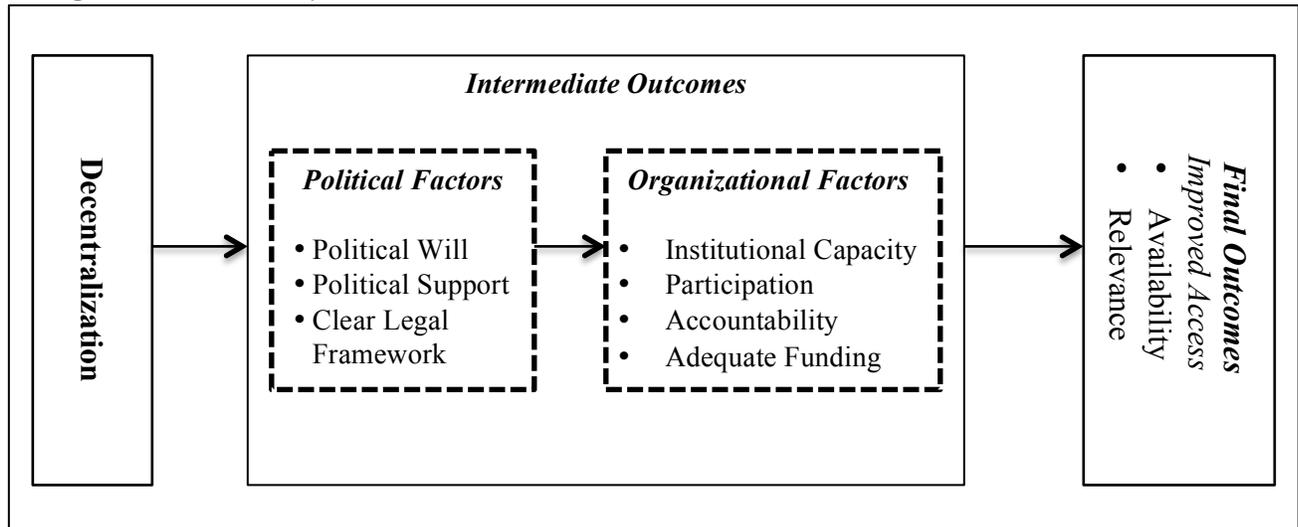
4. A Conceptual Framework- The Soufflé ‘Theory’ of Decentralization

In line with this study’s aim of examining the impact of decentralization on farmers access to extension services I have chosen to modify and use the soufflé theory of decentralization since it identifies and integrates the political and organizational factors required for the success of decentralized systems (Parker 1995; Okorley, 2007). These factors as pointed out in the preceding discussion determine successful decentralization outcomes such as improved access to extension services, which in the context of this study, encompasses availability and relevance to farmers’ needs (Shah, 1998; Ribot and Peluso, 2003; Peterman *et al.* 2010).

As illustrated in the model in Figure 1, decentralization can succeed where there is a genuine political will by the central administration to transfer responsibilities for service delivery to local level governments and a clear legal framework to avoid overlapping of roles (Fig. 1). These political factors lead to organizational outcomes such as strengthened institutional capacity, stakeholder participation, accountability and adequate funding (Parker, 1995; World Bank, 2000; Smoke 2001; Okorley, 2007). Together both political and organizational factors impact farmers’ access to agricultural extension services.

Thus in answering RQ1, I have examined the political and organizational outcomes in the current decentralized extension delivery system (as delineated in the model) and analysed their impact on availability and relevance of extension services in providing an answer to RQ2. I have elaborated on the political and organizational factors below the model.

Figure 1: A framework for analysing the impact of decentralization on farmers' access to agricultural advisory services.



Source: Modified from Parker (1995) and Okorley (2007).

4.1 Key Elements for Success

4.1.1 Political Factors

Where central government officials are unwilling to cede powers due to the fear of losing certain privileges, decentralization efforts might fail. The central government must be *willing* to provide technical, administrative, logistical and financial *support* to field agents in the lower levels of government to ensure effective performance (Rondinelli *et al.*, 1989; Lai and Cistulli, 2005). In Indian states of West Bengal and Kerala, and in South Africa, Bolivia and Philippines, the success of decentralization was found to be largely dependent on the commitment of governments of these countries to empower local governments through the delegation of power and resources (Cabral, 2011).

There must also be an *unambiguous legal framework*, which should stipulate how the various decentralized extension institutions must be organized, their roles and their relationships with other local and national organizations. This helps to prevent an overlap of roles (Parker, 1995; Rivera and Alex, 2004; Okorley, 2007). Both central and local government officials must also know the provisions of the legal framework in order to ensure compliance (Asuming-Brempong, *et al.* 2006).

4.1.2 Organizational Factors

In order for extension organizations to provide services that are relevant to the needs of farmers, they must have the requisite *technical and managerial capacity* (Parker, 1995). Capacity refers to the ability to make informed decisions and attract and manage resources to achieve certain goals (Rondinelli *et al.*, 1989). Thus insufficient funding for the delivery of extension services, inability to fully mobilize funds, failure to cost-effectively deliver services and meet farmers' needs are evidence of weak institutional capacity (Parker 1995). Several studies (Sharma, *et al.*, 2001; Pasteur 2002; Saviroff and Lindarte, 2002; Tapa and Ojha, 2002) show that enhanced technical and management capacity helps improve the motivation, confidence and attitudes of extension staff.

Extension staff must have adequate capacity and must be trained in technical agriculture to be able to assist farmers with improved crop varieties, planting techniques, efficient input use, market conditions, and more effective production management techniques (Anderson, 2007). Aside this they must be knowledgeable in communication and facilitating, problem-solving and critical thinking skills, teamwork and human relations in order to effectively interact with farmers and other stakeholders (Kroma, 2003; Kwarteng and Boateng, 2012). The capacity of extension staff could be built through staff training, informal learning, information and communication technology, research extension linkage and enhancing staff motivation and commitment. Career development opportunities, which enhance promotion prospects, also motivate staff to develop their skills and perform better (Vijayaragavan and Singh, 1997; Leeuwis and van den Ban, 2004).

Participation in the planning and implementation of extension programs by all stakeholders especially farmers ensures user ownership of programs, relevance to local needs, improves accountability, program effectiveness and strengthens farmers' capabilities (Antholt and Zijp, 1995; World Bank, 2000; Swanson and Samy, 2004; World Bank, 2004). Farmers can participate by being involved in the program development process such as identifying needs, setting and designing program goals and program implementation (Rivera, 2007). Where both public and private stakeholders such

as research institutions and commercial organizations (agricultural and food processors, input distributors and retailers) also participate in extension processes, diverse views, skills and resources become available to improve programme implementation and this strengthens networks for better service delivery and improved access (Leeuwis and van Den Ban, 2004).

Conyers (1999) and Leeuwis and van Den Ban (2004) contend that it may not be possible for all stakeholders to be given decision-making powers and control over extension programs as a result of resource constraints, conflict management requirements and the need for leadership to ensure successful implementation of program objectives. There is also the concern that not all stakeholders might necessarily want to participate (Davis, 1997). These concerns notwithstanding, Rivera (2007) argue that for the purpose of enhancing participatory processes, there is the need for a two-way communication between extension agents and farmers to ensure that extension delivery does not just become one of technology transfer but that which ultimately empowers farmers through knowledge. With such knowledge farmers will be able to hold extension organizations accountable and demand better services.

There is the need for *accountability*; farmers who are users of extension services should be able to determine whether they are receiving services which are relevant to their needs or otherwise and should have the power to demand better services (Rivera, 2007). Accountability can be assured through administrative mechanisms such as the establishment of monitoring and evaluation systems for extension activities. Again, where private organizations and NGOs are also involved in extension activities, it brings about competition among service providers and services are therefore delivered efficiently, at low costs and extension agents become more accountable to their clients (Shah 1998; Cohen and Peterson, 1999; World Bank, 2000).

Lastly, extension organizations require *adequate funding* to be able to organize staff training programs and embark on farmer outreach programs. Where there are little funds for recurrent costs and field operations, extension officers scale down field activities and

this affects the availability and quality of extension services (Bentz, 1997; Anderson and Feder, 2004). Local extension organizations can raise funds through the introduction of fee-for-service or cost-sharing arrangements, where farmers are made to pay all or part of the cost of services they receive from public extension units. They can also acquire additional resources by involving all stakeholders in extension program planning through partnerships and collaborations (Deshler, 1997 Anderson and Feder, 2004; Umali-Deininger, 2007).

Thus in summary, for decentralization to result in improved access to extension services there must be a clear legal framework and adequate institutional capacity for extension officers to deliver relevant services. Stakeholders must participate in planning, implementing and evaluating extension services through accountability mechanisms, and finally there must be adequate funding to ensure the sustainability of decentralized extension systems.

The next chapter presents the methods of data construction of this study.

5. Methodology

5.1 Research Design

The study follows a qualitative research design. A qualitative approach allows people to share their stories and provides a better understanding of the contexts and social settings that influence people's behaviour. By interacting and commiserating with participants, the researcher is able to explore people's views and complex phenomena including organizational and change processes and social interactions that influence outcomes (Patton, 2002). Since this study sought to capture change processes and identify the political and organizational factors that influence extension outcomes in a decentralized system, a qualitative approach was perfectly suited for it.

5.2 Case Selection

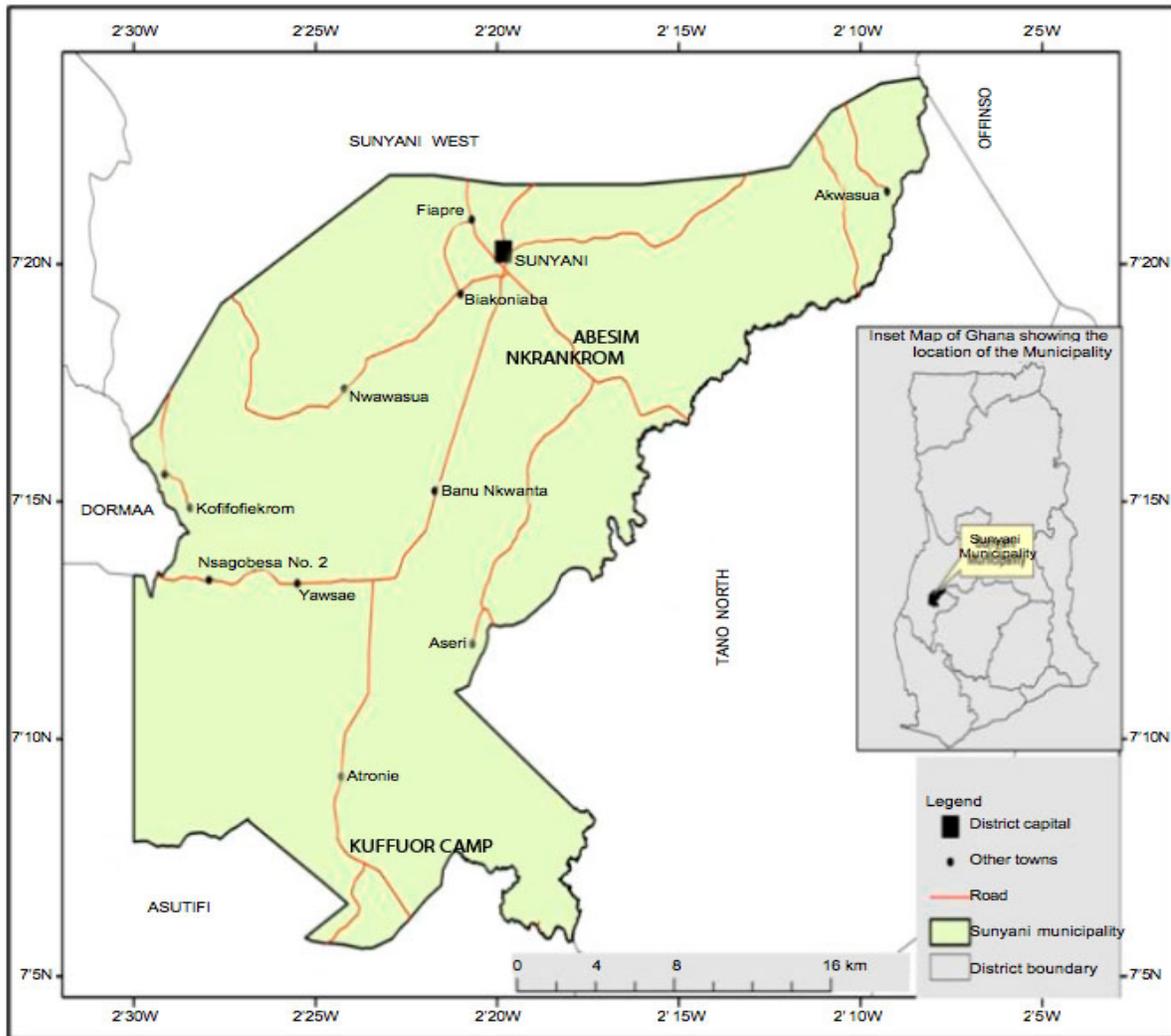
I chose a multiple case study approach in order to have a holistic understanding of the effects of decentralization on farmers' access to extension services (Yin, 2003). Again,

some studies (for example, Nambiro *et al.*, 2006) show that distance from cities and their social amenities influence access to extension services. Therefore, the three communities or cases (Abesim, Nkrankrom, Kuffuor Camp) under the Sunyani Municipality were selected to examine how distance, even in a decentralized system, affects farmers' access to extension services.

The Sunyani Municipality is one of the 22 administrative districts of the Brong-Ahafo Region of Ghana. Sunyani, which is its capital, also doubles as the capital of the region, and it is where all the regional and municipal level government departments and agencies are situated. It covers a total land area of about 829.3 square kilometres. The area's high rainfall pattern coupled with its rich vegetation cover supports high agricultural production in the municipality. Farmers mostly cultivate crops such as plantain, cocoyam, maize and cassava. Many farmers also cultivate pepper and tomatoes. Cocoa is the major tree crop and accounts for about 80% of cash crop earnings in the municipality. Oil palm and citrus follow in this regard (SMA, 2012; MoFA, 2015).

Abesim is the closest town to Sunyani and the rapid growth of Sunyani has engulfed it. Majority of farmers in Abesim are vegetable growers. Nkrankrom is nearer to Abesim although connected by an untarred road. Kuffuor Camp is the farthest from these communities and Sunyani. It is a farming community with migrant farmers from all parts of Ghana. Fig 2 is a map of the Sunyani municipality. The study communities are indicated in capital letters.

Figure 2: Map of Sunyani Municipality, Ghana



Adapted from Sakordie *et al.* (2014)

5.3 Data Construction Processes

Mikkelsen (2005) asserts that the selection of research methods must be guided primarily by the nature of the research questions to be answered. Given the research question under study, qualitative data construction methods were thought useful for this research. I used diverse qualitative methods such as semi-structured interviews, focus-group discussions and a review of existing literature and relevant documents such as legislations and policy documents on Ghana's decentralization as they enhance the quality of case study research (Yin, 2003). Other organisational documents such as the extension policy and the 'reporting forms' for extension agents also came in very handy.

5.3.1 Sampling

An official of the Department of Agriculture in the Sunyani Municipality facilitated my entry into the field as a gatekeeper. Prior to the fieldwork in December 2014, we discussed the objectives of the research and possible criteria for the selection of cases and participants for the study. Creswell (2009) indicates that in a qualitative research the idea is to purposefully select participants that will help the researcher provide answers to the research questions. Accordingly, I used the purposive sampling technique, selecting participants mainly by “informational considerations” (Mikkelsen, 2005:193). Thus ‘information-rich’ participants who have in-depth knowledge or had direct experience pertinent to the subject under study were sampled.

Since, I was exploring the impact of decentralization on farmers’ access to advisory services, participants included government officials of the regional and municipal directorates of agriculture, officials of the municipal assembly (the local government office) and smallholder farmers in the study communities. To gain a better appreciation of the situation before and after decentralization, it was important to access officials who had been in the municipality before 2012 and were familiar with the processes of decentralization since 1997. Similarly, there was the need to select farmers who could share both experiences (before and after decentralization) on their access to advisory services. Smallholder farmers were further stratified on the basis of gender and literacy level, since these factors are also known to influence access to extension services (Nambiro, *et al.*, 2006; Cohen and Lemma, 2011). Extension agents for all three communities were helpful in identifying participants and reaching them in the three communities. In some instances I also found myself using the snowball type of purposive sampling as some participants recommended that I spoke to other farmers in the communities or officials in the study DOA who could be of relevance to the study (Bryman, 2012). A list of participants of the study has been attached in Appendix 1. To safeguard the anonymity of participants, they have been identified with abstract names.

5.3.2 Interviews

I conducted semi-structured interviews with officials of the municipal assembly and regional and municipal directorates of agriculture and with some smallholder farmers. The flexibility of semi-structured interviews afforded participants the leverage to decide on how to reply (Yin, 2003; Bryman, 2008). Again since I was doing a multiple case study, some structure was needed to facilitate easy comparison of cases (Bryman, 2012). Although I had an interview guide, it mainly served as a reminder on areas to be covered. My goal was to rely as much as possible on participants' opinions; hence the questions were broad and open-ended to enable participants construct the meaning of the phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 2009). Initial interviews held with staff of the DOA helped me shape some of the questions for other participants. In a few instances, I had to have interviews with some respondents again to corroborate certain facts that had been established. Such interviews, referred to as 'focused interviews' by Yin (2003:90, 91) were conducted in an informal manner but in a quest to seek answers to specific questions.

I conducted semi-structured interviews with 8 staff members of the Department of Agriculture (DOA), 2 staff members of the regional directorate of MOFA and 1 staff member of the Municipal Assembly. In Nkrankrom and Kuffuor Camp, there were 12 interviews with both male and female farmers (six in each community) while in Abesim I had 2 interviews with male farmers and 1 with a female farmer. In all, I conducted 26 semi-structured interviews. With the express consent of participants, each of these sessions was digitally recorded. I also took field notes to serve as back up to audio recordings.

5.3.3 Focus-Group Discussions

An FGD that included both male and female participants was undertaken in each of the three communities. Whereas it is recommended that focus groups should comprise a maximum of eight or nine people, to avoid complexities in data analysis (Mikkelsen, 2005; Bryman, 2008), I could not control the number of participants, as passers-by joined the discussions as active participants. Participants were encouraged to freely express their

views notably divergent ones. This was necessary to establish the degree of consensus or divergence in opinions of the issues discussed (Morgan and Krueger, 1998). Again as was in the case of interviews, questions were broad to allow them decide on how to answer. Initially, I noticed that participants felt uncomfortable answering the questions as they thought they amounted to an appraisal of the work of extension staff, a practice that as the data will show was very uncommon in the municipality. I assured the participants of the aim of the study in order to alleviate the fear of a supposed backlash from extension staff. They were also made aware that they could decline participation at any point in time.

5.4 Data Analysis

Primary data from the field were coded in accordance with the types of themes and issues that emerged. The lists of codes were then organized under similar categories using my conceptual framework as a guide. I triangulated different data sources to ensure that themes were established on the basis of converging perspectives from participants. This notwithstanding information that runs contrary to the converged themes has been presented knowing that in real life context there are bound to be conflicting opinions. Data has been presented mostly using participants' quotes in varying length from long to short embedded passages (Creswell, 2009).

5.5 Limitations and Quality Considerations

Purposive sampling technique is highly susceptible to researcher bias as it is the sole responsibility of the researcher to make judgments on the reliability of participants. To avoid such bias, the cases and participants were sampled and stratified based on criteria informed by previous research and theory as discussed earlier (Tongco, 2007). Again since the study adopts a 'before and after' approach to analyse the impact of decentralization on farmers' access to advisory services, I have depended mainly on the 'historical' accounts of participants. As with all oral reports, such accounts are subject to problems of bias, poor recollection, and imprecise articulation (Yin, 2003). To safeguard the validity of data constructed I employed the iterative questioning technique, occasionally returning to issues previously raised by participants and obtaining related information by rephrasing the question. In this case it was easier to determine

contradictions. Moreover, I have triangulated data constructed with different sources, theory and previous research to establish congruence and examined the reasons for divergence in findings where there are such (Shenton, 2004; Tracy, 2010; Creswell, 2013).

6. Results and Analysis

This chapter presents and discusses the results of the study. It is divided mainly into two sections, one for each research question. In the first section, I have sought to answer RQ1 and discussed the factors that have impacted the extension system in the Sunyani Municipality, while in the second section which builds on the results of RQ1, I have examined the effects of these political and organizational factors on farmers' access in answering research RQ2. Each section is structured according to the conceptual framework discussed earlier.

6.1 Political and Organizational Factors

Regarding political factors I have relied largely on the broader Ghanaian context, reviewing existing legislative and institutional framework to show whether there has been adequate political support for the decentralized extension system or otherwise. With the other organizational factors, I draw mainly from the perspectives of staff of the case extension organization (Sunyani Municipal Department of Agriculture), other government officials and farmers in the municipality to examine if and how decentralization has had a positive impact on institutional capacity, stakeholder participation, resource mobilization and accountability as promised by decentralization.

6.1.1 Demonstration of Political Commitment and Support

To prevent an overlap of roles between central government organizations and local government bodies responsible for the delivery of extension services, the literature as discussed earlier advocates for strong political commitment to decentralize and the enactment of a clear legal framework. Nie *et al.* (2002) show that the success of public extension reform in China is attributable to the promulgation of well-defined guidelines

(the passage of an extension law in 1993) by the central government, which gave authority to lower level bodies.

In Ghana, I gathered from interviews with extension and local government officials in the Sunyani Municipality, existing legislative documents and some literature on decentralization in Ghana, that successive attempts have been made by both past and current governments to decentralize governance although fraught with a number of challenges (Mogues and Omusu-Baah, 2014; Asuming-Brempong *et al.*, 2006; Interview with MDA1, 2014-12-16; Interview with MA1, 2014-12-16).

Earlier attempts at decentralization began in 1988 where the then military government passed the PNDCL 207 to transfer administrative and fiscal power to the districts. This was among other things to facilitate rural development and to make governance less bureaucratic. Chapter 20 of the country's constitution gave a further boost to the PNDCL 207, which mandated the country's parliament to pass laws for the implementation of decentralization (Constitution of Ghana, 1992), thereby indicating how powers, responsibilities and resources are to be transferred from central to local government units in a coordinated manner. Thus for the purposes of local government, the country was divided into districts with the District¹, Municipal or Metropolitan Assembly as the highest political authority in the district having deliberative, legislative and executive powers.

An official of the Department of Agriculture in the municipality and a director at the Sunyani Municipal Assembly pointed out that it was in pursuant to Chapter 20 of the constitution, that parliament passed the Local Government Act 462, referred to as the 'Decentralization Law' in 1993 (Interview with MA1, 2014-12-16). Section 161 of the Act provided for the establishment of a Local Government Service (LGS) whose members would be staff of the various district assemblies. It was however not until 2003

¹ A district has a minimum population of 75,000 people; a municipality is a single compact settlement with a minimum of 95,000 people while a metropolis has a minimum of 250,000 people (Local Government Act, 1993). These are all generically referred to as district assemblies or districts.

that the Local Government Service was instituted by the passage of the Local Government Service Act, Act 656. The LGS became operational in 2004. The Act also provided for the transfer of staff of the district assemblies from the Civil Service (CS) to the LGS. Consequently, government passed the Local Government Legislative Instrument (L.I.) 1961 in 2009 to reconstitute all departments of central government ministries and agencies at the district level into departments of the District Assemblies. MA1 (2014-12-16), a staff of the Municipal Assembly recalled in an interview that in 2010, the government formed the Inter-Ministerial Coordination Committee for Decentralization (IMCCD), chaired by the President of Ghana, to oversee the implementation of the various laws that had been passed to accelerate the decentralization process.

Therefore through the activities of the IMCCD, about 43,000 staff members of the Civil Service nationwide had been formally transferred to the LGS by the end of 2011. The central government departments in the districts were also finally reconstituted and merged into 16 departments at the Metropolitan Assembly level, 13 departments at the Municipal Assembly level, and 11 departments at the District Assembly level. These are all under the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development (MLGRD). The Ministry of Food and Agriculture (MoFA) at the district level was one of the departments that was transferred and thus became a Department of Agriculture (DOA) under the local government structure. Once the transfer was made, it meant that the district assumed responsibility for the performance of their functions (Mogues and Omusu-Baah, 2014; Asuming-Brempong *et al.*, 2006; Interviews with DOA1, 2014-12-10; MA1, 2014-12-16). The LI 1961 also spells out the functions of each department of the assembly. For instance, the Department of Agriculture is, among other things responsible for the provision of extension services to farmers, and within the framework of national policies, assist in the formulation and implementation of agricultural policy for the municipality.

Additionally, Section 38 of the Local Government Act 462, which envisaged the preparation of a “composite budget” at the district level, became operational with the passage of the LI 1961. Participants from the Department of Agriculture and the

Municipal Assembly recounted that as a consequence of this legislation since 2012 all departments of the District Assembly prepare their own budgets and integrate them into the overall budget of the District Assembly (Interviews with MA1 2014-12-16; DOA1, 2014-12-10).

Whereas the passage and implementation of various legislations demonstrate a commitment to decentralize governance and ensure enhanced access to public services, extension agents in the municipality indicated that they were not aware of the details of these legislations. AEAs 1, 2, and 3 recalled in interviews that prior to the changes in the organization of extension systems in the municipality, they received no education on the laws, their responsibilities and reporting and control channels (Interviews with AEA1, 2014-12-11; AEA2, 2014-12-12; AEA3, 2014-12-12). They have therefore had to rely periodically on the director of the Department of Agriculture for insights into these legislations. Knowledge of the laws that border on decentralization and particularly those on the decentralized extension system is crucial in ensuring compliance and to guarantee improved extension services delivery as shown by Asuming-Brempong *et al.* (2006). Where the guidelines are unclear to extension agents, this may result in poor coordination between central and local level bodies and may smother extension reforms (Seepersad and Douglas, 2002). I have alluded to some of these effects in ensuing sections.

It would suffice to deduce however here that the afore-mentioned efforts based on previous discussions in the conceptual framework, satisfies to some extent the necessary but not sufficient condition for political support for decentralized extension systems to ensure success, although the process has been slow and incremental. Other organizational factors that have altered extension systems in the municipality are discussed in subsequent sections.

6.1.2 Is there Increased Institutional Capacity?

Advocates for decentralized extension systems emphasize the fact that strengthened institutional capacity required to meet the demands of farmers is essential to ensure successful extension systems (Rondinelli and Nellis, 1986; Litvack and Seddon, 1999;

Kerr, 1999). They claim that while institutional capacity is an essential condition for successful decentralization, the process of decentralization in and of itself helps build capacity of local officials. In decentralized systems, central governments can pay attention to staff training while at the same time the ‘autonomy’ of local agencies will enable them devise innovative ways to ensure that their employees have adequate capacity (Kerr, 1999). Rondinelli *et al.* (1983) show that in countries like Indonesia, Morocco and Thailand, the capacity of local government bodies saw a modest increase within some years of implementing decentralization.

I have examined these claims in the Sunyani Municipality by assessing the staff strength of the study Department of Agriculture and their technical and managerial capacity. In an interview with a senior staff member of the DOA, I was informed that the DOA had 28 staff members: a director, 5 District Development Officers (DDOs), 10 Agricultural Extension Agents (AEAs), 2 accountants, 2 administrators, and 8 other support staff (DOA2, 2014-12-11). The AEAs are field officers and deal directly with farmers in the municipality. They are among other things, responsible for assisting farmers in diagnosing farm and farming related problems and advising them on solutions to such problems. They are also required to assist farmers with information on farm inputs, credit support and marketing to ensure cost-effective farming enterprise. The DOA has zoned the municipality into 20 operational areas for the purposes of delivering agricultural extension services. There are about 9 communities in each operational area with an AEA assigned to each area.

An extension agent could count about 1,200 farmers in his operational area that he had to serve. Since there are fewer AEAs than operational areas, some staff members of the Department of Agriculture mentioned in interviews with them that there are some AEAs who had been assigned to more than one operational area (DOA1, 2014-12-10; DOA2, 2014-12-11). Actually, the problem of inadequate staff has persisted and negatively affected extension services delivery by the DOA even prior to decentralization. Nonetheless, an official of the DOA mentioned that they are now constrained to recruit more AEAs:

Ideally, we should have at least one AEA in each of the operational areas. There is however an embargo on public sector recruitment. So we can only make replacements for retired, resigned or deceased staff members. –DOA2, 2014-12-11.

Clearly such policy that limits the recruitment of people into the public sector may not be directly linked to decentralization. Nevertheless, this official also pointed out that the process of making and seeking approval for replacement of retired staff members under a decentralized system seems protracted and frustrating:

Currently, requests for replacements are sent to the Municipal Assembly. The assembly then refers our request to the Brong Ahafo Regional Coordinating Council (RCC), who in turn submits it to the LGS. When approved the RCC issues appointment letters after seeking clearance from the MoF. It can take more than a year to complete this 'cycle'. Hitherto (before decentralization) requests for recruitment were made directly to MOFANational. - DOA2, 2014-12-11.

We have asked for the replacement of 3 retired staff members this year. We are yet to receive any response from the said quarters. - DOA2, 2014-12-11.

Although some studies (Jütting *et al.*, 2004; Okorley, 2007; Moguees and Omusu-Baah, 2014) recognize the need to address the problem of inadequate staffing which remains a bane to decentralized extension systems in many developing countries, it is also crucial to lay emphasis on staff quality. Parker (1995) argues that the existence of a large number of extension personnel may only be indicative of the existence of capacity but does not guarantee it. Extension staff must therefore be trained to have adequate technical knowledge to help farmers identify and deal with farming challenges.

In an interview with an official of the DOA he stated that all the AEAs in the DOA have a certificate or diploma in agriculture while 4 of the DDOs have bachelor's degrees in agriculture or its related fields, with one having a master's degree (DOA2, 2014-12-11). Diploma-level agricultural programmes in Ghana as in many developing countries only produce generalists in agriculture with limited or no training in any particular area of specialization. University degrees on the other hand are more specialized in major agricultural fields such as crop and soil science, agricultural economics and agricultural engineering, with little or no attention paid to agricultural leadership, rural development

and management skills (Zinnah *et al.*, 1998; Swanson 2008; Spielman, *et al.*, 2008; Kwarteng and Boateng, 2012).

Due to the fact that there are lapses in extension education in the country, AEAs who deal directly with farmers must frequently be trained and their skills enhanced to enable them adequately address the changing needs of farmers. Prior to decentralization, DOA1 who is with the department of agriculture reported that they periodically assessed staff training needs through informal interactions with AEAs, monthly extension reports and from farmers' complaints. Training sessions and workshops were constantly held by the central government's Ministry of Food and Agriculture for extension staff (Interview with DOA1, 2014-12-10). Under the current decentralized system, staff of the study DOA shared the view that the frequency of such programmes has been reduced causing them to rely on previously acquired knowledge and skills, which may not be suitable for changing agricultural needs. This was expressed by AEAs in the following extracts:

We used to have several workshops and training programmes on many agricultural development issues when we were under MOFA-national. If I recall, correctly, we used to have about 6 of them annually. For the past two years since we were brought under the MA, it was just in November this year that we had one workshop on agricultural value chain management. -AEA3, 2014-12-12.

We have had just one workshop in the past 2 years. [...] I have virtually been employing knowledge acquired over the years as an extension agent and from previous training sessions. -AEA4, 2014-12-12.

Moreover, from monthly reports that AEAs submit to their superiors in the DOA, they are required to report on the number of trainings they had received. From a few reports that I was given by a staff member of the DOA, it was evident that since May 2012 till October 2014, AEAs had not received any training through workshops. Admittedly, 'supply-driven' training programmes by central government agencies as argued by Kerr (2000) might not encourage local initiatives as such local processes by themselves also help build staff capacity. Kerr (2000) contends that staff capacity can be enhanced through practice and that local institutions must use a portion of their funds to solicit local technical experts to train staff. The local government can also give financial support to

the extension organizations to organize their own training programs. DOA1 and DOA2 suggested that this has not been the case in the municipality as they are financially challenged to organize such workshops themselves and they receive no support from the Municipal Assembly in this regard. They have therefore resorted to informal learning where the District Development Officers (DDOs) of the DOA occasionally interact with the extension agents to share expertise (Interviews with DOA1, 2014-12-10; DA2, 2014-12-11).

Another way through which extension agents in decentralized systems can build their capacity is through enhanced research-extension linkage. Flow of appropriate technologies from diverse organizations including research institutions ensure that extension agents have ready access to knowledge required for their work (World Bank, 2000, Rivera and Alex, 2004). Yet, in many developing countries research organizations are autonomous, operate under separate central government ministries from that of agriculture and have not been decentralized to the regional and district levels, thus hampering effective collaboration between them and extension organizations (Okorley, 2007).

This situation pertains in the study DOA as there are no research institutions in the region where the DOA operates. Still, there is a Research-Extension Linkage Committee (RELC)² in the region to foster collaboration among researchers and extension organizations. Annual meetings are organized to assess farmers' adoption of technologies and to review research and extension programs and offer recommendations. As of the time the research was conducted a staff of the DOA indicated that no such meetings had been held in 2014 (Interview with DOA1, 2014-12-22).

As pointed out earlier in the conceptual framework, the technical capacity of extension staff can also be built through ICT. Extension agents can use ICT to access professional

² The RELC comprise researchers, the Regional Director of Agriculture, Regional Extension Officer, District Directors of Agriculture, Farmer representatives, NGOs and suppliers of inputs.

knowledge and other kinds of information beneficial to their work. ICT could be instrumental for the collection, analysis and storage of field data (Swanson and Samy, 2004). Notwithstanding its importance extension agents in the municipality bemoaned the fact that they have no access to the use of computers and Internet services. I was told in an interview with a senior staff of the DOA, that they had just 3 computers in the office, with one broken down. There was no Internet service in the DOA and staff members had to access this privately. Most of the DDOs had their own laptops (DOA2, 2014-12-11). The AEAs I interviewed also mentioned that they were not familiar with the use of such technology and would require some training for them to employ ICT for their work. They sometimes though use their private mobile phones in communicating with and delivering services to farmers (Interviews with AEA2, 2014-12-12; AEA3, 2014-12-12; AEA4, 2014-12-12).

Lastly, the literature suggests that when extension staff members are adequately motivated they are inspired to embark on activities to develop their skills in order to provide better services (Vijayaragavan and Singh, 1997). In the study DOA, however, AEAs lamented the fact that incentives such as staff promotions, provision of requisite logistics for their work and opportunities for career developments have been adversely affected since 2012 and by extension affecting staff motivation. Interviews with AEAs revealed that previously the central government's Ministry of Food and Agriculture (MOFA) freely provided protective clothing such as wellington boots and staff uniforms, and subsidized prices for motorbikes to ensure that AEAs are able to purchase them and frequently visit their operational areas. The AEAs I interviewed indicated that these had not been forthcoming for the past two years (Interviews with AEA1, 2014-12-11; AEA2, 2014-12-12; AEA3, 2014-12-12; AEA4, 2014-12-12). Staff members no longer received risk allowances, as was the case in the past. Delays in staff promotions were a major concern to many staff members of the DOA. DOA2 asserted that hitherto, requests for staff promotions were sent directly to the human resources office of MOFA, and were swiftly attended to. Currently such requests are sent through the Municipal Assembly, to the Regional Coordinating Council and to the Local Government Service Secretariat.

This lengthy process results in delays in handling such requests (Interview with DOA2, 2014-12-11).

Ultimately, the existence of adequate institutional capacity will be determined by the ability of staff of the DOA to effectively deliver extension services and meet the demands of farmers as discussed in the conceptual framework. Nevertheless, given that opportunities for building the capacity of extension staff in the DOA seems to have declined in a decentralized system, portends the fact that decentralization may not have led to increased institutional capacity in the study area as assumed by its advocates. A lack of support from the central government and the local government in organizing training activities, the bureaucracy that stifle prompt response to staff promotion requests and general staff welfare issues and the financial challenge faced by the DOA appears to have accounted for this.

6.1.3 Stakeholder Participation: Declined or Improved?

One of the main underlying assumptions of decentralized systems is that devolving the responsibility for planning and delivering services from the central government to lower level political and administrative bodies would spawn both informal and formal structures that can allow for increased participation (Manor, 2011). Empirical evidence with regards to whether decentralization leads to increased participation in development activities have provided mixed results (Crook, 2003; Faguet, 2004; Agrawal and Gupta, 2005). With regards to farmers' participation in extension program development and implementation in particular, Cohen and Lemma (2011) report of a modest increase in farmers' participation in some districts in Ethiopia as a result of decentralization reforms. A different story is told in the Sunyani municipality of Ghana.

In an FGD in Kuffuor Camp, a male farmer recollected that the DOA previously invited him and another female farmer from the village to forums at the end of every year where farmers' needs and problems in extension services delivery were discussed. Such forums were also avenues for them to participate in planning the implementation of extension services in the coming year (Farmer 1-Kuffuor Camp, 2014-12-22). In Abesim, another

male farmer corroborated this and recounted his participation in such events two years ago (Interview with Farmer 1-Abesim, 2014-12-22). A staff of the DOA also mentioned that such forums were organized over a two-day period where farmers, opinion leaders, district assembly members interact with extension staff for the aforesaid purposes (Interview with DOA1, 2014-12-22). He noted they are unable to organize such events in recent times due to the lack of financial support from the central government. The Director of the DOA, DDOs and administrative staff of the DOA therefore rely on reports from extension agents who visit the field and are familiar with farmers' challenges, to design extension strategies for the year (DOA1, 2014-12-22; DOA2, 2014-12-11; AEA1, 2014-12-11).

It is tenable to argue that the organization of these 'stakeholder participation events' in the past where only a few farmers could participate may not be cost-effective and may not amount to judicious use of limited funds. Thus as Cristóvão *et al.* (1997) has suggested there is the need for extension agents to build on and work with existing community organizations to solicit their knowledge and experiences for effective service delivery. Such indigenous organizations create the opportunity for ensuring broader farmer participation as a wider spectrum of farmers can be reached. In Nkrankrom, farmers pointed out that the only farmer group in the area was that for cocoa farmers (FGD with Nkrankrom farmers, 2014-12-19). In Abesim vegetable growers had through their own initiative formed an association for easy accessibility to credit and markets (FGD with Abesim farmers, 2014-12-22). There is a pepper growers' association also in Kuffuor Camp (FGD with Kuffuor Camp farmers, 2014-12-22). The FGDs in all communities revealed that such groups have only become forums for extension agents to deliver their services to them rather than soliciting their inputs for extension program development.

Regarding the participation of other stakeholders such as local NGOs, private or commercial organizations like agricultural and food processors and input suppliers, staff of the DOA indicated that they had not fostered any collaboration with such and thus they do not participate in extension program planning and implementation. An official of the

DOA noted in an interview that there were no agricultural-based NGOs in the municipality. He also mentioned that reports from AEAs suggested that some private organizations were delivering extension services to farmers in the area but they had however not been in contact with these organizations (DOA1, 2014-12-10). The reason for this as explained by an official of the DOA is that:

Writing to these private agencies, visiting their offices and inviting them over for meetings all require some expenditure and we do not have the funds for that-Interview with DOA1, 2014-12-10.

Whereas this official cited the unavailability of funds as a reason for low stakeholder participation, there might be more to it that borders on institutional capacity. Facilitating stakeholder participation requires good networking, problem solving and human relation skills on the part of extension officers (Rondinelli, *et al.*, 1983; Okorley, 2007; Swanson, 2008; Swanson and Rajalathi, 2010). Ensuring stakeholder participation also calls for a change in the attitudes and behaviour of government officials to recognize the importance of shared decision-making and broader participation in planning, managing and executing extension activities. Such understanding and skills can be emphasized and acquired by extension staff through training (Rondinelli *et al.*, 1983). As pointed out in the discussion on the subsection of institutional capacity, extension staff noted a virtual lack of training in these areas, with opportunities for staff training having declined under a decentralized system (Interviews with DOA1, 2014-12-10; AEA1, 2014-12-11; AEA2, 2014-12-12; AEA3, 2014-12-12; AEA4, 2014-12-12).

Prior to 2012, stakeholder participation in extension programme planning was limited to a few farmers who were invited for stakeholder meetings in Sunyani, an anomaly decentralization was expected to correct. My inference from interviews and FGDs with both farmers and extension is that although existing avenues were not sufficient to foster stakeholder participation, they are not even present in a decentralized system. Other private and commercial organizations that were not engaged in extension development planning and implementation are still not involved in these activities, except delivering services to farmers on their own volition. Extension planning, development and

implementation appears to remain top-down and it is possible to deduce that this is a consequence of low institutional capacity and unavailability of funds to organize stakeholder participation forums in a decentralized system. Indeed as Crook (2003:79) asserts, it is not even enough to encourage citizens or more specifically in this case, farmers' voice; farmers' voice must be heard and this is a question of accountability.

6.1.4 Are AEAs now more accountable to farmers?

Decentralization supposedly improves accountability mechanisms and allows the citizenry to demand better public services from state officials (Parker, 1995). Thus in a decentralized extension system farmers should be able to hold extension agents accountable to provide services that are relevant to their needs. Agrawal and Ribot (1999) suggest that where public officials are accountable to themselves or only to superior authorities in the governance structure (horizontal or vertical accountability), decentralized systems might fail.

In the Sunyani municipality of Ghana, interviews with AEAs, other staff members of the DOA and the municipal assembly and with farmers revealed that accountability mechanisms largely remained only upwards or horizontal, with AEAs being accountable to their superior DDOs who are in turn accountable through the director of the DOA to the Municipal Coordinating Director, as illustrated in Appendix 5. Mechanisms for ensuring accountability are mainly administrative. DDO1 indicated in an interview that in order to monitor and evaluate the performance of AEAs, they are required to submit monthly reports to the District Development Officers (DDOs) who in turn compile them and submit an overall quarterly report to the municipal assembly through the director of the DOA (Interview with DDO1, 2014-12-09). In these reports AEAs must among other things account for extension activities they embarked on, technologies transferred and farmer groups formed. An evaluation of these reports provides the basis for adjudging the best AEA of the year during the annual Farmer Day Celebrations (DDO1, 2014-12-09).

An official of the DOA also stated that although they are not required to submit this report to the Regional Directorate of the Ministry of Food and Agriculture under this

decentralized system they send a copy of the report meant for the MA to regional directorate. This is to elicit technical backstopping where the need arises (DOA1, 2014-12-10). This official also stated that technical review meetings are held quarterly in each year where the various departments under the municipal assembly meet to evaluate their respective reports.

While this is a modest step towards ensuring that the DOA is accountable at least horizontally prior to and after decentralization, this is not enough. As Agrawal and Ribot (1999) have argued, downward accountability where service users can hold public service providers to be responsive to their needs is the basic dimension of decentralization and it is through that the acclaimed benefits of decentralization can be realized. In the study area, there are no mechanisms for farmers to evaluate the activities of extension officers (FGD with Nkrankrom farmers, 2014-12-19; FGD with Abesim farmers, 2014-12-22). In spite of this some farmers who have been dissatisfied with the services of AEAs, had visited the office of the DOA to register their displeasure as the following interview extracts show:

Some of the stubborn ones do come here to complain to our superiors especially when we do not visit their communities- Interview with AEA3, 2014-12-12.

*About three weeks ago, some farmers in a community where the annual Farmers' Day celebration was to be held came to my office and claimed they did not know and had not seen their AEA in the community. The AEA was called to my office and the issue was resolved amicably-*Interview with DOA1, 2014-12-22.

Asked why although displeased with their services he had not taken steps to hold the AEAs or DOA accountable, a farmer in Nkrankrom retorted:

How can I? I am just a village farmer and assuming I even muster the courage to go to their office, who will listen to me? -Farmer 4-Nkrankrom, 2014-12-19.

I infer from the above quotes that they show the paternalistic and patronizing attitudes of local officials to farmers even in a decentralized system. As Rondienlli *et al.* (1983:78) observe such attitudes have long been fed and supported by centralized structures and procedures. Again they portray the fact that the planning and delivery of extension services involve a number of actors who have unequal powers and that there are local

social inequalities that prevent farmers from holding extension agents accountable. Supporters of decentralization tend to ignore these power relations (Meynen and Doornbos, 2004) and assume that decentralization will lead to downward accountability. The reverse looks to be the case in the study area. With the seeming absence of a multiplicity of other organizations that provide extension to foster competition and make AEAs more accountable to their clients as suggested by the literature, only administrative mechanisms are used to ensure this, and farmers practically have no roles to play.

This result is consistent with that of Cohen and Lemma (2011) in four districts of four different regional states in Ethiopia. Accountability of extension officials was found to remain mostly upward after decentralization reforms, as the administrative and political systems were still very hierarchical.

6.1.5 Is Funding Available for Extension Services?

Lack of funds is often cited as one of the factors that impede the availability of extension services to farmers. There must be funds to cover administrative or recurrent and capital expenditure of extension organizations to ensure that AEAs have the required logistics for field activities (Swanson and Samy, 2004; Okorley, 2007). In decentralised systems ‘independent’ local government bodies can devise innovative ways to safeguard the financial sustainability of its departments (Swanson and Samy, 2004; Anderson and Feder, 2004). Indeed this was the expectation of government officials of the municipality as expressed by an official of the Regional Directorate of MOFA:

We expected that with decentralization the DOA would have four sources of funds: the central government, the municipal assembly, MOFA and NGOs or CSOs-Interview with RD1, 2014-12-16.

The study DOA still relies on the central government to fund its activities. Central government provides funding for the DOA’s expenditure on goods and services. These refer to administrative expenditures such as stationery and transportation incurred in executing the department’s main responsibilities of extension delivery. These funds are supposed to be released quarterly each year, coming in at the beginning of each quarter.

These have however not been forthcoming since 2012 as indicated by participants in the municipal assembly and the DOA. For the past two years, an official of the DOA recounted that funds are only released in October and November. At the time this study was being undertaken in December 2014, the DOA had just received partial funds for June to December for 2013. This differed strikingly from the situation prior to 2012:

Previously we were assured of regular inflows from MOFA. In instances where funds were delayed, the Ministry gave us reasons. We were sometimes also given a provisional sum that was usually below what we had budgeted for the first quarter. When the MoF finally approves the budget, we received a top-up for the first quarter, together with funds for the 2nd quarter, while that of the 3rd and last quarters followed subsequently. - DOA1, 2014-12-22.

Mogues and Omusu-Baah (2014) found similar results in a recent scoping study in the Ga West Municipal Assembly and the Shai-Osodoku District Assembly of Ghana. In 2012, these two case study DOAs received only two releases for goods and services. The Dangbe East DOA in the Greater Accra Region of Ghana also received two financial releases of these funds instead of the quarterly four releases. The first release was made as late as September 2012 and the second in December 2012. As of July 2013, neither of these districts had received funds for goods and services (Mogues and Omusu-Baah, 2014:8).

Not only are funds released late, they also fall short of the budgeted funds of the DOA. For the Sunyani Municipal DOA, a staff member recalled that that they were made to prepare a budget within a GH¢28,000 ceiling for 2013. The DOA however received only GH¢16,000. For 2014, they had only received less than a quarter (GH¢ 8,000) of the GH¢ 35,000 budgeted for (DOA1, 2014-12-22). This is similar to the Ga West DOA, where releases for goods and services, which amounted to about GH¢ 40,000 per annum before 2012 was cut by 40 per cent in 2012 (Mogues and Omusu-Baah, 2014:8).

Budgetary inadequacy and delays have been attributed to central government's inability to meet the budgetary needs of its ministries and departments as expressed in the words of an official of the Sunyani Municipal Assembly:

[...] Government has not been able to meet its financial obligations, and that is why we have these challenges. Even for us at the Municipal Assembly, it was just about two weeks ago that we received our share of the first quarter of the Common Fund³. Maybe this is because of the increase in public wages [...]. Government is unable to meet the budgetary demands of its departments - MA1, 2014-12-16.

The above extract clearly shows that the problem of delays in the release of funds is not peculiar to the DOA, and in the absence of official reasons, some speculative explanations have been given. Mogues and Omusu-Baah (2014) for instance also speculate that the high wage bill which is a result of central government's upward adjustment of public wages through a new personnel policy implemented in 2011, account for Ghana's current fiscal challenges, and hence government's inability to promptly release adequate funds for the DOA.

Other reasons such as the long-winded administrative mechanisms used to check expenditure and corruption by the Municipal Assembly, the apparent bureaucratic structure of the assembly and staff attitudes account for delays in disbursing funds to the DOA even after the MoF has released them. An official of the Department of Agriculture assembly explained that before decentralization funds were released directly to them from the central government's Ministry of Food and Agriculture (MOFA). They could therefore access the funds within a week. Currently funds are released from the Ministry of Finance (MoF) to the Municipal Assembly and it could take between one to three months before they are able to access the funds. He noted that sometimes officials of the Municipal Assembly who should work on the requests are absent from work either for official or personal reasons, hence the delay (DA1, 2014-12-10). He recounted several occasions where he had had to visit the offices of officials at the municipal assembly to ensure that they promptly work on their requests.

For another official of the Municipal Assembly the delay was as a result of the necessary checks conducted to ensure that funds were not mismanaged. When funds are released from the central government, the budget officer at the Assembly has to verify the requests of the DOA to determine whether they are covered in the earlier budget prepared. When

³ A minimum of 7.5% of national revenue set aside and shared among all District Assemblies in Ghana.

this is done, the Municipal Coordinating Director then gives instructions for pre-auditing. The MCD then forwards the request to the Municipal Chief Executive who subsequently approves for a cheque to be released by the Finance Officer of the Assembly to the DOA (MA1, 2014-12-16).

Prud'homme (1995) and Okorley (2007) have argued that corruption-avoiding strategies such as the pre-auditing and post-expenditure auditing mechanisms delay the implementation of programs in decentralized systems. Moreover, as discussed earlier, decentralizing governance without appropriate behavioural and attitudinal change among lower level government officials to support the decentralization of service delivery and maintenance will undermine extension systems (Rondinelli, 1989; Shah, 1998).

While central government funding has been unavailable, the municipal assembly is also unable to support the DOA financially from its internally generated funds (IGFs). An official of the MA mentioned that they do not generate enough funds from the municipality and these meagre funds are used on development projects in the area (MA1, 2014-12-16). He further stated that where they have to prioritize among departments or projects to support “*education and health usually come first, before agriculture*” (MA1, 2014-12-16). Again, current central government extension policy considers extension service as a public good, thus services are provided freely and no attempts have been to revise this policy to allow for fee-for-service arrangements (DOA2, 2014-12-12; DOA1, 2014-12-22; MOFA, 2002). It is only MOFA's Veterinary Services Directorate that has commercialized some of its services (MOFA, 2003).

The current financial challenges the DOA faces lends credence to Anderson and Feder's (2004) claim that in some decentralized systems, fiscal challenges instead of being resolved are only transferred to the local level. Given that the fiscal sustainability of the DOA has been undermined or if I dare say worsened under this current system, it is not surprising that participants constantly made reference to it in earlier discussions on institutional capacity and stakeholder participation.

After examining the intermediate outcomes of decentralization, the next question that begs resolution is to what extent then have they affected farmers' access to extension services? This therefore takes us to the next subsection.

6.2 Impact on Farmers' Access to Extension Services

This section seeks to answer RQ2: to what extent have these political and organizational factors affected the availability and relevance of advisory services in the study area? Although this section is the crux of this study, it is not elaborate in terms of length as compared to the other section as it deals with only two aspects of access: availability and relevance of extension services before and after decentralization. The section draws mostly from the perspectives of farmers in the three study communities.

6.2.1 Availability and Relevance

Farmer 1-Nkrankrom is a thirty-six year old female smallholder who cultivates a variety of crops. She is a second wife to another farmer in Nkrankrom whom she had worked with on the same farms together with the first wife. During these times, they had ready access to extension services as the then extension agent often frequented their farms, albeit the husband was largely the recipient of such services (Farmer 1-Nkrankrom, 2014-12-19). She informed me in an interview that for the past two years she decided to cultivate her own farm as she felt she did not *“receive much benefits from her toil on their ‘family’ farm”*. She asserted that due to this her husband who mostly interacted with the extension agent had refused to share with her information on appropriate farming practices and technology. She had also not received frequent visits from the new AEA who was posted to their operational area two years ago.

Farmer 1's (Nkrankrom) story highlights some of the challenges with regards to the availability of extension services in the previous and current extension systems and the methods used for extension delivery. Indeed in Nkrankrom, Farmer 1 was not the only one who was not enthused about the services of the current AEA. Both male and female participants of the FGD and interviews were full of praise for the previous extension agents as they indicated that they visited the community and their farms regularly; the same however could not be said of the new one (FGD with Nkrankrom farmers, 2014-12-

19). Participants reported that she barely visited the community and when she did she only visited farms that were easily accessible. They received extension services from no other organization and have had to rely on each other or on more experienced farmers for information on farming activities (FGD with Nkrankrom farmers, 2014-12-19). Given the patriarchal nature of many Ghanaian societies and the fact that the previous AEAs had been males, some farmers cited her gender as reason for her unavailability claiming that men were better AEAs. This is shown in the following interview extracts:

*We have not had access to extension services as we used to because of the AEA we have here. She is a woman and very inactive as compared to Mr. A (past AEA). Mr. A was with us almost every day. For the extension work it is the men who can do it effectively as it involves travelling long distances to visit farms. We prefer men as AEAs because they are very energetic-*Farmer 1 in an FGD with Nkrankrom Farmers, 2014-12-19.

For another farmer it boiled down to her poor attitude towards work:

People work differently, and I think this may not have anything to do with her gender. Some people are hardworking, others are not and for me this AEA appears to be one of those who are not- Interview with Farmer 2, Nkrankrom- 2014-12-19.

Both in earlier discussions on organizational factors and the present one that deals with access and relevance, one theme that runs through is the attitudes of local government officials and that of AEAs of the DOA that influence extension services delivery. Yet, this is not given much attention in the literature. Perhaps as Rondinelli *et al.* (1983:57) have reasoned, this is due to the fact that attitudes are “soft variables”. It is quite difficult to operationalize them or deal with them in a policy sense. Nonetheless, as earlier discussions on institutional capacity in the conceptual framework and previous analysis show, attitudes could be altered to some extent, through staff training and motivation. Under this current decentralized system avenues for staff training and motivation have however been negatively affected as previously shown.

In spite of the fact that extension services were not readily available, participants in Nkrankrom indicated that the few times they interacted with the AEA, issues discussed were germane to their farming needs (FGD with Nkrankrom Farmers, 2014-12-19). Prior to such meetings, the AEA reaches one of the farmers on phone who in turn announces to the rest of the farmers that the AEA will be visiting the community. The problem with

such community meetings as participants identified was that that not all farmers are made aware of her visit and therefore are unable to be present to benefit from the AEA's services (FGD with Nkrankrom Farmers, 2014-12-19). Again as Cristóvão *et al.* (1997) warns extension organizations must not assume that beneficiary farmers are a homogeneous group. Identification of specific groups based on size of land holdings and other socio-economic factors is crucial in extension services delivery as needs and preferences of farmers may differ. This is not done in this study area (FGD with Nkrankrom Farmers, 2014-12-19; Interviews with Farmer 3-Nkrankrom, 2014-12-19; Farmer 4, 2014-12-19).

The situation is not different from that of Abesim where farmers have been unhappy with the services of both past and present AEAs. In an FGD, the farmers claimed they have not had adequate access to extension services before and even after decentralization. They however mentioned that previously, they were receiving some farming inputs from the DOA but had not received such for the past two years (FGD with Abesim farmers, 2014-12-22). The vegetable farmers were very critical of the DOA and its personnel noting that they did not visit their farms and even when they visited the community they preferred to visit nearby farms as the quote below from Farmer 1-Abesim show:

I had problems with some diseases on my maize farm some time ago. I called him on phone and he asked me to show him where the farm is. After giving him directions to the farm and having recognized the area, he sharply responded that the farm was too far and he cannot make it. You (referring to the AEA) are just visiting the farm once in about six months and you are telling me it is far, how about I who travels that distance every day? - Interview with Farmer 1-Abesim, 2014-12-22.

One of the participants in the FGD recalled that four years ago, when they formed a group and 'contracted' the then AEA to be providing extension services to them at their expense, he failed to perform his side of the bargain (FGD with Abesim farmers, 2014-12-22). Participants of the FGD also cited instances where information provided on the use of some farm inputs by extension agents had rather caused harm to their farms; in other instances, they have not been able to prescribe solutions to some crop diseases (Farmer 2, FGD with Abesim Farmers, 2014-12-22). Participants were therefore doubtful of the competence of the AEA.

A few weeks ago, I called him on a challenge I had on my pepper farm. Without visiting the farm to diagnose the nature and extent of the problem, he recommended that I should go and buy some of the chemicals we usually buy and it will be fine. A colleague farmer however suggested a technique to me, which was useful and did not require that I bought any chemicals- Farmer 3, FGD with Abesim Farmers, 2014-12-22.

On the issue of farm chemicals to treat crop pests and diseases, participants mentioned that due to the proliferation of such on the market, they are unable to tell which was useful and that which was counterfeit. Moreover, they lacked adequate knowledge on the appropriate application of farm inputs. The AEA had not been helpful in providing advice in these areas, the farmers intimated (FGD with Abesim Farmers, 2014-12-22).

Furthermore, the vegetable farmers mentioned that they encountered difficulties in marketing their produce, an issue of particular importance to their activities and yet the AEA has failed to assist them. Consequently, they have recently organized themselves into an FBO in order to have ready access to market information and a strong bargaining power on the market (FGD with Abesim Farmers, 2014-12-22). Owing to the fact that this is a budding group, there is the need for AEAs to assist in building their capacity and training them in management and accounting skills (Birner and Anderson, 2007; Holmén, 2011). A leader of the group who was also a participant of the FGD indicated that the AEA had promised to organize such training sessions for them but this is yet to materialize (Farmer 4, FGD with Abesim Farmers, 2014-12-22).

Actually, AEAs are required to assist farmers in confronting marketing challenges as the country's extension policy document show (MOFA, 2003). Hence they are encouraged to facilitate the formation and development of farmer groups in order to realize this. In their monthly reports, they are obliged to account for the number of groups formed in their operational areas. A look at some of the reports that I was given by staff of the DOA showed that from May 2012, most AEAs have not delivered in this regard.

For farmers in Abesim, advisory services were not readily available because of AEAs' dereliction of their duties, a lack of appreciation on the part of AEAs of their farming challenges and inadequate technical capacity to help them resolve them (FGD with Abesim Farmers, 2014-12-22).

The AEAs had earlier stated in my interviews with them that they were unable to perform their duties as required, except that they had different reasons as the following interview extracts show:

I am supposed to serve about 1,200 farmers in 15 communities in my operational area [...] It was just about a week ago that I was informed that last year's money for transportation has been released. How do I visit my farmers with no money for transportation? We are not given motorbikes and with the one I personally bought I receive no money to buy fuel. There is no risk allowance, no uniforms are provided, we have to sometimes buy fuel, and even field note books ourselves and hope to be reimbursed later-Interview with AEA3, 2014-12-12.

Ideally we should be able to conduct several field demonstrations and farmer exchange visits within a year. The farmers expect we the AEAs to bear their transport costs when farmer exchange visits are organized and considering that our funds are not promptly released I am unable to organize such visits- Interview with AEA2, 2014-12-12.

The above quotes show that for the AEAs their inability to provide advisory services to farmers bordered more on the lack of logistics and a lack of motivation, reiterating earlier discussions on institutional capacity and funding. Be that as it may, poor work attitudes, inadequate logistics for extension services and a lack of motivation, as noted in earlier discussions, are a reflection of broader institutional and organizational lapses that impede the successful delivery of extension services, even in decentralized systems (Rondinelli *et al.*, 1983).

To ensure that they provide their services to farmers in spite of these challenges, staff of the DOA told me that they had employed the use of technology to reach more farmers. They asserted that some farmers in the communities have their contact numbers and reached them on phones when the need arises (AEA1, 2014-12-11 AEA2, 2014-12-12; AEA3, 2014-12-12; AEA4, 2014-12-12). Some radio stations have also been benevolent to the DOA having given them free airtime once a week to sensitize farmers on agricultural issues (DOA1, 2014-12-22). Again, since they are unable to visit individual farms, AEAs mostly organize community meetings to disseminate agricultural information (AEA1, 2014-12-11 AEA2, 2014-12-12).

In Kuffuor Camp, which is relatively farther away from Sunyani, the story was different; most farmers I interviewed and participants of the FGD were satisfied with both past and

present AEAs and claimed they had ready access to extension services. Farmers indicated that the present AEA in particular visited the community regularly and visits individual farms (FGD, 2014-12-22). Two farmers had high regard for the current AEA, noting that it was through his timely advice to them that they won awards as male and female best pepper farmers for 2014 for the Sunyani municipality (Interviews with Farmer 1 and Farmer 2-Kuffuor Camp, 2014-12-22). Farmers however also mentioned the need for more assistance in dealing with marketing challenges (FGD, 2014-12-22).

Later I gathered that this AEA was a District Development Officer (DDO) with a master's level education in agriculture. He had been assigned to this community due to the fact that there were not many AEAs for the DOA (DOA1, 2014-12-22). This DDO (and AEA) mentioned in an interview that with his background in the study of the causes of diseases in plants and how to manage them he felt obliged to share his expertise and be as useful as possible to the farmers in this community, in spite of the lack of logistical support (DDO2, 2014-12-23). Indeed it may be far-fetched to suggest that enhanced technical capacity leads to better work ethic as implied by this DDO. Nonetheless, in Venezuela, Savioff and Lindarte (2002) show that training helped motivate extension staff to deliver better services. It is therefore plausible to inconclusively infer that farmers in Kuffuor Camp had better access to extension services due to their AEA's training. The case of Kuffuor Camp also illustrates the significance of enhanced institutional capacity in ensuring better access to extension services as discussed in the conceptual framework.

This result in Kuffuor Camp differs from that of Nambiro *et al.* (2006) who show that distance from towns significantly influenced farmers' access to extension services even in a decentralized system. Farmers in Kuffuor Camp, which is farther away from the office of the DOA relatively access better extension services than others in Nkrankrom and Abesim.

In the context of this study, decentralization should result in the final outcome of improved access to extension services by farmers. Inadequate institutional capacity exemplified by a lack of sufficient logistical support for AEAs to carry out their duties low technical capacity, low staff motivation, poor staff attitudes, and inadequate funding,

have made extension services almost unavailable to farmers in Nkrankrom and Abesim. The case of Kuffuor Camp is however different, illustrating the importance of staff training to the availability and relevance of extension services.

7. Conclusion

In this study, I have sought to contribute to an unresolved debate on the impact of decentralization on public services delivery. Whereas considerable attention has been paid to its impact on other services such as education and health, little is known about decentralization's effect on extension services. I have therefore examined the effects of decentralization on farmers' access to extension services by assessing political and organizational factors regarded as immediate outcomes of decentralization.

On political factors, the study has shown that there has been a relatively strong political commitment to decentralize service delivery and ensure improved access. This has been done through the promulgation of several laws and policies since 1988, with the country taking further steps in 2012 to consolidate decentralization. AEA's are however oblivious of the provisions of these legislations thereby affecting compliance.

While there is demonstrable political commitment, organizational factors appear to be adversely affected. Opportunities for enhancing institutional capacity seem to have waned since 2012. Since the DOA is not an income generating organization, they are unable to organize such sessions on their own. The Municipal Assembly faced with its own peculiar challenges is also unable to provide any support in this regard. Staff motivation and general welfare issues are not promptly attended to, as the processes are currently long-winded than they used to be under a centralized system. The planning, development and implementation of extension programs remain top-down and farmers and other stakeholders are not involved. Mechanisms for ensuring farmer participation in extension program development under a centralized system although not sufficient are even non-existent now. AEA's remain accountable to their superiors instead of farmers, as it was the case prior to 2012. Unequal power relations render farmers unable to demand that services of AEA's are readily available. Funding of extension services is now worsened as

the DOA relies solely on the central government to finance the delivery of extension services. Funds are insufficient and are not released on time. Cumbersome administrative processes for the approval of funds, staff attitudes and the inability of government to meet the budgetary needs of its departments have accounted for this.

Since these factors have been adversely affected in a decentralized system, they have in turn negatively influenced farmers' access to extension services. With the exception of Kuffuor Camp, where the farmers were relatively satisfied with the availability of extension services, the same could not be said of Nkrankrom and Abesim. In Nkrankrom, availability of extension services seem to have declined since 2012 while in the case of Abesim, the poor access under the centralized system has not improved. Thus it is possible to conclude from the results of this study that decentralization has not led to improved access to extension services in the Sunyani municipality of Ghana.

It is however noteworthy, that the failure of decentralization to live up to its promise of improved access, at least for now, is not as a result of weaknesses in the concept itself. As seen, implementers of decentralization have been unable to rightly mix the ingredients of political and organizational factors to ensure success, thereby resulting in a flattened or perhaps a sour soufflé. This study also shows that we cannot expect decentralization to be a magic wand to address problems of access to service delivery in the Sunyani municipality, without meticulously nurturing the factors required for its success. Until this is done, the promise of decentralization will remain a mirage.

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Appendix 1: List of Participants

Government Officials

Participant	Gender	Organization	Date of Interview	Type of Interview
DOA1	M	Department of Agriculture	2014/12/10 2014/12/11 2014/12/22	Semi-structured/ Focused
DOA2	M	Department of Agriculture	2014/12/11	Semi-structured/Focused
DDO1	M	Department of Agriculture	2014/12/11	Semi-structured
DDO2	M	Department of Agriculture	2014/12/23	Semi-structured
MA1	M	Sunyani Municipal Assembly	2014/12/16	Semi-structured/ Focused
RD1	M	Regional Directorate of MOFA	2014/12/16	Semi-structured
RD2	M	Regional Directorate of MOFA	2014/12/16	Semi-structured
AEA1	F	Department of Agriculture	2014/12/11	Semi-structured
AEA2	M	Department of Agriculture	2014/12/12	Semi-structured
AEA3	M	Department of Agriculture	2014/12/12	Semi-structured
AEA4	M	Department of Agriculture	2014/12/20	Semi-structured

Farmers-Nkrankrom

Participant	Gender	Age	Type	Date
Farmer 1	F	36	FGD/Semi-Structured Interview	2014-12-19 2014-12-20
Farmer 2	F	37	FGD/Semi-Structured	2014-12-19
Farmer 3	M	48	Semi-Structured Interview	2014-12-20
Farmer 4	M	50	Semi Structured Interview	2014-12-19
Farmer 5	F	36	Semi-Structured Interview	2014-12-19
Farmer 6	F	42	FGD	2014-12-19
Farmer 7	M	40	FGD	2014-12-19
Farmer 8	M	45	FGD	2014-12-19
Farmer 9	F	42	FGD	2014-12-19
Farmer 10	F	39	FGD	2014-12-19
Farmer 11	M	50	FGD	2014-12-19
Farmer 12	M	51	FGD	2014-12-19
Farmer 13	F	35	Semi-Structured Interview	2014-12-20
Farmer 14	M	48	FGD	2014-12-19
Farmer 15	M	45	FGD	2014-12-19

Farmers-Abesim

Participant	Gender	Age	Type	Date
Farmer 1	M	49	FGD/Semi-Structured Interview	2014-12-22
Farmer 2	M	45	FGD	2014-12-22
Farmer 3	M	47	FGD	2014-12-22
Farmer 4	M	42	FGD	2014-12-22
Farmer 5	M	50	FGD	2014-12-22
Farmer 6	M	35	FGD	2014-12-22
Farmer 7	M	37	FGD	2014-12-22
Farmer 8	M	38	FGD	2014-12-22
Farmer 9	F	50	FGD/Semi-Structured Interview	2014-12-22
Farmer 10	F	51	FGD	2014-12-22
Farmer 11	F		FGD	2014-12-22
Farmer 12	M	45	Semi-Structured Interview	2014-12-23

Farmers-Kuffuor Camp

Participant	Gender	Age	Type	Date
Farmer 1	M	48	FGD/Semi-Structured	2014-12-22
Farmer 2	F	44	FGD/Semi-Structured	2014-12-22
Farmer 3	M	42	FGD	2014-12-22
Farmer 4	M	50	FGD	2014-12-22
Farmer 5	M	52	FGD	2014-12-22
Farmer 6	M	37	FGD	2014-12-22
Farmer 7	F	35	FGD	2014-12-22
Farmer 8	F	44	FGD	2014-12-22
Farmer 9	F	42	FGD	2014-12-22
Farmer 10	F	50	FGD	2014-12-22
Farmer 11	M	52	FGD	2014-12-22
Farmer 12	M	49	FGD	2014-12-22
Farmer 13	F	32	FGD	2014-12-22
Farmer 14	F	33	FGD	2014-12-22
Farmer 15	F	40	Semi-Structured Interview	2014-12-23
Farmer 16	F	46	Semi-Structured Interview	2014-12-23
Farmer 17	M	45	Semi-Structured Interview	2014-12-23
Farmer 18	M	50	Semi-Structured	2014-12-23

Appendix 2: Interview Guide for Government Officials

Introduction

Thanks so much for your willingness to participate in this study. I am Prince a student of Lund University in Sweden. This study is being conducted for my masters thesis. I seek to understand from you how decentralization has affected or not affected farmers' access to extension services in this municipality. Hence you will be asked a few questions that border on the planning and implementation of extension programs before and after decentralization.

Your participation in the study is completely voluntary and you may refuse to answer any question or choose to stop participating at any time. All information provided will be held in confidence and your name will not be mentioned in the report. The interview might last for about 45 minutes to an hour, and with your permission, I will like to record the session. I will be taking notes as well. Thanks!

Background Information on Participant

Name:

Department:

Position:

1. When and why was the delivery of agricultural advisory services decentralized?
2. Generally, would you say these objectives have been met or not? Please explain.
3. What was the relationship between the Department of Agriculture and the Municipal Assembly before decentralization? How has this changed with decentralization?
4. How does the DOA relate to the Regional Directorate of the Ministry of Food and Agriculture?
5. How has decentralization affected or not affected the activities of the Municipal Assembly/the Department of Agriculture?
6. How many staff members does the DOA have? What was the staff strength of the DOA before decentralization?
7. What steps were taken before decentralization to build the capacity of the DOA? Have these changed or not with decentralization?
8. What stakeholders are involved in the planning and delivery of extension services in the municipality?

9. How did the DOA encourage stakeholder participation in extension services delivery before decentralization and how is it done now?
10. How is the quality and availability of extension services assessed?
11. How was the DOA funded prior to decentralization? Has this changed now? Please explain.
12. How were farmers reached with extension services before decentralization and how are they reached now?
13. Would you say that extension services are now more readily available to farmers than they used to be before decentralization? Please explain.

Thanks so much!

Appendix 3: Interview Guide for Farmers

Introduction

Thanks so much for your willingness to participate in this study. I am Prince a student of Lund University in Sweden. This study is being conducted for my masters thesis. I seek to understand from you how decentralization has affected or not affected your access to extension services. Hence you will be asked a few questions that border on the planning and implementation of extension programs before and after decentralization.

Your participation in the study is completely voluntary and you may refuse to answer any question or choose to stop participating at any time. All information provided will be held in confidence and your name will not be mentioned in the report. This session might last for about an hour, and with your permission, I will like to record the session. I will be taking notes as well. Thanks!

Background Information on Participant

Name:

Age:

Gender:

Crops Cultivated:

Community:

1. What kind of agricultural advisory services do you require?
2. What kind of service was provided to you before decentralization? Has this changed with decentralization or not?
3. How often did you receive advisory services from the DOA before decentralization? How is the situation like now? If there are changes, please explain why.
4. How were advisory services delivered to you before decentralization and how are they delivered to you now?
5. Would you say your access to extension services has improved or not over the last two years? Please explain.
6. Would you say the services provided to you before decentralization and now are relevant or not to your farming needs? Please explain.
7. What role did you play in planning the delivery of extension services? Has this role changed now? Please explain.

8. How do you assess the quality of services you receive from the DOA?
9. How do you ensure that the DOA renders its services effectively?

Appendix 4: Focus-Group Discussion Guide

Introduction

Thanks so much for your willingness to participate in this study. I am Prince a student of Lund University in Sweden. This study is being conducted for my masters thesis. I seek to understand from you how decentralization has affected or not affected your access to extension services. Hence you will be asked a few questions that border on the planning and implementation of extension programs before and after decentralization.

Your participation in the study is completely voluntary and you may refuse to answer any question or choose to stop participating at any time. All information provided will be held in confidence and your name will not be mentioned in the report. This session might last for about an hour, and with your permission, I will like to record the session. I will be taking notes as well. Please feel free to express your opinions as much as possible as there are no wrong or right answers. Thanks!

Background Information on Participants

Name:

Age:

Gender:

Crops Cultivated:

Community:

1. What challenges do you usually encounter as farmers?
2. How does the DOA help you confront these challenges?
3. How does the DOA provide extension services to you?
4. Are you satisfied or not with the mechanisms for extension service delivery, both prior to and after decentralization?
5. In the past how did you influence the planning and implementation of extension programs?
6. How did you ensure that the DOA provided its services to you before decentralization? Has it changed or not now?
7. Would you say your access to extension services has improved or not over the last two years? Please explain.

Appendix 5: Organogram of the Department of Agriculture

