

NATIONAL DECENTRALIZATION POLICY FRAMEWORK (2026-2029)
CROSS-CUTTING ISSUE ON MINDSET AND CHANGE MANAGEMENT
(UPDATED)

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1. Introduction

Resistance has been at the heart of the implementation of reform and change, especially those that challenge the status quo. This resistance is due to the inherent skepticism, fears and “incredulity of men” (Machiavelli, 1513). Dealing with resistance involves not only creating effective institutions through new structures and rules but also developing new mindsets including attitudinal and behavioural changes as part of capacity development and change management initiatives at the individual, organizational, institutional and societal levels (United Nations, 2021). The United Nations (2021) has already recognized new mindsets as one of the key drivers of the successful implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Implementing decentralization, a public sector reform, involves the distribution of power and resources among levels of government, institutions and individuals accompanied by gains and losses, which naturally lead to resistance. This resistance can be addressed through legal and institutional reforms (the “hardware”), which were implemented in the past in Ghana and developing a culture of new mindsets (the “software”), which was hardly on the front burner.

Against this backdrop this issue paper discusses six dimensions of decentralization in Ghana—political, administrative, planning, fiscal, local economic development, and popular participation and accountability. Specifically, it examines how central resistance has impeded progress in each area, and how a shift in mindset could reinvigorate efforts to build a more effective and inclusive decentralized local governance system. This mindset transformation entails strong and committed leadership at all levels (Republic of Ghana, 2019).

2. The Context

The 1992 Constitution emphasizes the importance of decentralization because of its beneficent outcomes of promoting democracy, development and citizen’s participation through the devolution of administrative and financial authority from the central government to the regions and districts. Despite robust constitutional provisions and an extensive legislative framework, the decentralization agenda has recorded marginal progress, thereby attracting attention and concern among stakeholders. This is because successive governments have shown a persistent reluctance to cede meaningful power, authority, and resources to subnational units (Ayee, 1997; Ahwoi, 2017). While institutional and policy reforms have received considerable attention, a critical yet often overlooked barrier to effective decentralization is the transformation of mindsets — a deep shift in the attitudes, values, and behaviours of both state and non-state actors and citizens.

Mindset in this paper refers to a set of beliefs and attitudes that have been assimilated by people throughout their lifetime about themselves and the world around them (United Nations, 2021). It consists of attitudes and beliefs, values, worldview, and self-perception that matter for individuals and influence their choices, decision-making and habits. Dweck (2006) has identified two types of mindsets, namely “fixed” and “growth.” In a fixed mindset, people believe their basic qualities such as intelligence and talent, are simply fixed traits which can lead to success. When people with fixed mindsets fail at something they tend to tell themselves that they cannot or would not be able to do it. On the other hand, people with a more persistent growth mindset believe that they can substantially change their intelligence and personality with effort. Their most basic abilities can be developed through dedication and hard work. This view creates a love of learning, hard work and perseverance which are important for success and productivity. There is the tendency to learn more and view challenges and failures as opportunities to improve and grow (Dweck and Yeager, 2019).

3. Political Decentralization

Several gaps remain with respect to political decentralization in Ghana. These include inadequate accountability mechanisms on the part of MMDCEs, Limited public participation in local governance, overpoliticization of local level developments, and ineffective sub-district structures (Ayee, 1997; Ayee, 2013). This reluctance perpetuates centralised patronage networks and weakens democratic accountability at the local level (Mohan, 1996). Advancing political decentralisation requires a fundamental shift in mindset—from a control-oriented to a service-oriented governance culture.

3.1 Key Policy Objective: Expand democratic governance by devolving political authority to local governments.

3.2 Strategies:

Mindset transformation should trigger the following:

- Amendment of constitutional provisions (Article 243 and 246) to enable election of MMDCEs. The implementing agencies include Implementing agencies are: Parliament, EC, MLGCRA, MMDAs, OHLGS
- Enhance the capacity and effectiveness of assembly members at the local level
- Resolve discrepancies in inter-district boundary demarcation
- Revamp and adequately resource sub-district structures (Town, Area, and Unit Committees) to perform statutory functions effectively.
- Institute mechanism for effective inter-service/inter- sectoral collaboration and cooperation at district, regional and national levels.
- Amend L.I.1961 in line with Local Governance Act 2016, (Act 936) and accelerate its implementation

3.3 Key Activities:

- Foster a mindset shift among central government actors to appreciate the value of power devolution and actively support the empowerment of local governments for responsive and accountable governance.
- Institutionalize an Annual National-Local Government Dialogue Summit to identify joint priorities and solutions, embedding values of mutual respect, ethical collaboration, and

shared responsibility shifting political mindsets from competition to cooperation for national development.

- Facilitate mindset change workshops for Assembly Members and political actors to reorient attitudes from partisan control and patronage to service-oriented, ethical leadership grounded in humility, accountability, and the public interest.
- Support CSO-led decentralization monitoring platforms at national and district levels to promote a culture of transparency, civic engagement, and ethical responsiveness — encouraging political actors to adopt a mindset open to citizen oversight and constructive critique.
- Produce radio and TV series in local languages explaining the benefits of decentralization and showcasing citizen impact stories, using drama and social media to change public perceptions fostering civic pride, trust in local governance, and values of integrity, fairness, and inclusion.
- Institutionalize community scorecards to assess Assembly Members' performance based on ethical indicators such as integrity, responsiveness, and community engagement shifting the political culture toward one that values ethical stewardship and measurable results over loyalty or political affiliation.
- Encourage student forums and simulations on local governance roles to instill a future-oriented, decentralization-friendly mindset emphasizing civic ethics, inclusivity, and accountability among emerging leaders.
- Promote public disclosure of Assembly Members' development plans and actions to foster a culture of openness, truthfulness, and responsible leadership, thereby encouraging a mindset of transparency and ethical duty to constituents.
- Encourage regular town hall meetings where elected officials explain decisions and gather feedback promoting values of listening, respect, and humility, and reshaping the mindset of politicians from rulers to public servants.
- Use cultural events and festivals to promote messages on peaceful elections and ethical political conduct leveraging traditional platforms to nurture a mindset of tolerance, unity, and ethical competition among political actors and citizens at the local level.
- Organize dialogues with traditional and faith leaders and encourage them to use their platforms to amplify messages on responsible local governance and inclusive decentralization promoting ethical values such as justice, equity, and peaceful coexistence.
- Use radio, TV, and local community platforms to discourage negative attitudes toward women's participation in local governance challenging discriminatory mindsets and reinforcing ethical principles of gender equity, respect, and inclusiveness.
- Institute enforcement and sanction regimes to ensure political actors and institutions adhere to ethical standards reinforcing a culture of accountability, deterring misconduct, and embedding a mindset that governance must be rooted in rule of law and ethical conduct.
- Establish clear enforcement and sanctions regimes to promote ethical behavior, deter abuse of power, and reinforce rule-based decentralization.

4. Administrative Decentralization

Despite the efforts made in institutionalizing administrative decentralisation, some notable gaps still remain, including centralisation of some departments undermining local autonomy,

inadequate service delivery by local authorities, inter-districts boundary controversies, central ministries continue to control critical functions such as staffing, promotions, and budget allocations, effectively undermining the operational independence of MMDAs (Yeboah-Assiamah, 2016). Key personnel in sectors such as health, education, and agriculture still report primarily to their respective central ministries rather than MMDAs. The root of the problem lies not only in institutional design but also in entrenched mindsets. Ministries resist devolving power due to fears of diminished influence and resource access.

4.1 Key Policy Objective: Devolve administrative authority and enhance the professionalism and autonomy of the local public service.

4.2 Strategies:

- Reform the Local Government Service Secretariat and related institutions such as the Civil Service to decentralize authority over recruitment, posting, and staff transfers to MMDAs.
- Provide ongoing professional development for local officials in areas such as management, financial administration, service delivery and change management.
- Strengthen coordination mechanisms—such as the Inter-Ministerial Coordinating Committee on Decentralisation (IMCCD)—to ensure alignment between central ministries and local priorities.
- Accelerate decentralisation of relevant departments such as education, health, roads etc. to improve sectoral coordination at the district level.

4.3 Key Activities:

- Review and revise the Local Governance Act and Civil Service Law and regulations to grant MMDAs greater authority over staff recruitment, retention, and performance management.
- Deliver in-service training and certification programs through the Institute of Local Government Studies (ILGS) for newly appointed assembly members and staff, with a focus on governance, participatory planning, budgeting, change management and local leadership.
- Establish district-based service centers for public services such as permits, licensing, and records management to reduce bureaucratic delays, increase local responsiveness, and strengthen accountability.
- Roll out leadership development programs for DCEs, Coordinating Directors, and departmental heads to provide an effective leadership at the local level.
- Use radio, social media, and community forums to rebrand public service at the local level as citizen-focused, innovative, and development-oriented.
- Revise job descriptions and performance appraisals to include behavioral competencies such as innovation, initiative, and accountability.

- Collaborate with training institutions, religious organizations, and civil society to promote values-based public service at the local level.
- Review and revise the Local Governance Act and Civil Service Law to grant MMDAs greater authority over staffing, fostering a mindset of local ownership, accountability, and proactive human resource management.
- Deliver in-service training and certification programs through ILGS for newly appointed assembly members and staff, instilling a mindset of continuous learning, ethical leadership, and citizen-oriented governance.
- Establish district-based service centers to promote a responsive and accountable local public service culture, shifting mindsets from bureaucratic rigidity to efficiency, accessibility, and community service.
- Roll out leadership development programs for DCEs, Coordinating Directors, and departmental heads to cultivate transformational leadership mindsets focused on collaboration, innovation, and ethical decision-making at the local level.
- Use radio, social media, and community forums to rebrand public service at the local level as citizen-driven and development-focused changing public and institutional mindsets from indifference to pride, innovation, and responsibility in service delivery.
- Revise job descriptions and performance appraisals to include behavioral competencies like initiative, innovation, and accountability reinforcing a mindset of professionalism, self-drive, and ethical commitment in the public sector.
- Collaborate with training institutions, religious bodies, and civil society to promote values-based public service embedding ethical principles and a mindset of integrity, humility, and servant leadership within local governance structures.

5. Decentralized Planning

Ghana's planning processes are often undermined by top-down imposition of development plans and the manipulation of local processes. Local-level planning is often subordinate to national agenda. Other critical gaps include weak spatial planning capacity, and weak implementation of planning, budgeting at national, regional, and district levels and Centrally-Driven planning and Programmes. However, mindset change must promote the understanding that local knowledge is valuable, and that development must be context-driven. Local planners and citizens must be empowered to see themselves as experts in their communities. Central agencies should adopt a mindset of support and partnership rather than command.

5.1 Key Policy Objective: Make planning processes bottom-up and participatory so that development plans reflect local needs.

5.2 Strategies:

Transformation of mindset is required to ensure the following:

- Build the technical capacity of district planning and physical planning units for effective spatial development and land-use planning.
- Strengthen capacity for spatial planning at the regional and local authority level

- Implement guidelines and training for public participatory budgeting at the district level. Ensure that communities are informed about planning processes and budgets so that they can collaborate with officials on priorities.
- Develop local capacity for data collection and Geographic Information System (GIS) mapping so that MMDAs will develop their plans on accurate local data.
- Encourage the use of digital planning tools by district planners.
- Ensure district plans feed into regional and national plans. Regularly convene joint reviews between National Development Planning Commission (NDPC) regional officers and MMDA planners to reconcile local and national goals.

5.3 Activities:

- Hold regular planning retreats in each district, inviting unit committee members, traditional leaders, CSOs, and citizens to contribute to the draft District Medium-Term Development Plan (DMTDP).
- Provide continuous training for District Planning Officers (DPOs) on inclusive facilitation techniques and the legal framework, the National Development Planning (System), 1994 (Act 480).
- Emphasize attitudinal shifts from insisting on what communities should do to listening and co-creating plans and advising accordingly.
- Establish a simple feedback mechanism (e.g. radio shows, community notice boards) so that citizens can see how their input influenced final plans, to promote the participation of the people in deciding with the MMDAs and sub-district structures their priorities.

6. Fiscal Decentralization

Fiscal decentralization remains weak and unevenly implemented, largely due to structural and attitudinal challenges that undermine the autonomy and effectiveness of MMDAs. Disbursements of the District Assembly Common Fund (DACF) are often delayed, inadequate, inconsistent, and unpredictable. In some cases, transfers are capped or withheld altogether, creating fiscal uncertainty that hampers planning and service delivery at the local level. Also, weak revenue generating capacity of MMDAs, overreliance on District Common Fund, and low commitment to decentralisation by officials at the ministry of finance have undermined the performance of local governments. Addressing these structural weaknesses requires more than institutional reforms—it demands a fundamental shift in mindset at both the central and local levels.

6.1 Key Policy Objective: Align financial resources with local responsibilities so that the MMDAs have adequate funding to perform devolved functions.

6.2 Strategies:

Mindset transformation on the part of NDPC, MoF, ILGS, MLGCRA, LUSPA, RCCs, MMDAs is required to:

- Implement the Inter-Governmental Fiscal Framework (IGFF) and Inter-Governmental Fiscal Transfers (IGFT)
- Enhance revenue mobilisation capacity of MMDAs
- Review DACF allocation to make it more equitable
- Strengthen and fully implement the Inter-Governmental Fiscal Framework (IGFF) so that funds flow directly to MMDAs for both recurrent and development needs. This will lead to an improvement in fiscal transfer and borrowing capacity of the MMDAs.
- Change the mindset of local leaders towards raising own funds (property rates, market fees, licensing) by demonstrating the link between local revenues and improved services. This will lead to the improvement in the financial management capacity of the MMDAs.
- Improve financial management systems at the district level. Introduce routine social audits and public disclosure of budgets to assure citizens that increased funding is well-spent.

6.3 Activities:

- Issue regulations requiring at least 60% of MMDAs' annual budget to be determined and executed at the district level. Ensure the remainder covers local staff salaries and national obligations.
- Provide accountants and auditors at the district level with modern budgeting software and training. Focus on instilling a fiscal mindset where local officials see themselves as stewards of public money for local development.
- Introduce positive incentives for MMDAs that generate more internal revenue (e.g. extra matching grants) and penalties for poor fiscal management. This shifts attitudes to view revenue mobilization as a valuable activity.

7. Local Economic Development

In Ghana, most districts lack the autonomy, incentives, or resources to drive local economies. However, economic initiatives are still heavily centralized, with major investments and industrialization plans decided in Accra and trickled down, limiting local innovation and ownership. To date, many districts have lacked the mindset or capacity for aggressive LED. Central government views LED as a national responsibility (overseen by central ministries) rather than a local one. This development has slowed local initiative. Inadequate exploitation of local opportunities for economic growth and job creation. In addition, the LED Policy and Implementation Plan (2024-2029) launched in 2024 to promote sustainable local business growth, decent employment and local economic empowerment has not been operationalized. Therefore, local leaders and communities need to adopt an entrepreneurial mindset. MMDAs should view themselves as catalysts for private investment, small business growth, and innovation.

7.1 Key Policy Objective: Stimulate economic growth and job creation at the local level by mobilizing local resources and enterprises. The goal is to make MMDAs active enablers of the private sector and social economy, not just service providers.

7.2 Strategies:

- Cultivate a pro-growth attitude within MMDAs and among community leaders. District officials should see themselves as facilitators of business (e.g. easing licensing, promoting markets) rather than obstacles.
- Promote local entrepreneurship through mindset-change programmes. For example, run awareness campaigns highlighting successful local entrepreneurs and encouraging youth, women and cooperatives to pursue businesses.
- Change the culture of public service to proactively engage the private sector. Form District LED Committees with real decision-making power, and train officials in partnership development. Use local planning processes to match district needs with private and NGO initiatives.
- Implement the LED Policy and Implementation Plan through the involvement of all stakeholders.

7.3 Activities:

- Offer workshops for MMDA staff on LED concepts and private sector engagement. Include field visits to vibrant local enterprises. Encourage officials to think. Mindset shifts from extracting fees and levies from businesses to how
- to grow these businesses.
- Adopt a ‘local preference’ rule for district procurement, as exemplified by other countries. Train procurement officers in transparent, pro-local sourcing within the Public Procurement Act guidelines.
- Support small-scale LED projects (e.g. business incubators, skills-training programs in ICT or agribusiness) that change the local mindset by demonstrating quick wins in job creation.
- Embark on aggressive campaigns programs to get local citizens patronise local goods rather than foreign products.
- Create awareness through public education among MMDAs, sub-districts structures and citizens on the LED Policy and Implementation Plan.

8. Popular Participation and Accountability

True decentralization hinges on popular participation—citizens actively engaging in governance and holding leaders accountable. However, there is limited public participation in

local governance, non-election of MMDCEs, excessive politicisation and partisanship, inadequate Capacity of Assembly Members, MMDCEs not held accountable, collusion between external auditors and local level officials, and integrity deficits. In other words, citizens do not trust the MMDAs as effective institutions for participation and development. The current participatory processes are elitist and often leave the poor voiceless. Transformation in mindset is essential to deepen participation. A deep cultural shift is necessary: from central and local actors to citizens. Citizens must see themselves as active co-creators of governance rather than passive recipients.

8.1 Key Policy Objective: Engage citizens as active partners and watchdogs in local governance to enhance transparency and responsiveness.

8.2 Strategies:

Mindset transformation is required to ensure the following:

- Educate citizens (through media, schools, community groups) on their rights and mechanisms for participation (town meetings, budget forums, elections). This builds a participatory mindset, so that people demand accountability rather than passively waiting for services.
- Empower sub-district structures, namely unit committees, town councils and area councils (which are constitutional channels for representation) by clarifying their roles and providing adequate funding. This signals that their contributions are valued, thereby encouraging ongoing engagement.
- Train local officials on open government norms. Promote regular disclosure of MMDA plans and finances in accessible formats. Encourage whistleblowing and protect local activists.
- Promote public interest in performance monitoring reports of public institutions through targeted campaigns.

8.4 Activities:

- Hold quarterly “Development Day” events in each MMDA where planners and citizens jointly review project status and gather feedback. Use participatory tools (maps, ranking exercises) to reinforce that citizen input shapes decisions.
- Introduce civic leadership modules in schools and youth clubs (in partnership with NCCE and local NGOs) that teach the importance of local governance and accountability. This is to instill these values early in the youth and school children.

Establish local offices of the Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ) or help desks at the MMDAs where citizens can lodge complaints. Ensure MMDA minutes, budgets, and audits are publicly posted on their notice boards.

- Ensure the effective operation of the Public Complaints Committee of the MMDAs, which is chaired by the Presiding Member. Citizens must be sensitized to the existence of the Committee and its operation simplified and made more accessible to them.

MATRIX: CROSS-CUTTING ISSUE (MINDSET AND CHANGE MANAGEMENT)

THRUST CC ISSUE	Political Decentralization	Administrative Decentralization	Fiscal Decentralization	Decentralized Planning	Local Economic Development	Pop. Participation
Climate Change and Environmental Management						
Gender, Disability and Social Inclusion						
Technology and Innovation						
Mindset and Change Management	Advancing political decentralisation requires a fundamental shift in mindset—from a control-oriented to a more participatory and service-oriented governance culture.	A changed mindset—where MMDAs are given a free hand to hire, manage, and if necessary, dismiss their own staff. This would help realize the core vision of	Strengthening fiscal decentralisation requires more than institutional reforms—it demands a fundamental shift in mindset at both the central and local levels. The central government must move away from a	Mindset change must promote the understanding that local knowledge is valuable, and that development must be context-driven. Planners and politicians at all levels should prioritise district-led planning.	Local leaders and communities need to adopt an entrepreneurial mindset. MMDAs should view themselves as catalysts for private investment, small business growth, and innovation.	Transformation in mindset is essential to deepen participation. A deep cultural shift is necessary: from central and local actors to citizens. Citizens must see themselves as active co-creators of governance rather

	Political elites must internalize the principle that empowering local governance strengthens, rather than fragments national cohesion.	administrative decentralisation. This also entails the full integration of the Departments and Units of the MMDAs and resourcing them.	perception of the MMDAs as inherently inefficient or prone to mismanagement. The central government must recognize that development must be locally-driven. The MMDAs should be empowered to raise their revenues, receive the DACF on schedule and improve their financial management capacity.	Central agencies should adopt a mindset of support and partnership rather than command and control. The MMDAs should ensure the public hearing of their plans.	National policies must encourage local initiative rather than discourage it with red tape and overregulation. The mindset of local population must be shifted towards the consumption of local goods over foreign products. The full implementation of the 2024 LED Policy will create an innovative mindset.	than passive recipients. The MMDAs must be more effective to promote trust between them and citizens.
24-Hour Economy						

9. Conclusion

This issue paper has shown that effective decentralization depends on transforming the mindset of all the stakeholders, namely state and non-state actors and citizens and not only on legal and institutional reforms. Decentralization, with divisible benefits such as power and resources, involves winners and losers and therefore will attract conflict and resistance as stakeholders jostle to promote their interests. However, a comprehensive capacity development and change management plan centred around transformative or new mindset (the “software”) has the potential to deal with the ingrained negative behaviour and attitudes, which are counterproductive to the benefits of decentralization as enshrined in the legal framework, policies and the 2024 election manifesto of the National Democratic Congress (NDC).

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