

**WELCOME AND OPENING REMARKS BY THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY OF
THE INTER MINISTERIAL COORDINATING COMMITTEE ON
DECENTRALISATION (IMCCoD) AT THE NATIONAL DECENTRALISATION
DIALOGUE, KEMPINSKI HOTEL, ACCRA 25-26th SEPTEMBER, 2025**

Your Excellency, the Vice President of the Republic of Ghana, Prof. Jane Naana Opoku-Agyemang,

Honourable Ministers,

Honourable Members of Parliament,

Hon District Chief Executives,

Heads of Institutions,

Your Excellencies and Representatives of Development Partners and Missions,

Traditional and Religious Leaders,

Representatives of Civil Society,

Members of the Private Sector,

Academia, Think Tanks,

Media Practitioners,

Esteemed Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen

Good morning, It is my honour and distinct privilege to welcome you all to this inaugural National Dialogue on Decentralisation and Responsive Governance.

This year marks 37 years since Ghana first embarked on the bold path of decentralisation reforms to herald the fourth republic. As we assemble at this critical juncture, it is fitting to pause and reflect on our collective journey. Therefore, this Dialogue provides us with a unique platform to review our achievements, confront our challenges, and explore new opportunities for strengthening decentralised governance in Ghana. Over the next two days, we will take stock of what we have accomplished, identify gaps and bottlenecks, and

chart a way forward for a more effective, accountable, and responsive local governance system.

The choices we make now will determine whether decentralisation fulfils its promise of empowering citizens and transforming communities or remains an unfinished journey of unrealised potential.

Your Excellency, the Vice President, Let me first convey our deepest gratitude to you, for joining us this morning. Your presence here demonstrates the highest level of political commitment to Ghana's decentralisation and local governance reforms.

To all of you present, I extend my heartfelt appreciation to each of you for honouring this invitation. Your presence here today is testament to your commitment to building a more inclusive, accountable, and responsive local governance system in Ghana.

I wish to acknowledge our development partners, civil society organisations, academia, and traditional leaders whose consistent financial, technical, and intellectual support has sustained Ghana's decentralisation journey over the years.

Prof. Chair, distinguished ladies and gentlemen, permit me to also extend my profound appreciation to the Team of Experts who are leading the development of the National Decentralisation Policy and Strategy (2026-2030), led by Dr.

Esther Ofei-Aboagye and our father of Decentralisation and eminent Professor Kwamena Ahwoi as oversight consultant, I thank you.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, Ghana's decentralisation journey formally began in 1988 and was subsequently given constitutional expression under the Directive Principles of State Policy in Article 35(6d) which states that Ghana shall ***“make democracy a reality by decentralising the administrative and financial machinery of government to the regions and districts and by affording all possible opportunities to the people to participate in decision-making at every level in national life and in government;”***.

Chapter 20 of the 1992 Constitution, further mandates that ***“Ghana shall have a system of local government administration which shall, as far as practicable, be decentralised.”*** This vision has since been reinforced through legislation such as the Local Governance Act, 2016 (Act 936), the PFM Act, 2016 (Act 921) and operationalised through policy frameworks, strategies, and fiscal mechanisms such as the District Assemblies Common Fund. Collectively, these have empowered District Assemblies as the fulcrum of local governance and expanded opportunities for citizen participation at the grassroots.

Your Excellency, We must remind ourselves that decentralisation is not an end in itself; it is a means to better governance and improved livelihoods. Scholars argue that devolving decision-making authority to the local level enhances efficiency and responsiveness, because local governments are better placed to understand and respond to the needs of their communities.

Yet, experience both in Ghana and globally teaches us that these expected benefits are not automatic. Without adequate financing, strong institutional capacity, and robust accountability mechanisms, decentralisation risks becoming a hollow promise, raising expectations among citizens but falling short in delivery. This is the challenge before us today: ensuring that the structures we have built are not only legitimate in law, but also effective in practice, capable of meeting the aspirations of our people.

Prof Chair, Ladies and Gentleman, These insights resonate strongly with Ghana's experience. While achievements abound, fiscal constraints limit the capacity of Assemblies to deliver effectively; administrative overlaps and turf wars erode efficiency; and political decentralisation, particularly the election of MMDCEs, continues to attract debate. These tensions are not unique to Ghana but reflect the delicate balance between devolution of power and the preservation of central oversight.

However, in all of this, the principle of subsidiarity in decentralisation remains supreme. It requires that decisions directly affecting people should be taken at the level of implementation and should involve the participation of the local people who are affected by those decisions. The principle also requires that each public service should be provided by the jurisdiction having control over the minimum geographic area that would internalize the benefits and costs of such provision.

This is the principle that has driven the traditional local government functions which have historically been assigned to local authorities because, Every human

is born, so in most countries the function of registration of births and deaths is a local authority function. Every human being goes to the toilet and urinates, so liquid waste management is a local authority function. Every human being goes to the toilet, so solid waste management is a local authority function. Every human being creates filth, so solid waste management is a local authority function. Every human being at one time or another buys or sells from the market, so market management is a local authority function. Every human being at one time or another uses public transportation, so the administration of lorry parks and city transport systems is a local authority function. Finally, every human being dies and must be buried, so cemeteries are a local authority function. Therefore, decentralisation facilitates and creates the foundation for a quality life journey.

Next to these “natural” local authority functions, the two next governmental functions that affect nearly every human being are education and health, more so basic education and primary health care. It is therefore very unusual to have any serious decentralisation programme under which education and health are not decentralised. In this regard, his excellency the President has directed that these be prioritised and achieved within the shortest possible time frame.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, the theme for this Dialogue, *“Resetting Decentralisation for Responsive Local Governance and Effective Service Delivery,”* reflects exactly this urgency. It reminds us that decentralisation is not a policy luxury; it is a democratic necessity.

This Dialogue therefore comes at the right moment in history. With the formulation of the National Decentralisation Policy and Strategy (2026–2030), we have an opportunity to reset decentralisation for responsive local governance and effective service delivery. The chosen theme is not only timely but urgent, reminding us—as Oates (1999) would put it—that, decentralisation, when well designed, is a democratic necessity that ensures inclusion, fairness, and justice for all citizens.

Our Dialogue today brings together some of the finest minds in governance, policy, and practice, and I am confident that the outcomes will provide a strong, well designed foundation for deepening Ghana’s democratic and developmental gains.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, As we embark on this important exercise, let us remember that decentralisation is not self-executing. It requires *careful design, consistent political will and commitment, and continuous adaptation*. Let us therefore commit ourselves to tangible actions and practical solutions that bring government closer to the people, improve service delivery, and transform communities in measurable ways.

Therefore, our discussions over the next two days should focus on the following critical areas. First, we must address the persistent challenges of institutional coordination, ensuring that all actors—across government and beyond—work in harmony for the benefit of our citizens. Second, we must develop innovative

strategies for resource mobilisation, so that local governments are empowered to deliver quality services.

Third, we must continuously improve service delivery to meet the expectations and needs of our communities. Finally, we must deepen citizen participation, making sure that every Ghanaian feels heard, valued, and represented in the governance process and that funds follow functions.

And let history record that this Dialogue was not another meeting or talk shop, but the moment when Ghana pressed the reset button, setting decentralisation firmly on the path to deliver equity, empowerment, and effective service delivery for all.

As we begin this important conversation, I am confident that the outcomes of this dialogue will provide clear direction and renewed momentum for our decentralisation agenda. Indeed, there is no better time to deliver decisively on the decentralisation agenda than when an NDC government is at the helm of affairs, and more so when we have a President who is a staunch Ambassador of decentralisation.

Prof. Chair, your Excellency, on behalf of the IMCC, I thank you once again for your presence, your dedication, and your partnership. On this note, it is my pleasure to welcome you all to the National Decentralisation Dialogue. May our deliberations be fruitful, impactful, and inspiring.

I thank you for your audience.