

PROPOSALS FOR MULTIPARTY LOCAL GOVERNANCE REFORMS

PB2 | May 2023

The Compromise: for the Election of MMDCEs

Reaching a compromise or a truce is a positive outcome of a misunderstanding or argument. It is a way of “**agreeing to disagree**” or amicably resolving a matter that has long caused rifts, confusion or stagnation to move a process forward.

If the Centre for Democratic Development (CDD) 2021 Afro Barometer survey report is anything to go by, then we must admit that there is a dichotomy between the majority of the survey participants who say they don't want political parties in the districts (72% respondents) and the same majority who also say that the system has failed in serving the people and needs to be reformed (78% respondents); it has systemic failures, extreme poverty, lack of jobs, especially for the youth, corruption and poor public and civil service delivery, etc. Besides, poor infrastructure is still very rife, and the future looks even bleaker if nothing is done drastically to address the concerns of the people. **We must reform the Local Governance System (LG) now!**

The question therefore is: how can we reform the system by electing individuals as MMDCEs on a non-partisan basis?

After 30 years of the existence of the local governance system without the participation of political parties, should we refuse to be guided by any lessons, moving forward in reforming the system? If people insist that they don't want Political parties in the districts, then the “**democratic compromise**” of the majority having their say, is to allow for MMDCEs to be elected as individuals by the electorate, and not by the appointment of the President. Elected MMDCEs then become accountable to the electorate.

However, we must also realize and be guided by the fact that the election of MMDCEs alone will not cure the systemic failures in the districts. We must reason beyond just electing MMDCEs and think of the broader picture and bigger challenge of reforming the LG system.

The reality and facts on the ground are that political parties continue to operate undercover in the districts. They influence assembly elections and their existence against the constitution makes their “democratic rights rather undemocratic”. Why should multiparty democracy be practiced at the national level and not at the local level?

By the interpretation of the 1992 Constitution, we can only reform the local governance system if we allow for Article 55(3) to be amended. However, this same law when amended would allow for political parties' participation in the districts.

The **dilemma** now is whether to elect MMDCEs without reforming the entire local governance system or to allow political parties participation (In electing MMDCEs or Assembly Members) and be able to reform the local governance system?

Perhaps a **“Compromise”** will be the way forward to move us from **“Advocacy to Action”**.

Political parties can be regulated and monitored in the LG reforms to become developmental-oriented to serve the needs of the people, and not just to be allowed in the districts to do what they like.

Parties are known to be stronger and better organized, and therefore their legitimized operations can be beneficial to the people. They can bring pressure to bear on the government, their campaign promises and manifestos to the people in the districts will open them up for scrutiny and accountability at the end of their tenure. There will be competition in all districts among parties regarding who is doing better and this will accelerate development. Parties will learn from the experiences of running the district assemblies, to place them in a good stead to do better at the national level. Issues with corruption and poor service-delivery can be managed by laws in the reform process.

We have not tried political parties in the districts in over 30 years, yet because they have not fared well at the national level, we kick against their presence in local government.

Ironically, their absence over three decades has also not cured the rather abysmally unacceptable performance in the districts. Has it not occurred to us that to have multiparty democracy at the top only means the bottom will have to **“keep yawning in hunger and anger until crumbs trickle down to them as and when”**? For instance, can an elected MMDCE alone have the guts and authority to challenge central government in power to release in time the District Assemblies Common Fund (DAF) which is always delayed? Not likely, but the parties can push central government because ordinarily they also act as a pressure group.

Should we continue to kick parties out of local government just by being sensational? With the right reforms system in place, parties will be empowered to transform the districts and eliminate the current winner-takes-all system of government in existence.

As citizens, the decision is ours to make, and must be based on facts, realities and our values as a people for peace, nation-building and prosperity.

IDEG Publication

For further information contact:
The Information Management Officer
Institute for Democratic Governance (IDEG)

No. 45 Garden road, intersection Okine Lane
Ambassadorial enclave, East Legon
P. O. Box CT 5767, Cantonments, Accra - Ghana

Phone: +233 (0) 054 357 752
Email: edsoffice@ideg.org /
info@ideg.org
Website: www.ideg.org