

# DEALING WITH WINNER-TAKES-ALL POLITICS IN GHANA: THE CASE OF NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLANNING

BY

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## Summary

In 2011, the Constitution Review Commission (CRC) recommended a national development plan that should be entrenched in the constitution and binding on successive governments. While accepting the need for a long-term plan, the recommendation to make it binding on all regimes was rejected by the government. This paper examines the positive side of the recommendation. It argues that Ghana's development planning process lacks broad participation. This heightens the feeling of marginalization usually associated with "Winner-Takes-All" politics and undermines inclusivity and policy continuity. The paper examines the current practice of development planning which is characterized by limited participation and also shows policy discontinuity resulting from abandoned plans and high cost of these in terms of development. It makes a case for an entrenched plan that can promote inclusive governance, policy continuity and accelerated national development.

## Introduction and background

In 2010 the government setup a Constitutional Review Commission to do nationwide consultation on the possible changes to the 1992 constitution. The Constitutional Review Commission submitted its report on 20<sup>th</sup> December 2011. Close to ninety-five percent of the recommendations were accepted by the government in its White Paper issued thereafter. However, there were a number of important recommendations that the Government rejected, much to the dismay of several Ghanaians. With regards to the NDPC, while the Government accepted the CRC recommendation for a comprehensive long term, strategic multi-year rolling National Development Plan, it did not agree with the CRC that the provision for the development plan should be entrenched; and that the plan so developed should be binding on all successive governments and enforceable at the instance of any person or institution.<sup>2</sup> In the view of the Government, the two propositions would have the effect of a command model of development planning and tie the hands of successive governments to the ideological interests and policies of a particular political party.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> See pages 4-6 of Government White Paper issued after the submission of the Report of the Constitution Review Commission available at <http://www.ghana.gov.gh/index.php/information/reports/2572-white-paper-on-the-report-of-the-constitution-review-commission-presented-to-the-president>.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid*

This paper examines the validity of the government's arguments for the rejection of the recommendation from the CRC. A development planning process that includes experts across the political divide and culminates in an entrenched plan that is binding on all regimes could douse the flames of winner-takes-all and its attendant feeling of marginalization. Indeed, one key manifestation of WTA politics is policy discontinuity. It is argued that the government's position would rather fuel the negative practice and policy discontinuity and feeling of marginalization associated with winner-takes-all (WTA) politics. Therefore, in order to deal with the practice of WTA politics and its attendant feeling of marginalization, this paper makes a case for an entrenched national development plan that spells out the role of all important stakeholders in the planning process and serves as a binding blueprint for development. This would ensure that the views of all the key political parties are incorporated into a long-term development plan that serves as a broader national vision that would be implemented by all political parties that are elected to power. The manifestoes of the various political parties during electioneering campaign may focus on the different approaches to realize the blueprints encapsulated in the long-term plan. This means that the National Development Planning Commission (NDPC) should be more independent and capable of fashioning out a long term and more entrenched plan that benefits from substantive inputs from all across the political divide.

This paper is divided into seven sub-sections. Section one deals with the background and problem statement. Section two operationalizes and clarifies WTA politics in Ghana. The third section discusses the development planning process with a view to highlighting some of the issues that will inform the argument for entrenching the CRC recommendations on the NDPC vis-a-vis government's response. In the section 4, the paper analyzes the limitations of the current planning process and makes the case that an entrenched plan would overcome these limitations and generate inclusiveness in the process. Section 5 deals with the issue of policy discontinuity characteristic of the current regime the need to bind successive governments to the long term perspective plan. Section 6 deals with the issue of ideological capture. The seventh section is devoted to conclusions and recommendations.

## **2. Defining Winner-Takes-All Politics**

"Winner-Takes-All" (WTA) politics, as argued in previous presentations connotes an extremely divisive and partisan sub-culture that excludes all other Ghanaians who are not part of the ruling party from national governance and decision making in a manner that polarizes the nation and dissipates the much needed talents and brains for national development. One palpable feature and result of WTA politics is the feeling of marginalization and exclusion from the governance process by those who are not part of the ruling party/government (Dennis, 2007; Abotsi, 2013). The feeling of marginalization and exclusion from the governance process by those who are not members of the party in power poses a danger to Ghana's developing democracy. It breeds apathy, creates a divisive "we and them" situation as well as ill-feeling against the state. The end result is tension, acrimony and rancor in the body politic. Again, the unbridled practice of WTA politics makes people ever ready to undermine the national interest and sabotage the national agenda in order to render the ruling government unpopular and be voted out in the next election (ibid). National development planning could serve to reduce WTA politics if Ghana adopts a development plan that is entrenched in the constitution and spells out an inclusive mode of participation in the planning process. This could reduce the feeling of marginalization and as the binding plan is implemented, all stakeholders will be proud to have contributed to the national development process.

## **3. Development Planning Process in Ghana**

Article 36 clause 5 of the 1992 Constitution provides that “...within two years after assuming office, the president shall present to parliament a co-ordinated programme of economic and social policies, including agricultural and industrial programmes at all levels and in all the regions of Ghana...” In this regard, successive governments are expected to work with the NDPC in formulating development plans for the country.<sup>4</sup> Sections 1, 10 and 11 of the National Development Planning (System) Act 1994 (Act 480) enjoins sectors/ministries and district agencies to undertake development planning functions in consultation with the National Development Planning Commission (NDPC). Every sector/ministry has a Policy Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation Division (PPMED) that undertakes planning on behalf of the respective sectors/ministries. At the local or district (Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assembly) level, there is the District Planning Co-ordinating Unit (DPCUs and MPCUs for municipal and metropolitan areas) that is expected to initiate and prepare district plans with the full participation of the local people through workshops and open forums to solicit their input into the district plan (NDPC Planning Process, 2010: 23). From this stage, the DPCUs/MPCUs are expected to draft a report encapsulating the local needs of the people. This report is presented at a Public Hearing Session (PHS) where the DPCUs/MPCUs disseminate the contents of the report to members of the local community. The PHS is purely informative, therefore, inputs are not solicited. After the PHS, the draft report or plan is forwarded to the NDPC (ibid: 28).

The NDPC analyzes the various draft reports or plans on receiving them and commences a process of preparing a national plan (NDPC Planning Process, 2010:30). The NDPC forms Cross-Sectoral Planning Groups (CSPGs) around the thematic areas of the development plan with each CSPG tasked to draft a policy framework that deals with specific development need (ibid). Each CSPG submits its report to the NDPC after which the NDPC is expected to organize public consultations to create awareness about the development plan, highlight what is new about it, solicit input from the public and promote ownership of the plan.<sup>5</sup> The inputs made during the consultative process are expected to be incorporated into the draft document that forms the basis of a national development policy framework upon which the sectors and districts are expected to rely in formulating specific implementable activities. The NDPC collates these plans into one document and submit it to the president as the national development plan (NDPC Planning Process, 2010:50). The only long term national development plan in Ghana since 1992 is the *Ghana-Vision 2020* formulated by the NDC in 1996. This plan was however shelved by the NPP when they came to power in 2000. It was during the NPP administration that two short-term development plans GPRS (I&II), were formulated to

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<sup>4</sup> The composition of the NDPC is spelt out in clause 3 (1) of the NDPC Act, 1994 (Act 479), which states that “the Commission shall consist of: (a) A Chairman who shall be appointed by the President in consultation with the Council of State; (b) A Vice Chairman elected by the members from among their number; (c) The Minister responsible for Finance and such other Ministers of State as the President may appoint; (d) The Government Statistician; (e) The Director-General of the Commission; (f) The Governor of the Bank of Ghana; (g) One representative from each region of Ghana appointed by the Regional Coordinating Council of the region who shall have experience in development planning; and (h) Such other persons as may be appointed by the President having regard to their knowledge and experience of the relevant areas and roles pertaining to development, and to economic, social, environmental and spatial planning”.

<sup>5</sup> Many groups are targeted in the consultation process. The groups include: Regional Ministers, Sector Ministers and their Deputies; Council of State; Regional Co-ordinating Directors and Regional Planning Co-ordinating Units; Metropolitan, Municipal and District Chief Executives; District Planning Co-ordinating Units; District Assembly members; Traditional Authorities; Community-Based Organizations; Professional Bodies; the Media; Women’s Groups; NGOs including CSOs; Religious Bodies; National Association of Local Authorities; Ghana Employers Association; Association of Ghana Industries; TUC; Research Institutes and Think Tanks; Parliament; Political Parties; Development Partners; and the National Union of Ghana Students (NUGS).

meet the conditions for securing loans and debt forgiveness from the country's development partners (Jonah, 2011).

#### ***4.0 Analyzing Development Planning, Entrenchment and Inclusivity.***

The composition of the NDPC is problematic. One key manifestation of WTA politics is the extensive appointing powers of the President that are exercised in a manner that only favors political apparatchiks sometimes without recourse to meritocracy. Indeed, apart from the Vice Chairman and the various representatives of the regions, the President appoints all members of the Commission. Even though the President is not barred from appointing members across the political divide to serve on the Commission on account of their expertise, the norm over the years has been such that "only party people are favored most" (Tweneboah-Kodua, 2010). Appointments to the Commission by the president tend to perpetuate the feeling of marginalization and undermines acceptance of development plans by subsequent governments. An entrenched plan that contains provisions specifying the composition of the Commission and reduces the powers of the president will broaden participation and general acceptability of plans. Again, civil society that represents the interest of a cross section of society and bridges the gap between the citizenry and the government are not officially represented on the Commission and given the pervasiveness of WTA politics and the overly partisan manner in which the power of appointment has been exercised since 1992, there is no guarantee that civil society would ever be given representation on the Commission. However in the nation's drive towards democratic maturity and fight against WTA politics, institutional representation as a countervailing measure, bipartisanship at all levels of the planning process and meritocracy must be key among the guiding principles in constituting the NDPC. To insulate members of the Commission from governmental control, their tenure must be secure and the legal duration of a plan to be formulated could be twenty years spanning beyond the four years of any government.

As can be deduced from the national development planning process, the role of political parties, particularly those in opposition in development planning is minimal or sometimes non-existent. They are merely expected to be part of a long list of groups and individuals required to be consulted after the major steps in the development planning process in terms of problem identification, conceptualization and formulation, have been undertaken. Impliedly, they are not involved from the scratch. At the national public consultations stage, the quality of representatives sent to represent the political parties has been low (Tweneboah-Kodua, 2010). On many occasions, the representatives of the political parties do not hold any expertise knowledge in the area of development planning and are unable to bring their party presence and views to bear on the planning process (ibid). Also, given that most of these representatives lack the political clout within their respective parties, they are unable to sensitize and influence discussions in their parties regarding the broad planning outlines agreed upon (Adutwum, 2012). This lack of qualitative participation also stems from the fundamental principle underpinning national development planning, that is, the political parties do not feel obliged to implement any pre-conceived plan when they get into office. This is the reason for a reconceptualization of the entire process.

National development planning presents a critical opportunity for dealing with WTA politics, ensuring proper inclusivity, policy continuity, ownership and effective implementation of plans. In this regard, it is important to broaden the development planning process to include political party contributions right from the scratch. Experienced and qualified party representatives in the areas of development planning as well as ordinary party supporters must therefore be part of the process at both the local level and the CSPG stage. The party representatives must own the process and make extensive and informed contributions from their party perspectives. The various perspectives may

then be harmonized to ensure that the broad outlines of the plan reflect the views and contributions of all across the political divide.

Even though there seem to be a mechanism that promotes inclusivity in development planning, it exists mostly in theory. Broad and effective participation is also limited because of a presumed lack of funds, and the fact that the various parties know the plan is not binding on them. Entrenchment that provides for funding along similar lines as the Electoral Commission should broaden the participation. At the national level for instance, consulting the list of groups and individuals listed as per the NDPC Planning Guidelines, would have brought various shades of opinion to bear on the development planning process in a manner that could douse the divisive flames of WTA politics. In reality however, such seminars to create awareness about the development plan and to solicit public input are not properly organized due to lack of funds. There is limited public awareness and low participation at such seminars and workshops. In venting his frustrations about the poor participation at such public forums, this is what Richard Tweneboah-Kodua, a Planning Analyst at the NDPC said: “we do not have resources to meaningfully organize such events and with the few that are organized, the quality of participation is always poor and nothing to write home about”. With such poor public participation at the national level in development planning the process is unlikely to benefit from meaningful views and contributions from all. Hence development plans continue to remain the dictates of only those in political power, thereby heightening the feeling of marginalization by those who are not part of the ruling party. But effective political party participation in the planning process will ginger the involvement of stakeholders who will not demand money before participation.

At the district level too, there are mechanisms to ensure popular consultation, contribution and influence of the planning process in order to promote grassroots ownership of local development plans. The DPCUs/MPCUs are expected to prepare district development plans with the full participation of the local community, including political party groups, to ensure grassroots ownership of the plans (NDPC Planning Process, 2010:46). However, over the years many DPCUs/MPCUs have only relied on the M&E reports on the implementation of previous development programmes and the views of few opinion leaders in preparing future district plans. This is due mainly to inadequate or total lack of funds for organizing workshops and seminars to create room for local participation. For example, in formulating the *Ghana-Vision 2020* no funding was allocated to the DPCUs/MPCUs to organize forums to solicit grassroots input. Indeed, the plan was formulated by the DPCUs/MPCUs without public consultations at the local or district level (Ghana-Vision 2020, 1997). In formulating the GPRS I & II, too, funding received for organizing public consultations at the districts was either not enough or received after the periods for public consultations were over.<sup>6</sup> Funding albeit inadequate, for organizing local consultations in drafting the GPRS I was received by many DPCUs/MPCUs at a time when the planning session was over, whereas others did not receive any funding at all.<sup>7</sup> In formulating the GPRS II, many DPCUs/MPCUs complained of inadequate funding for public consultations. In the Ga-East municipality, for example, the cost of public consultations was estimated at GH¢40,000; yet only GH¢ 3,840 was given (Ga-East

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<sup>6</sup> In a follow-up interview with Regina Adutwum, Director General of the NDPC in Accra on 30<sup>th</sup> January 2012, she noted that about her office was inundated with several memoranda from almost all the DPCUs/MPCUs about this challenge. Indeed, several memoranda that contained complaints from the DPCUs/MPCUs were shown to this researcher. Unfortunately, her outfit could not deal with the problem because funding for public consultations in the formulation of district plans was expected to come from the government through the MMDCEs.

<sup>7</sup>  
ibid.

Draft MTDP, 2005:43). In the Savelugu-Nanton district too, the cost of public consultations was GH¢34,000 but only GH¢4,413 was received (Savelugu-Nanton Draft MTDP, 2005:62). Similarly, in the Tolon-Kumbungu district, the estimated cost for local consultations was GH¢ 29,000 and the total amount received was GH¢3,654 (Tolon-Kumbungu Draft MTDP, 2005:44). Other DPCUs/MPCUs suffered similar challenges and therefore could not organize public consultations but solicited views from opinion leaders during MMDA meetings and used them as proxies in drafting district plans. This undermines the need to broaden the planning process to include the views and contributions of political parties.

It must however be noted that as a developing country, the refrain of inadequate funding may always be used as an excuse by politicians to douse public interest and keep all others who do not belong to the ruling party from the governance and decision making process of state. Until political parties socialize and educate their followers to demand their participation in the planning process at both the local and national level and to take active part in them, public interest in the planning process at all levels would be as low as voter turnout in local level elections.<sup>8</sup> With such limited public interest, governments may conveniently use inadequate funding as an excuse to deny groups, the public and grassroots an opportunity to be part of the planning process. The 1992 Constitution enjoins the political parties to offer political education on pertinent issues such as their participation in the development planning process. Unless this role is fully activated to whip up partisan interest in development planning, there would be limited public interest in the role of the citizenry as a countervailing authority in the planning process and WTA politics would persist that marginalizes people would persist. Civil society and the National Commission for Civic Education may also play a role in ensuring that citizens and all across the political divide participate actively in the development planning process at all levels.

Once public enthusiasm is whipped up in the planning process, political parties must again play an active role at the CSPG stage. Political party representatives at this stage must be appointed because of the positions they hold and the expertise they have. Such experienced people and political party experts must contribute to the technical base of the planning process and ensure that the broad planning outline contains implementable and achievable targets that would be acceptable to their respective political parties. Again, the role of political parties in the national consultations in the development planning process must be taken seriously. Only qualified party stalwarts must be consulted to ensure that the plan benefits from valuable contributions from the political parties.

To enable all across the political divide to participate in the development planning process and guarantee national ownership of the plan, the relatively short time frame of two years within which development plans are expected to be formulated must be reviewed as it undermines the NDPC's effort at all levels to consult as many people as possible, particularly political party representatives, in the development planning process. To this end, article 36 clause 5 of the 1992 Constitution may be amended to allow ample time to be spent in formulating a truly long term and holistic national development plan that reflects the views of a cross section of Ghanaians including civil society and all across the political divide of the country. To achieve a long term sustainable development, the national development plan must be entrenched in the Constitution.<sup>9</sup> Again, to ensure that the views of all across the political divide are reflected in the governance process in a manner that reduces the feeling of marginalization associated with WTA politics, the national plan must be entrenched in the

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<sup>8</sup> On the average, voter turnout in local level elections since 1988 has been less than 30 percent compared to national elections that enjoys an average voter turnout of close to 80 percent. This has largely been attributed to the Constitutional injunction that bans political parties from participating in local or district level elections.

Constitution. The entrenched plan must have adequate provision for the funding of the various steps of the planning process to allow for effective participation of various stakeholders. It must be binding on all political leaders who are elected to power but must be reviewed every six years using the cross party approach discussed above, in the light of current trends and unforeseen contingencies.

### **5.0 The Planning Process and Policy Continuity**

One of the major limitations of the planning process in Ghana is the ease with which development plans can be abandoned by successive government with the heavy cost in terms of retardation of development. This arises in part because plans are not binding on successive governments according to the planning law. It also arises because other parties are effectively excluded from the planning process and therefore do not feel any commitment to the outcome of the process. The resulting policy discontinuity in terms of abandoned vision strategy and projects exacts a heavy toll on the economy. Vision 2010 was introduced in 1996 by the National Democratic Congress (NDC) as a long term development plan for Ghana but was abandoned by the New Patriotic Party (NPP) when they won the 2000 elections (Gyampo, 2012). The NPP introduced an Affordable Housing Project while in office between 2004 and 2008. However, the NDC government abandoned the project when it was elected to power in 2008 (ibid). Again, the two parties have introduced counter policies on the number of years to be spent in Senior High School (SHS). While the NPP introduced the four-year SHS programme, the NDC changed the Programme to three years (ibid). Again, the first comprehensive youth policy in Ghana was introduced in 1999 by the NDC government. However, upon winning the 2000 election, the NPP scrapped that policy and introduced another one in 2008. In the divisive spirit of policy discontinuity, the NDC also abandoned the 2008 youth policy and introduced another one in 2010 (ibid). These negative practices do not only alienate political opponents but also undermine national development in the sense that there can be no meaningful development without some level of stability and policy continuity. The framers of the 1992 Constitution may have been aware of this, hence their prescription of policy continuity in the section on Directive Principles of State Policy. Without a national development plan formulated with input from all across the political divide, the feeling of marginalization associated with WTA politics would be prevalent and policy continuity and implementation would suffer in a manner that would retard national development.

### **6.0 Ideology, Inclusivity and International Experience**

One of the arguments of the government in rejecting the entrenchment of the development plan is capture by a particular ideology. Fear of ideological capture can be diffused by inclusiveness in the planning process. Inclusiveness ensures that the plan so developed represents the views and ideological leanings of the ordinary people. It is also argued that entrenching the national plan will not necessarily imply an inter-generational imposition of ideologies on regimes. The creation of a uni-polar world system has doused the relevance of ideology in shaping development. What matters to leaders and their followers is development and there can be no ideological imperative that frowns on development. Furthermore, *"If we all took part in preparing the plan, we must implement it when we are in power."* This quotation from a prominent member of the opposition New Patriotic Party and corroborated by participants from the other political parties and civil society during the IEA-Winner-Takes-All public consultations in Tamale on June 18, 2014 negates the government response on the need not to have a command model of development due to ideological differences. With the demise of the bi-polar world, the need to effectively tackle the challenges confronting the

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<sup>9</sup>See the Constitution Review Commission Report submitted to the President and Government White Paper issued thereafter at <http://www.ghana.gov.gh/index.php/information/reports/2572-white-paper-on-the-report-of-the-constitution-review-commission-presented-to-the-president>

ordinary people is held paramount and not political ideologies (Gyampo, 2012). Indeed, a look at some of the social interventionist policies of Barack Obama in the US such as “OBAMA CARE”, the policies of the various regimes in Ghana, since the inception of the Fourth Republic in 1992, as well as the practice of “political somersaulting”<sup>10</sup> in Ghana show a total departure from ideological “purity”. This means that ideological reasoning cannot be an excuse against the call for an entrenched long term development plan that would benefit from inputs from all across the political divide and be implemented by successive regimes.

Indeed, experience from other countries shows that constitutional provision for binding and entrenched plans are beneficial. Indeed, economically advanced countries such as the US, UK, Canada as well as some newly industrializing states like Brazil, have entrenched blueprints for development that also highlights the relationship between the state and groups in the formulation of these programmes, and encourage all groups to actively participate in the planning process (Weimer and Vining, 2007; Novy and Leubolt, 2005). For example, in Porto Alegre, the capital city of Rio Grande do Sul – the most southern state of Brazil, leaders have introduced the concept of *Participatory Budgeting*. This is the core element in a new form of governance in which government officials and the public or ordinary people across the political divide come together to discuss and collectively plan urban development (Weimer and Vining, 2007: 158). In Africa, Malaysia, South Africa and Botswana are excellent examples of countries with binding plans formulated through broad participation and consensus (Novy and Leubolt, 2005). Ghana may therefore take a cue from these other countries as an entrenched plan with adequate modifications will allow for broader participation, policy continuity and accelerated development.

## 7.0. Conclusion

In this paper we have discussed Ghana’s development planning process and highlighted the crucial need for an entrenched development plan which could spell out the role and participation of all stakeholders as well as engender public interest in the planning process. It has been argued that in order to deal with WTA politics with its attendant feeling of marginalization, government must rethink its response to the CRC recommendation on the NDPC. This paper makes the point that contrary to the government’s position, entrenching the national plan and making it binding on all successive regimes will lead to policy continuity, inclusiveness and a rapid rate of economic transformation. Entrenching the long term national development plan is critical because the current constitutional provision that deals with the formulation of national plans does not encourage mass participation in the planning process. An entrenched provision would make it mandatory for more consultation and participation of all in the planning process. Again, entrenching the plan in the constitution would deal with the frequent challenges of policy discontinuities, disruptions of development projects and retardation of development that have plagued the country for decades. In this regard, the constitutional provision that mandates regimes to formulate new plans within two years in their term of office has to be amended as argued earlier. This would pave the way for a broader long term perspective plan to be formulated with input from all and binding on all regimes. It is also argued that entrenching the national plan will not necessarily imply an inter-generational imposition of ideologies on regimes. As already pointed out, the creation of a uni-polar world system has doused the relevance of ideology in shaping development. What matters to leaders and their followers is development and there can be no ideological imperative that frowns on

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<sup>10</sup> The author uses the term to describe the practice of constant defection from one party to another in a manner that does not take cognizance of ideology. In Ghana’s political history since 1992, staunch politicians such as Prof AlhassanWayoSeini, Madam Frances Essiam, can be cited as examples. etc

development. There should be a national development plan, a long-term perspective plan formulated through broad consensus with input from qualified experts, civil society and all across the political divide both at the grassroots and national level. This plan should be entrenched in the constitution and should guide all governments irrespective of which political party is in power. The manifestoes of political parties should explain how their policies and programmes would help achieve targets in the plan.

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