



INNOVATIONS FOR SUCCESSFUL SOCIETIES

*An initiative of
the National Academy of Public Administration,
and the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs
and the Bobst Center for Peace and Justice,
Princeton University*

Oral History Program

Series:

Governance Traps

Interview no.:

13

Interviewee: Kwamena Ahwoi

Interviewer: Itumeleng Makgetla

Date of Interview: 8 September 2009

Location: Accra
Ghana

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MAKGETLA: My name is Itumeleng Makgetla, it is the 8th of September 2009, I am in Accra, Ghana and I am here with Mr. Kwamena Ahwoi who was the Secretary for the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development from 1988 to 1999. From 1993 his position was designated Minister of that ministry. He also doubled as the Minister of Foreign Affairs from 1997 to 1998. Thank you very much for joining us and being part of this set of interviews.

AHWOI: *Thank you very much.*

MAKGETLA: Before we begin can I just confirm that I have your consent and that this is a voluntary discussion?

AHWOI: Yes.

MAKGETLA: Excellent. Can we begin with you giving us a brief overview of your career and how you came to be secretary of the ministry in 1993?

AHWOI: *I left the University of Ghana after studying law in 1974. For my first degree in 1975 I went to Oxford and I read for BCL, Bachelor's in Civic Law. In 1978 I returned to Ghana and lectured in the faculty of law at the University of Ghana until 1982 when the coup d'état took place and the chairman of the ruling council at the time, Jerry Rawlings, invited me to join his government. So I worked in the Secretariat of the government from 1983 to 1988, when I was appointed to the Ministry of Local Government. I was doing this alongside my lecturing and activities at the university, then in 1993 I left the university and attended full time to government business. This was when we moved into constitutional rule and I had to become a full-time minister.*

So between 1993 and 1999 I was the Minister of Local Government and Rural Development. Before then, as you said earlier, in 1988 I had been appointed the PNDC (Provisional National Defense Council) Secretary for Local Government and Rural Development.

Between 1997 and 1998, when General Rawlings' first government term ended and the transition into the second term of his government began, I was given additional responsibilities in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for about one year and three months before a substantive Minister of Foreign Affairs was appointed. In 1999 I was moved from the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development to establish the brand new Ministry of Planning Regional Economic Cooperation and Integration, which basically had responsibility for the affairs of ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States), the African Union, and the Economic Commission of Africa. That was the last position I held until my party lost power in 2000 and then handed over power in 2001.

During 2001 and 2005 I was a volunteer Director of Research at the headquarters of my party, the National Democratic Congress. When we lost the elections the second time I joined the staff of the Ghana Institute of Management and Public Administration as a principal lecturer and that is what I have been doing since.

MAKGETLA: So you have an extensive career in the government.

AHWOI: Yes, kind of.

MAKGETLA: I would like to focus perhaps on your involvement in implementing decentralization policies. So when you think back to the early days of the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development, what were the key challenges that you regarded as priorities in your position as secretary?

AHWOI: *First of all, after the coup d'état of 1982, the Ruling Council made a commitment to decentralization very early on. This was in May 1982. Between then and 1987, very little had happened by way of translating that commitment into actuality. A path of consultation that had been going on with respect to the re-demarcation of district boundaries. So in 1987 I was part of a political committee that was put together to fashion out a blueprint to personalize decentralization. When that work was finished I was part of a team that went around the country to discuss the draft policy with the citizens.*

Once it was felt that the citizens had bought into the idea, I was then appointed the Minister of Local Government to implement that policy. So the first major challenge that I faced was in 1988, translating the policy proposals for decentralization into operational legislation. This was because we were completely changing the framework for local government and local administration.

Now, having done that, the second major challenge was how to implement the provisions of the legislation. This was a law that we called the Local Government Law of 1988, or PNDC [Provisional National Defense Council] law 207. There were three main components to the policy. First was redemarcation of the districts. At the time of the program there were 65 districts. The new policy saw the expansion of the number of districts from 65 to 110. This involved physical re-demarcation of the existing boundaries. It also involved consultation with opinion leaders, community members, etcetera, about the location of the boundaries and even the selection of district capitals. All of that was a very major challenge. We called it the district expansion program. That was the first major challenge that I had to work on.

The second had to do with the establishment of the political structures for decentralization. These are what became the district assemblies. Now until this time we did not have democratic local government structures; rather, we had what we called interim management committees for the various districts, all of whose members were appointed by the central government. This program envisioned that we would go the election route and get established democratic local government structures, not just at the district level, but also at the subdistrict level. So all of that was part of the challenge that I faced and that I had to organize.

Then the third major component of the program was the decentralization program itself—how to carve out and transfer some functions from highly centralized government agencies, ministries, and departments to the district assemblies; and how to get personnel with the requisite skills and competences to be available at the local level in order to perform the transferred functions. Additionally, we needed to determine how to get resources transferred from the central government to the district assemblies to enable them to perform the transfer function.

So those components of decentralization became the third leg of the three-legged program, which represented the major challenges of local government reform I confronted in 1988.

MAKGETLA: Can I ask, before we get into some of the details of the reforms, how you went about building support for these reforms? What were the individuals or institutions that you relied on or looked to for support in moving some of these initiatives forward?

AHWOI: *As I said, first of all, a group of about thirty of us constituted a kind of political committee to put together the proposals for local government reforms. The document we came out with in 1987 was referred to by the media as the bluebook because the cover was blue.; but the book itself was called District Political Authority and Modalities for District Level Elections. When we finished the work, then we got in touch—. And when I was given the assignment of getting the citizenry to buy into it, the agency that we used was at the time called the National Commission for Democracy, NCD.*

It is now split into two, the present Electoral Commission and then the present National Commission for Civic Education, which are now two distinct institutions. At that time they were one institution performing two functions so that was the main institution that we used. Then we also brought on board the information services department of the Ministry of Information and the Department of Community Development which is under the Ministry of Local Government.

So in addition to the staff of those three departments, at the time we also worked with political structures of the revolution on the ground called the Committees for the Defense of the Revolution, or CDR for short. So basically these were the four organizations that we organized at the national, regional, district and subdistrict levels to campaign, interact with especially the chiefs, and then with the opinion leaders to get them to buy into the program. Then for the national level we embarked on a regional tour in which we visited each regional capital and got the teams that we had made operational on the ground to bring together all of these different groups: the chiefs, the Farmers' Association, Fishermen's Association, traders, students, and all different kinds of associations. They would meet in a kind of town hall meeting, introduce the policy to them, spell out the advantages, and then we would invite their comments, input, reactions, etcetera. We got a lot of those.

Actually, when we finished all the ten regions, we came back. We actually revised the policy document based on the inputs that we had gotten from the consultations. It was that revised document that we then used to draft the legislation on local government. So it was a fairly consultative process which took all of about nine months to complete.

MAKGETLA: Can you give me an example of the kind of input that you fed into your policy document out of this consultation exercise?

AHWOI: *One major concern was that people wanted to represent themselves. They did not want the previous kind of representation, especially the urban elite to continue speaking for the countryside. So we got the message very loud and clear that whatever we did, we should make sure that they—the people that lived in the rural areas, in the deprived areas, who suffered the deprivations—were the best persons to speak for themselves. We should make sure that in whatever we designed there would be no kind of artificial representation; they wanted their own people to represent them in the assemblies so that they could articulate their concerns with more passion than any urban elite could do for them.*

So that influenced a very large...that forced us to come back and think about what things had previously been obstacles to the participation of local people, or rural people, etcetera. So in the revised document by the end of the day what we made, which is what we have now, was a program that allowed to a very large extent for the people to represent themselves. One of the things we did as a result of these consultations, for example, was that we removed the requirement of literacy in English as criteria for contesting local government elections.

Previously you had to be able to speak and write English to be able to contest. We saw that only about 50% of the people in Ghana could read or write English, and yet our legislation stated that people must read and write English before they could represent their people in the local assemblies. This meant that we had legislated 50% of the population out of the democratic process. So that became a major concern for us. One of the things we did was to remove that requirement and make the law that the assemblies could conduct their business in English or any other language. So now when they meet after elections, the first thing they do is decide on the language in which business will be conducted.

We introduced another important substantive change because of the concern about poor people and how poor people must not be spoken for but must speak for themselves. We decided as a matter of policy that all local government elections must be free. So currently all local government elections are free, state-sponsored, the support channeled through the Electoral Commission. Not only is it free but it is free in the sense that we actually print posters for candidates. So if you want to be a candidate, the only things you provide are your CV and four photographs because they need them for the posters.

MAKGETLA: Interesting.

AHWOI: *You do not pay any deposits; you do not print your own posters. They even select days on which they do the "mounting of platforms," where they create a forum for the candidates to present their programs, etcetera. So that is one important outcome of the consultations that we held.*

Another outcome, I must say, was more a matter of a decision than an outcome. When we went around the people were uncertain as to whether local government elections should be partisan or nonpartisan. At that time we were still under military rule in the PNDC era and therefore there were no political parties. So there was a very loud voice in favor of a nonpartisan local government system. That is what we came out with and that is what we have now.

MAKGETLA: Okay.

AHWOI: *The reason I say it must be more a decision is because today, if we were to do a similar exercise, I suspect that they would go for a partisan local government system.*

MAKGETLA: Okay.

AHWOI: *So what we have today is a rather peculiar situation in which the central government is partisan but the local government system is nonpartisan. This is fairly unique in my own experience.*

MAKGETLA: Were there any remnants from previous republics or regimes in Ghana of political parties that were pushing for partisan representation?

AHWOI: *No, at that time because there were no political parties, even if they wanted to they could not do it overtly. Individuals came and pushed the line for party politics but they were always swallowed up by this and that. It was even illegal to talk about political parties because there was a ban on political party activity. So it was there but it was muted. That is why I say I am sure today, from my own experience, that if we were to do a similar exercise there would be very loud voices, much louder voices in favor of a partisan local government system.*

MAKGETLA: When you look at the process of building support and you discuss the individuals, the traditional leaders, and also opinion leaders in the communities that you spoke to among others, were there any challenges to that process of trying to garner support for the introduction of these structures?

AHWOI: *Yes there was, especially for the articulate sections of the society, among the lawyers and the students. They viewed the whole process with a lot of skepticism. They suspected that it was part of a grand design to have a nonpartisan local government system out of which would emerge a nonpartisan central government system with Jerry Rawlings as the head of state. We understood that very distinctly. At that time of course, at the beginning of our revolution we had fairly strong ties with Libya so there were fears that we were thinking of going the Libyan route—nonparty, messianic leader type of government arrangement.*

So it was with great difficulty,,,there were other regional fora that we conducted. In some, there were organized groups of students and some professionals who came and stated their opposition quite clearly, but I think the numbers were on the side of what we finally came out with. So you could say that it became an argument of quality versus quantity. We did not conduct a headcount vote, but the majority of voices seemed to be in favor of a nonpartisan local government system, while the better-articulated views were in support of a partisan local government system.

MAKGETLA: How did you address those concerns to show that your policy commitments were credible?

AHWOI: *In the policy document that we came out with we had a paragraph that said district assemblies were going to be established and they would form the basis for the establishment of higher national structures. So as soon as the assemblies were established we followed very quickly with another set of regional fora using the assemblies as the pivot by which we started a discussion on the government structures above the district level. So we didn't allow time to elapse at all. The two processes followed each other very quickly. The discussion, or the debate about the national structure...and all of this was televised.*

You could tell quickly that at that time the direction was for multiparty system for the central government, so that relaxed a lot of the skeptics. I think they began to appreciate that maybe we meant well after all. So that was...in not allowing...This assembly is to last for a long time before we did anything else. I think we got a lot more people on board.

MAKGETLA: You mentioned televising some proceedings. Can you describe the role of mass media communication in these efforts?

AHWOI: At that time we did not have an active private media for broadcast, we had only the state broadcaster, the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation, which was very firmly under the thumb of the government and the Ministry of Information. So it was easy to use it for “propaganda purposes” in order to explain to the people what we were doing. There was no other private broadcast. Now we have about 165, but at that time there were only state broadcasters. There were also only four national newspapers—all state-owned, or I should say government-owned. So it was not too difficult to get them to be part of the process.

Rather, when we started the process of building the higher national levels, at that time some private media, print media houses, had started to emerge and so the debate and the dissenting views were more actively articulated in those papers. But when we were dealing with the local government one, the media was very much a part of it because it was a part of government more or less.

MAKGETLA: In building support for these reforms, did you have to come to any sort of agreements or bargains with groups to bring them on board to support the efforts?

AHWOI: No, not the local government one. At the national level we had to. There were a lot of compromises, I should say negotiations, but not at the local government system. My own view was at the time when we started the exercise that for a long time, about seven or eight years of PNDC rule, there had been no democracy, no elections, nothing of the sort, so there was a lot of excitement about anything that promised some form of democracy, no matter how limited. I think people were ready for anything that would get them to participate in governance, no matter how limited it was. So there was enthusiasm for it.

In fact, the elections, the local...The first district assembly elections were held in November and December of 1988 and January of 1989. Now those have turned out to be the local government elections with the highest turnout in our entire history, from precolonial to postcolonial times. I believe the turnout was about 59%. Before that, in the last local government elections which had been held in 1978, the turnout was 18%. So the turnout went from 18% to 59%. That was a big jump. That can be a barometer for the kind of excitement and enthusiasm that was generated.

MAKGETLA: Just to go back to what you said earlier about bargaining at the national level, can you just give me more insight into what you mean by that?

AHWOI: Okay, now we may be leaving the local government, because I was also very involved in the evolution of the national structures. In fact, the team that worked out the constitution worked from my ministry because they were tacked onto a decentralized planning program supported by the UNDP (United Nations Development Program) that we were implementing

MAKGETLA: Okay.

AHWOI: So they actually were based in my ministry. But after the district assemblies had been established and we had gone around again a second time to find out views about national structures, this exercise was conducted by the same National Commission for Democracy that I talked about and of which I was a member. It was chaired by the late Justice (Daniel Francis Kweipe) Annan. He used to be a Justice of the Court of Appeals but he was also a member of the PNDC.

So we came out with a document called 'Evolving a True Democracy.'

So this was a very interesting finding that was made in paragraph 5 on page 8. You can read it.

MAKGETLA: The general opinion was that the generality of the population is not against political parties as an ideal instrument that may give the fullest expression to the freedom of association.

AHWOI: *Very good. So that was the paragraph that moved us in the direction of multiparty democracy. Now read it without the word not.*

MAKGETLA: The general opinion was that the generality of the population is against political parties as an ideal instrument—.

AHWOI: *Very good. That paragraph had to be very carefully crafted because at the level of the PNDC there were also disputes as to the direction in which we should go. We crafted it in this way so depending on the way the argument went it was very easy to...I will not tell you how the final outcome emerged, but the outcome was for the word not to remain. Therefore this was the—that three-letter word was the word that made all the difference in the political arrangements.*

So after that, the council then set up a nine-member committee called the Committee of Experts. It was set up by a professor of governance who used to be a UN consultant. This was the group that worked from my office. They came out with a report with draft proposals on the constitution based on the report of the NCD (National Commission for Democracy) which was today, felt that we should have a multi-party system of government.

So when they submitted this report, then PNDC set up what was called a consultative assembly of 260 members to debate the draft proposal. It was at that consultative assembly that a lot of negotiations had to be done because it was made up of different interest groups. There is a book here that should tell us...The Making of the Fourth Republic Constitution of Ghana. This book was written by (Dr.) Kwadwo Afari-Gyan. He is the present electoral commissioner, the chairman of the Electoral Commission. He was a member of the committee of nine that drafted the report. He is a political scientist and used to be a lecturer at the university. So he was made a member of the committee, then later he was appointed to the Electoral Commission, and now he is the chairman.

Now in the book which is about the making of the fourth republic constitution, because he was there, you will see the committees, or the groups that were represented in the consultative assembly to debate the proposals made by the committee of experts. So it was in this assembly that negotiations took place because there you had the professional associations, the trade associations, the youth groups, the political groups—not political parties, but you had all kinds of political groups, etcetera. They had different interests. A lot of negotiations had to take place there.

Then when they finally finished and agreed on the proposals, the draft constitution that they came out with was put to a referendum for us to vote on whether we accepted it or not. They voted to accept it and that is what became the constitution that we have today. You see that also—.

MAKGETLA: I see what you mean, but this kind of bargaining did not happen in the context of local government development.

AHWOI: *No, it did not. How we voted for the referendum...The open book, the open constitution, it means that you accept it—you would read it so you accept it. The closed one meant moved. That's how. But we didn't have this when we were doing the local government reforms, no.*

MAKGETLA: That's all very interesting. Perhaps you can now take time to go through each of the reforms that you mentioned earlier, the first being the district expansion program. Could you first tell me what the specific steps were that you took to make this a reality? That is quite a big sort of initiative to expand the number of assemblies to such a large number

AHWOI: Yes

MAKGETLA: We were speaking about the district expansion program.

AHWOI: *Yes, between 1982 when the first commitment was made...Incidentally, you will see that these are the PNDC Policy Guidelines for Ministers Department Regionally May 1982.*

MAKGETLA: Okay.

AHWOI: *Now, you see, the document has been chewed up by termites. That shows you how old it is. "The urgent need for participation democracy to ensure that the bane of remote government that had afflicted Ghana since independence is done away with, effectively to run a government to be responsible and accountable to the government. The assumption is also that the power of the people cannot be complete unless a truly decentralized government system is introduced. That is, the central government in all its ministerial manifestations should empower local government councils to be initiated, coordinated, and managed, and to execute policies in all matters affecting them within their localities."*

So this was the kind of policy guideline that we went to all the time. We used the period between when this was enunciated and when we started working on the details of the policy in 1987 for consultation with various stakeholders—mainly the chiefs, their elders, opinion leaders, community leaders, and other identifiable groups in the districts. At that time there were 65 districts. No decision had been made at the beginning, at the time this policy was made, about the number of districts we wanted to have. All we knew was that the 65 districts did not allow for effective representation. We wanted a representation ratio that would make one elected person represent between 500 and 1500 people. That was the broad framework that we had.

So these consultations took place then. They were very difficult because we had to balance all kinds of forces. First, there are the chiefs. I keep mentioning chiefs because although they do not have power, they have a lot of influence. There are chiefs with subjects under them who want the boundaries of their political districts to be coterminous with the boundaries of the traditional districts. We could not do that because if we did that we would need to breach the representation ratio.

If you wanted a certain number of people to be in a district... the number we had in the law at the time was 75,000, based on the 1984 census. Maybe there was a chief who had 2 million subjects under him. He would want all the 2 million

people to be part of his district and we could not do that. So we would have to talk to him and then, at the same time, talk to sub-chiefs who also wanted to assert their authority and who were seeing in the redemarcation of the districts an opportunity to have political influence in the smaller districts that were going to be created.

So we had to talk to all of them. Then we sometimes had hostile tribes or ethnic groups that had to be put together in order to meet the minimum threshold for a district. So if we had an ethnic group with a population of about 30,000, and another adjoining ethnic group with a population of 60,000, we had to put them together to reach the minimum threshold. But sometimes they would be very hostile to each other and they would not want to belong together under one political administration at the capital district level, so that also involved a lot of negotiation and sometimes a lot of tradeoffs.

In some cases we encountered problems in selecting where to put the district capital because maybe the minority group would not want to conduct their business in the capital which was situated in the majority area, etcetera. So we had to make some trade-offs. For example, we had to tell them that if they accepted the district at that location, we would appoint somebody from your side as the mayor, as the chief executive. So many trade-offs like that took place during the negotiations. It took the better part of our four and a half to five years.

MAKGETLA: Oh.

AHWOI: *Once we finally thought that we had reached a large measure of agreement, compromises, etcetera, then of course we had to bring in the survey department and then the Electoral Commission for them to do the physical demarcation on the ground. That also, as you know, involved a lot of technical work. It also took about one and a half to two years before they could do all that. So when that was finished, then before we could put all the work that had been done together into law, convert it into legislation by then having the criteria for the demarcation of districts. So if you look at the local government law, you see that the criteria for demarcation of districts has been indicated and all the other things that we have to do in order to get these compromises, what we used to build up the legal frameworks.*

It does not mean that we were successful at one go. In fact, when the announcements were made about the number of districts, the new districts, the capitals, etcetera, there was quite some commotion in the country and it took us approximately between nine months and one year to resolve all of that. But by the time the district assemblies were being inaugurated in March, 1989, I think that there was only one outstanding matter in one district in one of the regions. We had been able to resolve all of them—not always through negotiations; sometimes you had to browbeat people.

I remember in this last district there was a problem. I say there was a problem and it had to do with the selection of the district capital. Two towns were competing for the capital and the factors were fairly evenly balanced. It had taken me a very long time, I had been talking to them, going there, it was very difficult. So what I did—I do not know whether I want it on the record, but I will decide whether it should be used—but what I did was, there was a third town which was also quite in contention if it wanted. What I did was to invite the chief and his people and then asked them to go and also put in a bid for the capital. So we wrote a routine letter: Dear Mr. Minister, seeing that town A and town B cannot

agree which should be the capital, we are offering ourselves to be made the capital. They also listed what were factors were in their favor. Of course I had worked it all out. So wherever, I got the letter, then called the chiefs and opinion leaders from the two towns. I said, well you do not seem to agree. This letter has come in so I am minded to recommend to the PNDC that we should go with this third town. They said, "No Mr. Ahwoi, anything that you decide we will accept." Rather than having the third town get it, the two of them then agreed to have a compromise.

So what we did was okay, we then decided that the town that had already been announced as the capital would remain as the capital, but we would have some of the decentralized departments located in the competing town. They were not too far apart and that is how the matter was finally resolved. So a lot of things like that—innovations, sometimes browbeating, etcetera had to be done in order to reach acceptable compromises.

MAKGETLA: You mentioned also having to come to agreements with chiefs and sub-chiefs. Can you describe the ways in which you did that?

AHWOI: *Well yes, I would go and visit them in their palaces and then raise the issue of district demarcation with them, discuss it with them, explain to them why we had reached certain decisions, etcetera. Most of the time the chiefs go with government so they would agree with me, but on rare occasions there were some recalcitrant ones who would not agree. So when that happened I would normally leave them and talk to their sub-chiefs. I would say things like what we are doing is in your interest because if we carve a district out of this bigger district you will get your own police station; you do not have electricity now and you will get electricity; you will get your own secondary school; etcetera. There were certain advantages that went with decentralization.*

Of course we decided that every district capital should have a certain minimum of facilities. Under the program we call it the basic needs strategy. So when we spelled it out to them that this would be what they would get in terms of tangible development then they would put pressure on their chief or whoever was being an obstacle so that they would stand out of the way. Later they would come and tell you that they had succeeded, when you check it is true, and then you go ahead.

MAKGETLA: You mentioned that there was an opportunity for people to address their concerns after the decision had been made. How did people register those complaints with the ministry?

AHWOI: *For the educated people they simply write to the ministry but for the uneducated and especially the chiefs, they send very large delegations; sometimes about sixty people will come with their umbrellas. You know our chiefs, they walk with umbrellas and things and then they come and seek audience. If for the whole day you don't have time for them they will wait for you. Then they will come and sit with you and then they will present their case. Invariably they have gotten somebody to write out a petition for them, but they want to speak to the petition. So they will bring the written petition but they also come and speak to the petition.*

When they come or when they are coming, they will come with goodies from their districts, maybe goat, sheep, yams. I don't know if you know those things, but they will come with things from there. They don't say it directly, of course, but in

their heart they are hoping that those things would influence you in the decision that you make. Under our custom also, it is more than insulting to reject a gift of that nature. So invariably you take it, you listen to them, and they think, in our educated parlance we will say, they will think that they have bribed you. But of course, if your head is properly screwed on you will make the right decision whether they have brought you a goat or sheep or whatever. So that was the form that that took.

A few also, at the time took their concerns to the media. But, as I said, because the media was heavily under government control, there was a lot of self-censorship in the media itself. Very often if a concern was against the government they would not carry it, unlike today.

MAKGETLA: Can we look then at the second reform that you mentioned, which is to set up the political structures for decentralization? Can you perhaps also go through the steps that you took to create them?

AHWOI: *Yes, first of all, we had to work with—at that time we didn't have the Electoral Commission to survey NCD, the National Commission for Democracy. So the Ministry of Local Government and the NCD had to work very closely together in making some policy proposals to the council to take decisions. The first decision that had to be made was the representation issue. As I told you, I proposed, or we proposed, that the representation ratio was to be between 500 and 1,500. So once we got the PNDC to agree, that was used as a basis for creating the district and also for carving out what is called the electoral areas.*

In Ghana the representation areas for local government are electoral areas. Those for national parliament are referred to as constituencies. So any time I say electoral area I'm referring to the area for which a representative stands to be voted for in the local government system. So they used the representation ratio first to create the districts because we were giving them... The PNDC had also decided on a population band for the district. The minimum for a district was to be 75,000, for a municipality was to be 95,000, and for a metropolis was to be 250,000.

MAKGETLA: Can I just ask here, you've got a lot of thresholds, how did you come up with these numbers?

AHWOI: *As I said once we decided on the representation ratio, one is between 500 and 1,500, then we used the national population figure. At the time we were doing this in 1988, the last census had been conducted in 1984 and the population was 12.4 million. So they simply divided the national population figure by the representation ratio, between 500 and 1,500. That gave them the number of districts we should have. It was going to be between 110 and 120 districts. The PNDC settled for 110.*

Once that was done they used the same representation ratio to calculate how many electoral areas there should be in a district, so that also was done at the technical level. Once that was done, the survey department worked with the NCD to do the physical demarcation of the electoral areas, which towns belonged to which electoral areas. So all of that was done. As soon as it was done it was actually converted into law.

So if you take a law, we call it legislative instrument, creating a district for example, you will find there are actually listed all the electoral areas as well as all

the towns and settlements that constitute that electoral area and therefore that constitute a district. So all of this technical—when it is finished it is brought to the Ministry of Local Government and then as minister, I have to supervise for the instruments to be drafted and make sure everything meets appropriate place.

So if you pick a law now—I have some here—at a glance you can tell which town belongs to each district and so on and so forth. So that's how that was done for the electoral areas.

Now once that was done, of course, we had to convert it into law and once the law was done—you know the number of electoral areas, then you know the number of people who are going to be elected. So let us take for example a district that has been demarcated into sixty electoral areas. This means there are going to be sixty assembly members, as we call them, to be elected. But as part of the policy proposals of the time, it was already decided that one-third of the members of the assembly should be appointed by the government. The constitution changed it to 30%, so now it is 30%. At that time it was one-third.

The reason that was done, that decision was taken is that first, we felt, and we were proven right in practice, that once we had made it easier for poor people, illiterates, etcetera to contest the local government elections, the assemblies are going to suffer in quality because, as you know, elections don't produce the best, elections produce the most popular. So you can get a village drunk, get elected into the assembly, not because he has anything to offer, but because he buys the people drinks, etcetera.

So if direct or effective representation was going to result in a diminution of quality in the assembly, then it was thought that we need a mechanism by which we can infuse people with skills and expertise to make up for this diminution in quality. We also considered that our culture is such that not many women, for example, were going to get elected into the assemblies. So we would use this appointment mechanism to again introduce, infuse a few more women into the assemblies, etcetera. So the assemblies then, as now, are composed of partly elected, partly appointed officials. At that time they were 2/3 elected, 1/3 appointed; now they are 70% elected, 30% appointed.

So with the elections themselves, the Ministry of Local Government had nothing to do with it; it was all done by the Electoral Commission, at that time the National Commission for Democracy. That actually marks an important difference between decentralization and democratization. Very often people think that decentralization necessarily involves democracy; it doesn't. Decentralization is actually a tool of public administration. So you can decentralize to a military dictator, you can decentralize to a chief. You can decentralize to an unrepresentative body. But experience shows that it is when you decentralize to democratic representative bodies that your decentralization works.

So there are always two, if you want your decentralization program to be effective, there are always two related but separate activities, the decentralization program itself which is largely administrative, then the democratization process which involves getting the people to be involved, to participate, etcetera. Our way of ensuring participation was through the electoral mechanism. That was handled exclusively by the Electoral Commission, the National Commission for Democracy.

So once we had done all of this technical work, then they set about a process of conducting the elections. Of course the elections were nonpartisan. The requirement was that anybody who was 21 years and above who wanted to contest—of course you should be of sound mind, you should have paid your taxes, there are a few qualifications—could contest. You needed the support of 25 registered voters. Again, at the time, we were going to do this we hadn't had elections for a long time, so a person had to begin with the registration of voters. So that was then.

Then the Electoral Commission, the NCD had to go through the process of calling for nominations. There were no political parties so we had to use the media and then local groups, the information services department, etcetera. So we advertised the fact that interested people should contest. Then, as I said, the Electoral Commission, the NCD had to prepare their posters for them and they had to do what we called mounting of platforms, select dates on which they would go to their electoral areas and get the candidates to meet with the electorate and present their programs, etcetera. All of that was then. I've told you that a policy decision had been taken that the elections were to be free. So money really was no object, the central government had to find the money.

So at the end, and because it was the first time, that's how we started the elections. So instead of having it all on one day we had it in three installments: in November, December '88 and then January '89. Then we got it out of the way. So when the elections were over, the results were then brought to the Ministry of Local Government. Then we did an occupational analysis of all those who had been elected on a district-by-district basis. Then what we were looking for was what shortfalls in terms of expertise there were among the people who had been elected. So if we found out for example that in a particular district assembly there were no accountants, we looked for one or two accountants and we appointed them.

MAKGETLA: Interesting.

AHWOI: *If a district needed a lawyer, we looked for a lawyer from the area and we appointed, etcetera. So that's how we did the appointments. So by February of 1989 we had finished. Then in March of 1989 the assemblies were all inaugurated and then they began functioning.*

MAKGETLA: I'm interested in how you determined the appointments based on the skills profile of the elected assembly people. How did you come up with a list of what were the necessary skills for an assembly?

AHWOI: *We have that in terms of the functions that the assembly has to perform. You know, in drafting the law the assembly was assigned certain functions. So we knew, for each function you needed some kind of skill. For example, decentralized planning. Until this program, planning had been very centralized. There were only twelve development planners in the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning who did planning for the whole country. Under this system, we introduced the concept of decentralized planning under which every district was to have a district planning officer so that planning could begin from below. But we didn't just need technical planners as district planning officers; we also needed people in the assembly who would appreciate planning, requirements, settlement, special development, etcetera. So because we had decentralized the planning function, we knew that we needed somebody with a planning background, for example, as a requirement in the assembly.*

Now under the program we were also transferring large resources. We introduced a decentralized transfer mechanism that we called ceded revenue, under which certain sums of money were ceded from the central government to the district assemblies. They were about fifteen, twenty times the budgets that the assembly treasury officers, as we called them, had been used to managing. So of course if you are infusing such large resources into the place, you need better trained, more qualified finance people at the district level than the low level accounts class etcetera that we used to have in the local government system.

So we would look for somebody with financial management background or economics background etcetera. So that is how we used the functions to identify the skills that were required.

MAKGETLA: Were there any other considerations that played into the decisions about which appointees you would select?

AHWOI: *One of the criteria for qualifying to contest as an assembly member is that you must ordinarily reside in the district because we didn't want representation by remote control. So to a large extent, in appointing persons, we were also looking for persons who were resident in the area. If we couldn't find any, we look for persons who hailed, that is, who came from the area, who were natives of the area but who were not necessarily resident.*

My senior brother, for example, is an economist and used to be a Minister of Energy in the PNDC regime, we come from very far in the western region. He is a resident in Accra, but he was appointed among the first appointees to go and be a member of the assembly in our part of the country because we couldn't find any economics or finance person there. That is also a consideration.

Then we also were very concerned about disadvantaged and marginalized groups. So we asked those who were identifying people for appointment—these are mostly the district chief executives, that's what we call them—that a minimum of 30% of the appointees should be women. Then in every assembly there should be at least one disabled person or one representative of a disabled person. Thirty percent was also to be set aside for chiefs, etcetera. So yes, we have other considerations. But I drew up guidelines which were to be used and which are still in use for the appointment.

MAKGETLA: A final question on this structure is that one might imagine that you could also put those skills into the local government structure by putting them into the civil service and not into the assembly. How was the decision made?

AHWOI: *Yes, in fact, that is the third part, the third component which is decentralization, properly building the capacity. So what we did was to identify how we decided on the functions, we then identified the departments at the national level that performed those functions at the local level. We converted those departments from centralized departments of the ministries into departments of the district assemblies. I'll show you how it was done.*

This is a compilation of the laws on local government. The basic one is Act 462 of the Local Government Act. If you look at the 8th schedule, the departments, organizations ceasing to exist in the district. Now these were departments that existed as departments of the centralized ministries. Now they are to cease to exist in that form in the districts, social welfare, community development, town

and county planning, public works, parks and gardens, cottage industry, this and this. All of these, twenty-two of them.

In their places these departments were to be created at the district level. From metropolitan assemblies there were sixteen of them, for municipal assemblies, thirteen of them, and for district assemblies there were eleven of them. So these departments at the district level which used to be departments of the central ministries, were converted into departments of the district assemblies. That's why I have departments under metropolitan, municipal and district. This is where the expertise is, the civil servants, this is where they are.

So by converting the departments into departments of the local authorities you created the expertise at the local level.

MAKGETLA: What were the criteria for the functions that would exist at the local level in district assemblies?

AHWOI: *That is something else. We will have to meet again. That is one of the policy decisions that we had to make under my...I was in charge of the program you know. First of all, under what is called the Principle of Subsidiarity in Decentralization you want to make sure that functions that are capable of being performed at the local level are those that are transferred there. So you look at all the functions of central government, you disaggregate them and then you find out which ones are capable of being performed at the local level. Some of them lend themselves very easily to being performed at the local level.*

If you take a department like parks and gardens where there is no skill, no expertise required, you just need the labor that will be weeding, cutting grass or something like that. So for that kind of thing you don't need supervision from Accra, you don't need supervision from the region, you need supervision at the very local level. So that function which used to be centralized easily lent itself to transfer. So you decided that parks and gardens for example, horticulture, will be a decentralized function. Then you look for the department, an existing department of a central agency that performs that function. Then you create that department in the department of the local authority.

Sometimes you want to transfer a function but you don't have the personnel to perform it. For example, when we decided that planning should be a decentralized function, as I said, because it had been a centralized function, there were only twelve development planners. But we needed planners at the district level. So what we had...fortunately we have a university in Kumasi, the University of Science and Technology that turns out about sixty development planners a year. We also have a national service scheme under which every invested graduate has to do a one-year national service.

So what we did was that for five years we commandeered all the planning graduates from this university and they were assigned to the Ministry of Local Government. Then we in turn allocated them to the district assemblies. That is how we started development decentralized planning. Now it is a critical requirement of effective decentralization that before you transfer a function there must be somebody with the requisite skills to be able to perform that function. So in deciding which function to perform, you look to see whether you have somebody who can perform it, or if you don't have it whether you can get somebody from somewhere who can perform it. If we didn't have this human resource base at this university and our national service system, for example, we

couldn't have made decentralized planning into a decentralized function at the time that we did it. We might have had to do it differently.

So first you disaggregate the functions and you try to find out which ones are lending themselves to transfer. Second, which ones are critical to your program such that even if the people are not there you have to find them somehow or we have to hire them. For example if we didn't have this national service core of planners, we would have had to look for planners and hire them or we would have had to abandon the idea of decentralizing the planning function. So that's how we did it.

MAKGETLA: In thinking about the process of decentralization generally, one of the concerns that we've come across in this program is that people may recognize the need to decentralize for administrative purposes, but they may not feel comfortable with the individuals that then take up those positions because they don't know them or because they have to let go of some of that control. What strategies would you suggest for coming up with effective ways to deal with that concern, about the tradeoffs of devolving power?

AHWOI: *First of all you have to acknowledge that decentralization itself is a struggle; it is almost like the struggle for independence because it involves asking people to give up power. You don't expect politicians who have spent time, or resources, effort, etcetera to attain power, to give up that power. When you are campaigning for elections they talk beautifully about decentralization because when you tell the people that we will give you back the power it is vote-catching. But once a politician gets the power, it is the last thing he wants to give up. So it is not an easy thing getting power devolved.*

In the US they were lucky, it was the states that gave up power to the national level. But when people at the federal level have monopolized power for a long time and you're asking them to give it up it is very, very difficult. So first of all, you yourself have to be very clear about the program you want to implement. Don't take on too much. Especially where there are entrenched interests, you find that in a decentralization program we have been having forward and backward movement because the education sector and the health sector are two very entrenched sectors. They have never wanted to be decentralized. Yet without decentralizing education and health you don't really have decentralization because those are the two sectors that affect every citizen.

So in our time we decentralize those sectors. When the next government came into power they recentralized them. They passed the law to take them off the list of decentralization. Now we are going to pass a law to put them back on. So the first thing you have to do is that, you have to try and reach a national consensus on what kind of decentralization you want to do and which are the sectors that you want to decentralize.

Then second you have to get your political operatives to accept the need for decentralization because, what I found out is that at the beginning you are very reluctant to give up power, but when you have actually given up power and the load has been lightened, you find that you have a lot more time to concentrate on policy because implementation is really what takes a lot of time and effort. What decentralization really requires is to give up implementation responsibilities to the lower levels, but policy continues to be done at the national level. If you need to educate your political operatives to accept that decentralization does not mean taking away the power, it simply means taking away the chores of

implementation and leaving them with the privilege of intellectualizing about policy etcetera.

But I realize it is difficult to do that because implementation is where the bread and butter is. People are talking about contract awards, that is implementation. If a bribe has to be taken, it is not at the policy level, it is where the contract is being awarded. So getting central governments for example to give up the power to award contracts to lower levels of government is very difficult and you simply have to convince your political operatives to do that.

They are advised by their technocrats and bureaucrats who invariably also have vested interests in not devolving power. So you have to try to also bring them on board. But, most important, from my own experience is the commitment of the leaders. If the head of state is committed to decentralization or devolution, you'll be able to achieve it because invariably there are a lot of turf wars between the ministries as to which sector should be decentralized, for example. I had a lot of problems, but not only was Rawlings committed to decentralization, I also had a close working relationship with him. So any time I had a problem with any of my colleague ministers on decentralization and the matter got to his desk he ruled in my favor, so much so that people thought that I had a lot of power. In fact, one of my colleagues summed it up by saying that I was building an empire.

But to decentralize, whoever is in charge of decentralization program has to operate like a kind of empire builder because he has to nibble at...he is nibbling at all the sectors. That's why local government is not really a sector if you are implementing decentralization because what you are doing is taking away functions, taking away powers from all the different ministries and transferring them to the local levels. You are only overseeing the process, but you are seen as the person who is responsible for their diminution of power and it becomes very difficult. So the commitment of the head of state is critical.

MAKGETLA: Thank you very much, it has been a very interesting discussion. Is there anything that you would want to add or that you think we've left out?

AHWOI: *The only thing, major thing I left out is the issue of fiscal decentralization. After all we have talked about, if the money is not transferred to the local level, the functions cannot be performed. So it was an important part of our program that we devised mechanisms for ensuring that resources would be transferred from the center independently of government budget to the local level. We started with what was called the ceded revenue. But when we were working the constitution we introduced what was called the district assemblies common fund. Under that a minimum of 5% of total national revenue is set aside for the district assemblies and an independent administrator of the common fund has been established by the constitution. What it does is that every year he presents a formula to parliament to share the fund and upon the approval of parliament then he uses that formula to disburse the funds to the various district assemblies.*

The last parliament, the last government, they increased the percentage from 5 to 7.5% so now 7.5% of total national revenue is set aside for district assemblies. This is in addition to whatever the other ministries, departments and agencies are also doing in the districts. This money is for the district assembly to spend on their own prioritized programs and projects. For me that is really the most critical thing that we have been able to do in order to move decentralization forward.

MAKGETLA: Great, thank you very much.

AHWOI: *Thank you very much too.*