Patronage can be conceptualised as an exchange relationship in which a variety of goods are bartered between a patron and a client where the patron is a party politician that offers “…expertise, legislation, access to the bureaucratic apparatus, public subsidies, housing or jobs in exchange for electoral support, labour, campaign contributions, partymembership or information available to the client” (Ennser-Jedenastik, 2014). That is the use of “… of public resources in direct exchanges between clients and party politicians…” (Müller, 2006). To Ennser-Jedenastik, this is an “immoral if not outright illegal” act. Political patronage is worldwide phenomenon over sighted by governing political parties which has led to poor quality and performance of state institutions especially in African countries (Mamogale, n.d). The widespread nature of politics of patronage does not spare local government institutions that ought to ensure decentralization. This is disastrous because decentralization provides the conduit to improve government accountability through building appropriate local governance structures that can be downwardly accountable to citizens and empowering citizens to exert stronger pressures to enhance government performance. As such, decentralization in most instances has not delivered accountable governments as demonstrated across most developing countries (Yilmaz et al, 2008). This situation is visible across the local government system in Ghana.

Intense political competition between the main parties in a local government area is associated with the provision of patronage over public goods. Elections are won by mobilizing ability of party workers at the lowest levels. Thus, the demand for reward seeking leads to the politics of patronage at the expense of public goods. Local government system is used as a conduit of patronage goods from central government. Ruling party officials saturate local government offices with party activists to deliver more patronage. Political competition is to reduce clientelism in local government yet in Ghana the local government is used to sustain it (Driscoll, 2011).

According to the 1992 Constitution of Ghana, District Assemblies shall consist of an appointed membership of not more than thirty percent by the President in consultation with the traditional
authorities and other interest groups in the district (1992 Constitution, Article 242 (d)). The intention of the law was to allow the President in consultation with opinion leaders, interest groups and other stakeholders appoint people with “professional and technical expertise” (Akorli, 2013). The rationale behind the 30% slot for the appointment of technicians and professionals to assist the district assemblies deliver on their mandate has become an avenue of demonstrating partisan interest (Daily Graphic, 2014). Appointments have been done based on political considerations instead of the principles fair representation as a reward for “party foot soldiers” that have worked to support incumbent parties in winning political office. This patron-client relationship in the local government system has resulted in the denial of the local people accountability and responsiveness due to the unrepresentative nature of the appointment to the District Assemblies.

It is rather ridiculous how the 30% government appointees are involved in the process of approval of an appointed MMDCE. Article 243 (1) of the 1992 Constitution stipulates, there shall be a District chief Executive for every district who shall be appointed by the President with the prior approval of not less than two thirds majority of members of the Assembly present and voting at the meeting. The appointment of the DCE by the government in addition to those she nominates for assemblies deepen patron-client relationships. For instance, government appointees to assemblies are usually removed when MMDCEs are not approved. The role of the political parties in the appointment of decision makers reduces the district assembly structure to pawns in the government’s game of chess. John Boadu, the acting General Secretary of the NPP in a radio interview on Morning Starr stated amongst other internal party arrangements “…loyalty is key in this arrangement and it is one of the main criteria that will be used,” rather than meritocracy as the system was designed for. Thus the MMDCEs are manipulated by the ruling party because of the active role they play in their appointments hence they feel more accountable to the appointing and lobbying powers than to the district (Akorli, 2013). The occupation of these positions as political spoils for party loyalty rather than capability on the grounds has resulted in the glaring administrative incompetence in the local government system (Okoampa-Ahoofe, 2016). Therefore the offices of the MMDCEs are used as means of recruiting and rewarding political allegiance.
In recent times, a huge number of rejection of presidential nominees to occupy the office of MMDCEs have been rejected in districts where majority of assembly membership belongs to an opposing party despite the non-partisan nature of the local government structure. Indeed, the local government system has fast forward become the lowest arena of political training for political activist who want to test their popularity and nurture future political ambitions. Thus, the opposing assembly members seek to engage in activities that would catch the attention of their mother parties even if it means sabotaging the local government system. In such instances the only avenue for coming to a compromise is through the nominees bribing the assembly members. Some MMDCEs have been rejected by the local party members through their district assembly members because they felt imposed upon, especially where these appointees had no cultural or ethnic ties to the communities.

The intense politics of patronage at the local government level has resulted in the execution of projects that increases the electoral fortunes to secure re-election of the ruling party in the district rather than projects of long term communal development (Tetteh, 2013). Indeed, these contracts are even awarded based on party affiliation and sponsorship at the grassroots level.

As an organization focused on transparent, effective and efficient local governance, TEERE declares its support for the call for the election of MMDCEs in the administrative districts of Ghana. We are strongly against the white paper issued by government to nominate five people which will be reduced to three through vetting to be presented to the districts for elections. This approach defeats the purpose of the request of the Ghanaian people through the Constitutional Review Committee to elect their own leaders at the district level. Indeed government’s white paper will not address the ills of the political patronage through the government appointment of MMDCEs. In our view, the election of the MMDCEs can be either political or apolitical. Our concern is the opportunity offered the people to choose their own political leaders at the lowest levels.

We recommend the 30% of appointment of the president should rather be done in a reverse order where interest groups nominate their representative to be submitted to the President for approval to the Districts. In the medium to long term, MMDCEs should be elected through popular votes whiles the 30% appointments to the Assemblies should be discontinued. Considering the ideal non-partisan character of the MMDCEs and prohibition of the constitution from partisan politics,
the chiefs ought to be given a slot on the District Assembly composition. This is the way not to relegate the chieftaincy institution from decision making. This is one of the many ways to develop the “distinctively Ghanaian Local governance system”.

We are also of the view that either the rules of nonpartisan membership of the 70% elected members are strictly observed or there is a constitutional act that allows for political participation. The current subtle way in which political affiliation is demonstrated through the choice of campaign poster colors, the support of projects based on affiliation to party in power is deceptive to the electorates and endangers the nonpartisan intended structure of the MMDCEs.

REFERENCES


