

Centralization of Power and Local Government Administration in the Gambia: The Brikama Area Council Experience

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Abstract

The study identified areas of political control over the local government by the central government of The Gambia. The extent of this centralization of power is measured from political, institutional, economic and financial perspectives. This is with a view to determining how centralization of the political system has affected local government administration in The Gambia. Both primary and secondary data were relied upon for this study, and these were collected using questionnaire and in-depth interviews. Brikama Area Council members made up of the Chairman, Vice Chairman, Councilors and Heads of Departments; executive members of the Ward Development Committees (WDCs) and middle and senior level officers of the administrative Division and five Directorates of the Ministry of Lands, Regional Government and Religious Affairs were sampled for the study. Two hundred and eight (208) copies of questionnaire were administered and with 95 per cent retrieval rate. A total of sixteen (16) respondents were also interviewed. The data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistical methods such as frequency distribution and percentages. The results of the study revealed that majority of respondents strongly agreed and agreed to the different areas of political control of the central government on local governments in The Gambia. It was therefore obvious that there is a high degree of political control of the central government over local government which underlines the unwillingness on the side of the central government to devolve some of its powers and responsibilities. It was also revealed that 61% of the respondents strongly agreed and agreed that centralization of political power has hindered effective local government administration in The Gambia.

Keywords: *Government Administration; Centralization; Decentralization; Intergovernmental Relations*

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Background to the Study

Centralized or unitary system is one of the oldest forms of governing societies in the world whereby all the powers to influence the economic and political affairs of such a society are given to the king or the monarch. Before the emergence of the modern nation state system, the world was known for strong national governments and weak and in some cases non-existent regional/local governments. For instance, central governments dominated greatly in Europe, though with the exceptions of countries like Austria, Germany, Switzerland and Yugoslavia. Latin American countries also had centralized states (Pose, 2006). Some countries such as Mexico, Brazil, and Venezuela believed to be existing under regionalist constitutions are centralized in nature. According to Pose, the USSR consisted of a union of sovereign states that was heavily centralized. In the USA, the power of the states and the role of regional governments have been declining while in India, the centralized mechanism of economic development planning undermines the power of the regions as the central government dictates financial and economic goals to the states (Sury, 1998).

Early history of African societies revealed that pre-colonial governance systems in Africa were known for large empires and kingdoms governed by Kings who enjoyed absolute powers. They were then the primary institutions of governance across the continent. These empires and kingdoms centralized the powers to effectively rule over their subjects. These Kings operated vast courts systems in which court officials, bureaucrats and all other heads and servants expressed their loyalty to the Kings. Examples of such empires include the Mali, Ghana and Songhai empires with centralized administration and hierarchical organizations. The Kings and their courts were performing executive, legislative and judicial functions. They also had advanced and complex bureaucracies and tax systems that yielded valuable economic and financial resources. The rulers were absolute monarchs and some even claimed divine right to kingship (Sesay, 2014).

In the precolonial era, The Gambia was part of the successive African kingdoms and empires. When these empires broke up, various Senegambia chiefdoms were created. These chiefdoms ruled different parts of the area (Taal, 2011). The Chieftaincy institutions assumed a very critical role as the mouthpiece of the rural majority. They were the symbol of peoples' voices and authority in governance. Governance was centralized and their prime task was to ensure peaceful, smooth and harmonious co-existence of people as one family. They were equally recognized and obeyed by the people and the entire governance process was able to progress in accordance with norms and principles of customary law (Senghore & Ozor, 2013). According to them, the advent of Islamic rule in The Gambia around the 8th Century AD heavily influenced traditional governance systems in almost every aspect of life.

In the post-colonial Africa, it is evident that the old system of indirect rule has evolved into new methods of democratic governments in Africa today, as the development of local government, particularly in West Africa owes its origin to the colonial history of the continent (Bellucci, 2010). African countries have experienced waves of decentralization initiatives and reforms since their independence as manifested in the long history of local government and decentralization in different traditions, starting from pre-colonial authorities, colonial

administration and post-independent local government reform initiatives as highlighted by Loquai and Le Bay (2007). This can be seen in the rate at which local councils are being elected by popular vote and empowered to pass by-laws with different degrees of political autonomy in many African states. The reasons for such transfer of political, financial and administrative responsibilities to sub-national governments include to secure democratic governance and legitimacy at the sub-national level, manage intra-state conflicts and expedite development (Alam, 2009).

The 1965 independence marked a turning point in the history of The Gambia as it moved into a new era of post-colonial administration with high expectations in terms of liberalization. Since the early 1980s, the government of The Gambia has been considering development approaches with a view to ensuring greater citizen participation in national socio-economic development activities. The government's dominant objective has been to accelerate decentralization by granting higher level of autonomy to local governments to enable them to provide more effective and efficient social services and make a greater contribution to the local communities and economic development in general sense. Section 91 of the Local Government Act (2002) of The Gambia, for instance, grants to every Council the planning authority and by this possessing the power to plan and implement programmes and projects towards achieving improved infrastructure and social services, as well as developing human and financial resources to improve the standard of living of the communities. In addition, the Local Government Finance and Audit Act (2004), Local Government Finance and Accounting Manual (2007) and Programme for Accelerated Growth and Employment (PAGE) 2012-2015 reinforced the acceleration of the decentralization initiatives and processes in The Gambia. The National Policy Road map, Vision 2020, also stressed the need for decentralization in order to exploit popular participation at the grassroots level in national development. Despite all above, much cannot be said to have been achieved as political power is still concentrated at the centre and on the Chief Executive. This can be seen in the over-bearing influence and control that the central government has over the local governments. This can be seen in the persistent political, administrative, economic and fiscal interference of the central government in the local government administration. It is against this background that this paper investigates the areas and degree of political control of the central government and how this has affected local government administration in The Gambia. It is believed that this could not have gone without some (negative) impacts bothering on the effectiveness and efficiency of the local government administration in The Gambia.

Conceptual Review

Centralization

Power is a highly encompassing concept that is germane to the subject of centralization. Basically, power is the ability to obtain what one wants. In the political realm, power is simply what is possessed to make authoritative and binding decisions over the allocation of valued resources as well as the need to enforce compliance with those decisions through the use of persuasion and influence at one end of the spectrum and the use of force, threat and coercion at the other. However, there are two extremes to power distribution in governance. It is either fused or diffused (centralized or decentralized). Centralization in the political realm deals

with the relationship between two levels of government and which refers to a political arrangement whereby specific powers, functions, and resources are not devolved to the lower levels of government by the central government. That is, the powers and functions of government are concentrated in one single (central) authority as present in a (centralized) unitary state (Adigwe, 1979).

Care must be exercised however not to confuse or equate centralization with unitarism. The administration of a unitary system needs not be rigidly centralized; the extent to which it will be centralized depends on the other factors influencing centralization. In fact, in all unitary states some delegation of authority has become imperative because it is now generally recognized that efficiency in administration is dependent on diffusion of power if only to create a wide sense of responsibility in the people at large. In some federal states, on the other hand, governmental authority and powers are so highly centralized that their constituent units have been reduced to more or less glorified local authorities.

There are various conventional indicators of centralization. These were listed by Wunsch and Olowu (1995:4) as including the proportion of public revenues expended by national as opposed to local governments, the taxes raised by national versus local governments; the proportion of Gross National Product (GNP) expended by government; the juridical weakness of sub-national governments; and the absence of competitive political parties or contested elections. Others include the percentage distribution of personnel at the lower levels as well as the existence of non-governmental and private organizations that are always under close governmental control. In general, while the legal capacity of the people to engage in diverse collective action is reduced, the tendency for very few persons to arrogate so much power to themselves increases. Wunsch and Olowu classified these indicators into quantitative and qualitative with the latter described as being easier to demonstrate. The readily available example of quantitative indicator is the GNP while those falling under qualitative indicator include the distribution of authority, responsibility and resources available to central vis-a-viz lower units as well as some others.

Centralization may be compelling for the sake of uniformity, complete control; and standardization. It may also be compelling where such functions or powers have to do with critical policy matters requiring major decisions. Some other reasons, as highlighted by Omolayo and Arowolaju (1987:312), include the size of the country (a small-sized country would always opt for a centralized administration); homogeneity of population characteristics (as the more homogeneous a country is in terms of population, the more favourable it is to centralize administration); a belief in the efficacy of law (that takes effect throughout the length and breadth of the country once it is passed at the centre); reduction in the rate at which public fund is lost (as the more the number of people involved the higher the rate of losing public fund); and so on.

Further to this, some scholars have also expressed the belief that it would help in terms of efficiency and in the building of a government of national unity and cohesion. Scholars like Adigwe (1979); Olson (1993); and Sawyer (2004), while discussing the merits and demerits of

centralization and its effectiveness in the administration of justice and development in the state, also expressed it that where power is centralized, responsibilities are well defined; activities and functioning of government are well coordinated and regularized, decision-making is usually relevant and unambiguous and the central power considers large and encompassing interests in its decisions on the welfare of the citizens since such a government benefits from any increase in the state's wealth and/or power. A centralized system, on the other hand, is said to be one that would hinder development and encourage dictatorship and tyranny at the centre as one individual will have so much political power being arrogated to himself. In addition, Sawyer (2004) stated, *inter alia*, that decision (s) may be misunderstood, attention to and support for each department or city may not be balanced or harmonized, actors at the local and provincial levels may be excluded or marginalized, and the capacity of the central government may not be strong enough to design effective local policies that may require local experience, knowledge and expertise.

Decentralization

In light of the above, decentralization came as a response to the problems associated with centralized system of administration. These include problems like economic decline, government inability to fund services and their general decline in the performance of over-bloated services, the demands of minorities for a greater say in local governance, the general weakening legitimacy of the public sector and global and international pressure on countries with inefficient, undemocratic, and overly centralized systems (Dutta, 2009).

In Ekpo's (2008) view, decentralization is simply the transfer of political power from central government to sub-national governments. In principle, decentralization is perceived as a means of improving the efficiency and responsiveness of the public sector. When decision making power is transferred to lower levels of government that are closer to the beneficiaries, it is argued that citizens have greater influence over the level as well as the mix of social services delivered to them and greater power to hold their officials accountable.

Devas (2008) identified three broad types/components of decentralization, namely; de-concentration, delegation and devolution. According to Devas, de-concentration involves assigning responsibilities to agents of the central government and this arrangement is described by Olowu (1990) as the weakest form of decentralization. Rondinelli, *et al* (1989) described it as a mere shifting of workload from central government Ministry headquarters to staff located in offices outside of the national capital. In other words, it is a mere geographic setting of local offices at the periphery without any measure of autonomy. This form of decentralization could take the form of field administration which entails the transfer of decision-making discretion to plan, make routine decisions, and adjust the implementation of central directives to field staff (Bello-Imam & Agba, 2004). Another component is known as delegation which involves transfer of the responsibility for decision-making and service delivery by central government to semi-autonomous organizations not wholly controlled by it but remained directly answerable to it for functions delegated to them (Olowu, 1990). Such responsibilities are said to be carried out on behalf of the central government in return for monetary compensation (Devas, 2008). These organizations may include parastatal entities such as education boards/authorities, NAQAA, etc.

The third major component of decentralization is devolution. This involves granting certain levels of power and authority to lower levels of government such that some measure of autonomy is enjoyed. According to Samoff (1990), devolution is generally known to be the most extensive form of decentralization involving creating or strengthening independent levels of units of government through the direct assignment of decision-making responsibility. By this, it is a mechanism that (genuinely) increases local participation and thereby reducing the burden on central bureaucracy, it was added. By this, power is decentralized by central government without sharing sovereignty. In essence, decentralized institutions (e.g a provincial or state parliament/assembly) are established and their nature and scope of the powers that are delegated to those institutions are determined by the central government (Bulmer, 2017). The powers to revoke or overturn the powers of the devolved institutions or change the institutional arrangements either unilaterally or by political negotiations reside in the central government.

Of these variants of decentralization, it is only devolution that is identified with real transfer of political and administrative powers from the central government to the people at the sub-national levels. Indeed, from the point of view of building a democratic society, devolution is the only method which permits maximum participation by the people at the grassroots (Bello-Imam & Agba, 1999). It is said to be flexible, and the flexibility is dependent on the degree of trust and goodwill the central enjoys from the sub-national governments.

Decentralization can be looked at from the point of view of administrative, fiscal and political decentralization. A country is said to be administratively decentralized when taxes are raised centrally, but funds are allocated to decentralized entities to carry out their spending activities as agents of the central government (Olaniyan & Busari, 1999). Area's offices are opened by the central government and workers therein perform their duties as representatives of the central government working with the grassroots people. Fiscal decentralization involves allowing sub-national governments some level of tax jurisdictions and carry out spending expenditures within the existing provisions of the constitution. In this case, sub-national governments are allocated functions and allow freedom of making both spending and revenue decisions. In other words, they shoulder the responsibility of providing goods and services for public welfare and at the same time assigned tax powers as approved from time to time to be able to execute such welfare programs. Revenue decentralization can take two forms. The major tax bases can either be assigned to different levels of government to be able to execute their welfare programs or shared among the levels of government. The latter arrangement allows different levels of government to tax the same base, or a level of government collect the tax from a given base and share it with other levels as the case in Nigeria with respect, for instance, to the collection of value added tax. According to Olaniyan and Busari (1999), financial support is given through either a bloc grant or revenue decentralization. In revenue decentralization, local or sub-national governments are granted some measure of freedom to determine tax rates and bases and to introduce other types of revenues. The third, which is political decentralization, is nothing but granting the people, especially in a federal state, a greater voice in decision-making either through voluntary organizations, local organizations or by allowing local elections rather than appointment of officials by the central government

(Olaniyan & Busari, 1999). The political objective here is to enhance representation and participation. It must be emphasized that the combination of the three types of decentralization is germane to a successful decentralized system.

Local Government and Local Government Administration

Local Government is simply the structure, unit or institution of government at the local level. The concept has been centred on the devolution of political powers to local authorities to deliver a range of services to a relatively small geographically delineated area (Shah, 2006) and encourage cooperation and participation of the people at grassroots to improve their living conditions (Fajobi, 2010). Beyond delivery of social services that are local in nature, local government is the lowest tier of government and it is specifically assigned the responsibility to administer local public affairs at the local level and this covers certain legislative, administrative and judicial functions which gives it power to serve as “instrument of rural transformation” (Alao, 1986), cited in Obiani (2023), and agent of social change and development as it represents the interests of a particular locality at the micro-level, leading to a broader concept of welfare and happiness of its people (Alam & Nickson, 2006).

Local government is known the world over as a veritable instrument to complement the efforts of central government in rural development and social service delivery because, according to Ezeani (2004), it can provide certain services far more effectively and efficiently than the central government. Tracing the origin of local self-government, Sikander (2015) attributed it to the desire for liberty and freedom for local communities to solve their needs based on their preferences.

From all above, it can be deduced that a local government is created by law (Constitution or executive Order) which specific feature is that it is autonomous. The breadth and depth of autonomy that a local government is accorded by the central government determines the extent and nature of its engagement in society and other levels of government in any local governance arrangement (Douglas, 2016). Local government administration is getting done what are required to satisfy the general needs of the residents of an area officially carved out as a local government. As simply given in Jobe and Adesopo (2022), it is how public officials translate community needs into community objectives and develop and implement programmes towards achieving them within the available resources to produce desired results.

Intergovernmental Relations (IGR)

Intergovernmental relations (IGR) is generally about the interaction existing between or among the levels of government to make easy the achievement of some common goals through such interaction and cooperation. Hahn and Levine (1980) described IGR as all the permutations, combinations and intricacies of relations among the levels of government. According to Malan (2012), it refers to the relations within governmental bodies and vertical and horizontal lines of authority. It encompasses all the complex relations among various spheres of government as well as the coordination of public policies among these spheres of government through various means. These include programme report requirements, grants-

in-aid, the planning and budgetary process, and informal communications among officials. It involves the fiscal and administrative processes by which spheres of government share revenues and other resources which are generally accompanied by special conditions that must be satisfied as pre-requisites to receiving assistance (Malan, 2012). Basically therefore, it is a tool for peaceful co-existence of the different levels of government. In all countries, the Constitution provides for the interaction and cooperation between/among the tiers of government as well a set of principles to direct the manner and quality of such interactions. Such principles recognize the interdependence of the levels of government as distinctive but interrelated in terms of functions. Each one of them is in a similar way, required to contribute to the ultimate goal of state building.

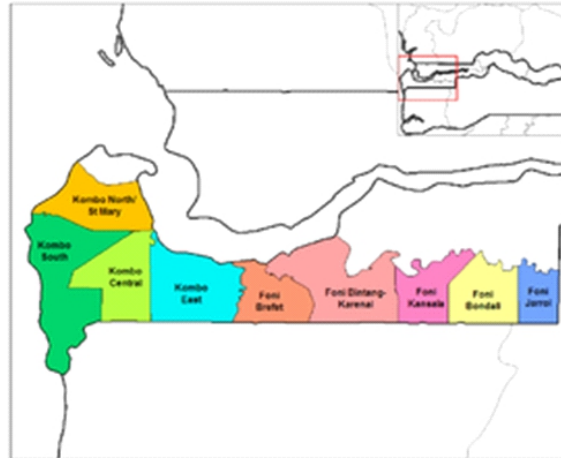
Adamolekun (1983 & 2002) identified three major issues in IGR. These are: allocation of jurisdictional powers among the levels of government; inter-governmental fiscal relations (IGFR); and administrative mechanisms for managing inter-governmental relations. Allocation of jurisdictional powers among the levels of government is about which tier or level of government does what. This requires the classification into important and less important functions as often defined by their implications on the general system. The basic problem in any multi-layer system is how to allocate revenue vertically among the levels of government and even horizontally among the units so as to ensure that each level of government has the financial capacity to perform the functions assigned to it (Adesopo, 2010). This brings us to the second issue in the inter-governmental maze which is IGFR. According to Adamolekun (2002), without question, finance is the most critical policy issue in IGR and Awa (1976) expressed it earlier that in an attempt to achieve the social purpose of a nation makes transfer of funds inevitable. Adamolekun went further by identifying two basic issues in IGFR. The first is the issue relating to the relative powers of both the central and sub-national governments to raise revenues. The second issue, according to him, is the proportion of the total government revenues that is actually utilized by the central and sub-national governments, regardless of how and which level of government generates the revenues. It was added that the degree of decentralisation in any arrangement can be measured based on the freedom of sub-national government in raising revenues and their actual spending powers. The third and the last issue in IGR relates to the administrative mechanisms for managing IGR. The issue is about the devices or instruments put in place for managing IGR and notable among these is the use of periodic meetings, seminars and conferences at the different levels of government (Ademolekun, 2002).

Methodology

Area of the Study

This study was restricted to the West Coast Region of The Gambia. The study carried out an empirical investigation on Centralization of power and Local government administration with specific reference to the Brikama Area Council. West Coast Region is the region that comes immediately after Kanifing Municipal Council in terms of size. It stretches from Tanjei on the Atlantic coast to Sintet in Foni Jarrol. There are 9 districts in the region as evidenced below.

Figure 1: Gambia West Coast Region Map Showing Districts



Source: Access Gambia (2009)

Brikama, which is the largest city in the region is the divisional headquarter and is composed of over 25 wards with a population of over 100,000. Brikama is a cosmopolitan city, and many economic activities take place there. It also serves as an urban centre for surrounding communities. Other major towns in the West Coast Region are Lamin, Wellingara, Sukuta, Kerr Serign and the newly established settlement of Brusubi Housing Estate. Many of these new settlements are along the Atlantic coast. Banjul International Airport, the country's only airport, Yundum Barracks, the largest army camp, and The Gambia College, the country's oldest College, are in the region (The Atlas of The Gambia, 2004).

Data Collection

Both primary and secondary data were collected for the study. Primary data were collected using questionnaire and in-depth interviews. A total of 208 copies of questionnaire were administered to local government councilors and career heads of departments in the local government (54), 3 executive members of each of the Ward Development Committees (WDCs) in the area (totaling 84) and senior and middle level officers of the Ministry of Lands, Regional government and Religious Affairs (70). Out of the 208 copies of questionnaire administered, 195 copies were retrieved, making a retrieval rate of 95%. In-depth interviews were also conducted on the Chairman, and Deputy Chairman of the Area Council, the Area administrator (Governor), and the Permanent Secretaries and Deputy Permanent Secretaries of the Ministry and the nine (9) Seyfos who head the existing districts in the area. Secondary data sourced from textbooks, academic journals, government publications and internet materials and so on were also used for the study.

Data Presentation and Analysis

The primary data collected were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical methods. As observed in the course of the study, there is a high degree of political control of the central government over local government. It was also obvious that this has hindered effective local government administration in The Gambia.

Areas of political control of the central government over the local government

The first objective was to find out the area and degree of centralization by the central government based on the areas of political control of the central government on local government as presented in Table 1 below.

A total of 181 respondents (92.8%) strongly agreed and agreed that an Act of Parliament established local government stating their functions, powers, election of officers and limitations and this means that only the national assembly has the power to amend the laws. Only 3 respondents (1.5%) were undecided about the assertion and 11 (5.6%) strongly disagreed and disagreed.

On whether Central Government imposes political responsibilities on local governments as the latter operate on the understanding that they are elected to govern nationally which overrides the display of any local mandates, 40 respondents (20.8%) strongly agreed, 117 (60.9%) simply agreed, 16 (8.3%) were undecided, and 19 (9.9%) respondents disagreed and strongly disagreed. On whether the Central government decides the nature, type and rate of tax and spending powers and the level of fiscal autonomy of the Local Governments, 50 respondents (25.6%) strongly agreed, 96 (49.2%) agreed, 32 (16.4%) were indecisive, and 17 (8.7%) respondents disagreed and strongly disagreed.

Respondents were asked whether the Ministry of Lands, Regional Government and Religious affairs is granted power by the Local Government Act to monitor, coordinate, harmonize central government initiatives and policies as they apply to local governments and even empowered to enter and inspect the premises or property of any local government and books of accounts of any local government and to this question, 46 respondents (23.6%) strongly agreed, 98 (50.3%) respondents agreed, 45 (23.1%) were indecisive and 6 (3.1%) disagreed and strongly disagreed. Respondents were also asked whether the conduct of election and appointment into Local Government councils rest with Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) which is an agency of the Central Government, 83 respondents (43.0%) strongly agreed, 74 of them (38.3%) agreed, 31 (16.1%) could not decide and 5 (2.6%) disagreed and strongly disagreed.

A total of 53 respondents (27.5%) strongly agreed that the financial affairs of the local government are regulated in accordance with the Local Government (Finance and Audit) Law, as enacted by the National Assembly, 76 (39.4%) simply agreed, 51 (26.4%) were indecisive, and 13 respondents (6.7%) disagreed and strongly disagreed. Again, 42 respondents (22.1%) strongly agreed that through an Act of the National Assembly, the central government determines the powers of the Local Government in areas like education, agriculture, natural resources, public and environmental health, land transactions, roads etc. And to this statement, 75 respondents (39.5%) agreed, 60 (31.6%) could not take any position while 13 (6.9%) disagreed and strongly disagreed.

On whether a certain percentage of the members of Local government councils are appointees of the Central government, 24 respondents (12.5%) strongly agreed, 75 of them

(39.1%) agreed, 65 (33.9%) were indecisive and 28 (14.6%) disagreed and strongly disagreed. Information on whether the Central government establishes Local Government Service Commission to manage appointment, promotion, transfer and discipline of officers in Local Government in conformity to the standards set by the Public Service Commission (An agency of the Central Government), 47 respondents (24.5%) strongly agreed, 76 (39.6%) agreed, 48 (25.0%) were indecisive and 21 (10.9%) respondents disagreed and strongly disagreed.

Efforts were also made to gather information on whether the appointment of the Area Administrator (Governor) for each Local government is by the Central Government to monitor and inspect the activities of Local Government and to these 86 respondents (44.8%) strongly agreed, 73 (38.0%) agreed, 12 (6.3%) were indecisive and 21 (11.0%) disagreed and strongly disagreed. Regarding the power of the Minister to institute a commission of inquiry to look into the improper and unlawful act of any local government, 49 respondents (25.7%) strongly agreed, 97 (50.8%) merely agreed, 36 (18.8%) were indecisive while 9 (4.7%) disagreed and strongly disagreed.

Whether the President has the power to assume the Executive powers of any Local Government Area with the approval of the National Assembly in certain circumstances, 53 respondents (27.3%) strongly agreed, 61 (31.4%) agreed, 60 (30.9%) could not decide and 20 (10.3 %) disagreed and strongly disagreed. Information was sought on whether Local Government bye laws are subject to the certification of the Minister (based on the advice of the Attorney General), that such bye laws are not inconsistent with the Constitution to avoid possible abuses. To this statement, 39 respondents (20.4%) strongly agreed, 69 respondents (36.1%) simply agreed, 60 (31.4%) respondents were indecisive and 23 (12.0%) disagreed and strongly disagreed.

Whether annual estimates of Local Governments are checked and approved to enable the central government ensure consonance between capital expenditure, recurrent expenditure and the expected income in a financial year, 44 respondents (22.7%) strongly agreed, 74 (38.1%) agreed, 61 (31.4%) were indecisive while 15 (7.7%) respondents disagreed and strongly disagreed. As per the control of local governments to ensure geographical spread of social amenities to the various communities in a financial year, 113 respondents (58.3%) strongly agreed and agreed, 64 (33.0%) were not sure and 17 (8.8%) disagreed and strongly disagreed. On whether local governments are controlled so as to ensure the implementation of the policy guidelines and objectives of the central government, 32 respondents (16.7%) strongly agreed, 72 (37.5%) agreed, 68 (35.4%) were not sure while 20 (10.5%) of them disagreed and strongly disagreed. Whether local governments are controlled so as to ensure that the internally generated revenue (IGR) and special grants are accounted for. For example, contract awards are thoroughly scrutinized to ascertain their genuineness and impact on the people, To this statement, 54 respondents (27.8%) strongly agreed, 82 (42.3%) agreed, 34 (17.5%) were undecided, and 24 (12.3%) disagreed and strongly disagreed.

Lastly, as per the empowerment of the office of the Minister for Lands, Regional Government and Religious Affairs to supervise various activities of local governments which include

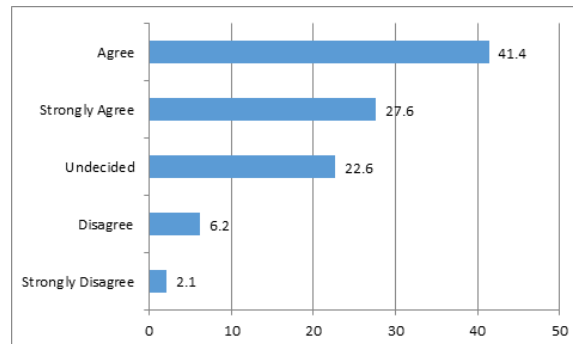
approval of budget estimates, introduction of new rates or levies, implementation of new projects, auditing of their accounts by central government auditors; 60 respondents (31.1%) strongly agreed, 83 respondents (43.0%) agreed, 39 (20.2%) were undecided and 11 (5.7%) disagreed and strongly disagreed. Based on individual responses, there were variations regarding the acceptance and rejection of assessed items on the areas of political control of the central government. As shown in table above, most respondents (69.0%) strongly agreed and agreed on the different areas of political control of the central government on local governments in The Gambia while only 8.3 % strongly disagreed and disagreed with the statements. It was therefore obvious that there is a high degree of political control of the central government over local government in The Gambia. There is lack of willingness on the side of the Central Government to devolve some of its powers and responsibilities through the decentralized structures especially when they have political implications for them. These are presented in Table 1 and Figure 2 below.

Table 1: Respondents' views on the areas of political control of the Central government on the Local governments in The Gambia

Description	Strongly Agree		Agree		Undecided		Disagree		Strongly Disagree	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
Local Governments are established by an Act of the Parliament stating their functions, powers, election of officers and limitations and only the National Assembly has power to amend the Laws (Parliamentary Sovereignty.)	125	64.1	56	28.7	3	1.5	10	5.1	1	0.5
Central Government imposes political responsibilities on Local Governments as the latter operate on the understanding that they are elected to govern nationally which overrides the display of any local mandates.	40	20.8	117	60.9	16	8.3	13	6.8	6	3.1
The Central government decides the nature, type and rate of tax and spending powers as well as the level of fiscal autonomy of the Local Governments. (Fiscal Power of LGs)	50	25.6	96	49.2	32	16.4	11	5.6	6	3.1
The Ministry of Lands, Regional Government and Religious affairs is granted power by the Local government Act to monitor, coordinate, harmonize central government initiatives and policies as they apply to Local Governments and even empowered to enter and inspect the premises or property of any Local Government and books of accounts of any Local Government.	46	23.6	98	50.3	45	23.1	5	2.6	1	0.5
The conduct of election and appointment into Local Government councils rest with Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) which is an agency of the Central Government.	83	43.0	74	38.3	31	16.1	4	2.1	1	0.5
The financial affairs of Local Government are regulated in accordance with the Local Government (Finance and Audit) law, as enacted by the National Assembly.	53	27.5	76	39.4	51	26.4	8	4.1	5	2.6
Through an Act of the National Assembly, the Central government determines the powers of the Local Government in areas like education, agriculture, natural resources, public and environmental health, land transactions, roads etc.	42	22.1	75	39.5	60	31.6	11	5.8	2	1.1
A certain percentage of the members of Local government councils are appointees of the Central government.	24	12.5	75	39.1	65	33.9	19	9.9	9	4.7
The Central government establishes Local government Service Commission to manage appointment, promotion, transfer and discipline of officers in Local Government in conformity to the standards set by the Public Service Commission (An agency of the Central Government).	47	24.5	76	39.6	48	25.0	16	8.3	5	2.6
Appointment of the Area Administrator (Governor) for each local government is by the Central Government to monitor and inspect the activities of Local Government.	86	44.8	73	38.0	12	6.3	13	6.8	8	4.2
The Minister has the power to institute a commission of inquiry to look into the improper and unlawful act of any local government council.	49	25.7	97	50.8	36	18.8	7	3.7	2	1.0
The President has the power to assume the Executive powers of any Local Government Area with the approval of the National Assembly in certain circumstances.	53	27.3	61	31.4	60	30.9	12	6.2	8	4.1
Local Government bye laws are subject to the certification of the Minister (based on the advice of the Attorney General), that such bye laws are not inconsistent with the constitution to avoid possible abuses.	39	20.4	69	36.1	60	31.4	17	8.9	6	3.1
Annual estimates of Local Governments are checked and approved to enable the central government ensure consonance between capital expenditure, recurrent expenditure and the expected.	44	22.7	74	38.1	61	31.4	9	4.6	6	3.1
Local governments are controlled to ensure geographical spread of social amenities to the various communities in a financial year.	31	16.0	82	42.3	64	33.0	12	6.2	5	2.6
Local Governments are controlled so as to ensure the implementation of the policy guidelines and objectives of the central government.	32	16.7	72	37.5	68	35.4	17	8.9	3	1.6
Local Governments are controlled so as to ensure that the internally generated revenue (IGR) and special grants are accounted for. For example, contract awards, are thoroughly scrutinized to ascertain their genuineness and impact on the people.	54	27.8	82	42.3	34	17.5	21	10.8	3	1.5
Office of the Minister for Lands, Regional Government and Religious Affairs is empowered to supervise various activities of Local governments which include approval of budget estimates, introduction of new rates or levies, implementation of new projects, auditing of their accounts by central government auditors.	60	31.1	83	43.0	39	20.2	10	5.2	1	0.5
Mean score	913	27.6	1436	41.4	785	22.6	215	6.2	78	2.1

Source: Field work (2020)

Figure 2: The Mean Score of the Respondents' views on the areas of political control of the Central government on the Local governments in The Gambia



Source: From Table 1

The effects of the Centralization of political power on local government administration in The Gambia

Table 2 shows the respondents' views on the effects of centralization of political power on local government administration in The Gambia.

Efforts were made to collect data on whether delays are experienced in taking decisions as approval has to be sought from the Ministry of Lands Regional Government and Religious Affairs (the supervising agency of the central government) which is not suitable for handling emergencies. A total of 85 respondents (44.3%) strongly agreed with this, 78 (40.6%) simply agreed, 12 (6.3%) indecisive and 17 (8.8%) disagreed and strongly disagreed.

On whether local governments are not given space for innovation and creativity thereby finding it difficult to adjust to change, 23 respondents (11.9%) strongly agreed, 87 (44.8%) agreed, 48 (24.7%) indecisive and 36 (18.6%) of them disagreed and strongly disagreed. Furthermore, responses were gathered on whether centralized authority decreases job satisfaction and organizational commitment in the employees of the local governments. A total of 44 respondents, representing 22.9% strongly agreed, 72 (37.5%) agreed, 50 (26.0%) were indecisive and 26 (13.5%) disagreed and strongly disagreed.

On the question of whether most decisions on local plans and priorities influenced by the central government may not lead to better results that benefit the poor at the grassroots, 34 respondents (17.9%) strongly agreed, 81 (42.6%) agreed, 57 (30.0%) of them were indecisive and 18 (9.5%) disagreed and strongly disagreed. On whether the citizens' participation and roles of citizens and local actors are reduced in the management of local affairs due to the influence of the central government, 28 respondents, representing 14.4%, strongly agreed, 83 (42.8%) agreed, 56 (28.9%) were indecisive and 27 (13.9%) disagreed and strongly disagreed. As per whether centralization discourages healthy competition among different local governments and administrative levels that should ordinarily lead to policy innovation, 75 respondents (39.1%) strongly agreed, 89 (46.4%) agreed, only 12 (6.3%) were indecisive and 16 (8.3%) disagreed and strongly disagreed.

Furthermore, 131 respondents (69.3%) strongly agreed and agreed that centralization is not the best for a society like The Gambia that is ethnically divided as policies may be poorly responsive to regional and local needs. A total of 37 respondents (19.6%) were indecisive in their response to this statement while 21 (11.1%) disagreed and strongly disagreed to it. Again, on whether centralization will not allow the central government to focus on strategic decision making, planning and coordination, 31 respondents (16.9%) strongly agreed, 63 (34.4%) agreed, 59 (32.2%) were indecisive and 30 (16.4%) disagreed and strongly disagreed.

Respondents were also asked whether centralization assists government in ensuring economies of large scale as activities of the local government are monitored and coordinated at a higher level. Only 32 respondents (17.0%) strongly agreed to this, 80 (42.6%) simply agreed to it, 53 (28.2%) could not decide and 23 (12.2%) disagreed and strongly disagreed. On the question as to whether it is easier and faster to implement political reforms and policies when decision making power is concentrated and coordinated, 28 respondents (14.9%) strongly agreed, 73 (38.8%) agreed, 55 (29.3%) of them indecisive and 32 (17.0%) disagreed and strongly disagreed. Furthermore, 25 respondents, representing 13.3%, strongly agreed that centralization makes it more difficult to develop local clientelistic networks, 70 (37.2%) agreed, as many as 69 (36.7%) of them could not decide and 24 (12.8%) disagreed and strongly disagreed.

Again, respondents were asked whether it makes it easy to develop uniform regulation and avoid multiplication of efforts, 20 respondents (10.8%) strongly agreed, 89 (48.1%) agreed, 62 (33.5%) respondents were indecisive while the remaining 14 (7.5%) disagreed and strongly disagreed. Respondents were also asked whether it allows for equality and consistency across the regions as decisions are taken considering the welfare of the whole country and thereby reducing tensions. A total of 21 respondents (11.2%) strongly agreed, 91 (48.4%) agreed, 54 (28.7%) respondents were indecisive and 22 (11.7%) disagreed and strongly disagreed.

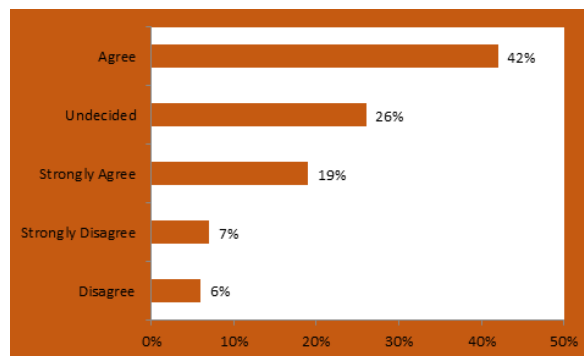
Finally, 22 respondents (11.5%) strongly agreed that centralization makes it efficient at pursuing high level government goals due to the monitoring of decision-making power. A total of 79 respondents (41.1%) simply agreed to this, 66 (34.4%) were indecisive and 25 (13.0%) disagreed and strongly disagreed. The overall mean percentage score by respondents on the intervening variables indicated that 61% strongly agreed and agreed that there are challenges hindering effective local government administration as a result of the centralization of political power in The Gambia. A mere 13% of the respondents disagreed and strongly disagreed with this.

Table 2: Respondents' views on the effects of centralization of political power on local government administration in The Gambia.

Description	Strongly Agree		Agree		Undecided		Disagree		Strongly Disagree	
	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%
Delay in taking decisions as approval has to be sought from the Ministry of Lands Regional Government and Religious Affairs (the supervising agency of the central government) which is not suitable for handling emergencies	85	44.3	78	40.6	12	6.3	6	3.1	11	5.7
Local Governments are not given space for innovation and creativity thereby finding it difficult to adjust to change.	23	11.9	87	44.8	48	24.7	11	5.7	25	12.9
Centralized authority decreases job satisfaction and organizational commitment in the employees of the local governments	44	22.9	72	37.5	50	26.0	11	5.7	15	7.8
Most decisions on local plans and priorities influenced by the central government may not lead to better results that benefit the poor at the grassroots.	34	17.9	81	42.6	57	30.0	8	4.2	10	5.3
The citizens participation and roles of citizens and local actors are reduced in the management of local affairs due to the influence of the central government.	28	14.4	83	42.8	56	28.9	11	5.7	16	8.2
Centralization discourages healthy competition among different local governments and administrative levels that should ordinarily lead to policy innovation.	75	39.1	89	46.4	12	6.3	9	4.7	7	3.6
Centralization is not the best for a society like The Gambia that is ethnically divided as policies may be poorly responsive to regional and local needs.	39	20.6	92	48.7	37	19.6	10	5.3	11	5.8
Centralization will not allow the central government to focus on strategic decision making, planning and coordination.	31	16.9	63	34.4	59	32.2	11	6.0	19	10.4
Centralization assists government in ensuring economies of large scale as activities of the local government are monitored and coordinated at higher level.	32	17.0	80	42.6	53	28.2	14	7.4	9	4.8
It is easier and faster to implement political reforms and policies when decision making power is concentrated and coordinated.	28	14.9	73	38.8	55	29.3	19	10.1	13	6.9
It makes it more difficult to develop local clientelistic networks	25	13.3	70	37.2	69	36.7	12	6.4	12	6.4
It makes it easy to develop uniform regulation and avoid multiplication of efforts.	20	10.8	89	48.1	62	33.5	8	4.3	6	3.2
It allows for equality and consistency across the regions as decisions are taken considering the welfare of the whole country and thereby reducing tensions.	21	11.2	91	48.4	54	28.7	14	7.4	8	4.3
It makes it efficient at pursuing high level government goals due to the monitoring of decision making power	22	11.5	79	41.1	66	34.4	16	8.3	9	4.7
Mean Score	507	19	1127	42	690	26	160	6	171	7

Source: Field Work (2020)

Figure 3: Figure showing the Mean Score of the respondents' views on the Effects of Centralization of political power on local government administration in The Gambia



Source: From Table 2

Discussion of Findings

The findings showed that the administrative and political systems are centralized going by the relationship between the central government and local governments in The Gambia especially in terms of the large areas of political control over the latter. Majority of the respondents agreed to the fact that the central government enjoys undue political control over the local governments which can be described simply as unitary in nature being pyramid in hierarchical terms. This was also corroborated by the interviewees. One of the interviewees noted:

There is political control as the governor of the region is appointed by the Central government. On matters of administration, most of the approvals have to come from the Ministry of Local Government. The ministry is entirely responsible for the councils in and out. In case of employment, for example, the council does not have the power to employ. When they want to employ, they would have to notify the Local Government Service Commission.

A contradictory opinion was expressed by another interviewee who believed the central government has a supervisory role to play in line with the Local Government Act to ensure sanity at the local government level. It was cited by him that the Minister for instance has power to approve projects and decisions at the council level, intervene and regulate situations if things are not going right at the councils but quickly added it that he has never heard of sanctions for any erring officer at the local level.

As a solution, another interviewee noted:

“The two tiers of government are supposed to work together to take advantage of collaboration and partnership for smooth administration and ease delivery of expected social services for common good of the locals.”

This calls for an intergovernmental relationship between the two tiers of government using the inclusive model. Some of the literature reviewed highlighted the importance of intergovernmental relationship between the two tiers of government. Intergovernmental relations are an integral part of the modern political systems and are of growing importance as the complexities of modern governance increase. This makes it to be an important component of any political system with more than one level of government (Phillip, 2013). It supports an efficient, effective and rational balance of responsibility and authority among the levels of government with accountability to the public. This can be achieved through the inclusive model which presents a system through which intergovernmental relations are based on essential and hierarchical set of relations and emphasized the predominant role of the national level (Wright, 2014). The Central and local governments can work together to build roads for example, serve the public, assure citizens of a good quality of life and work together for the common interest of the citizens.

On the question as to why it is difficult for the political class to grant enough autonomy to local governments in The Gambia, majority of the respondents strongly agreed and agreed to an

array of reasons why it has been difficult for central government to grant enough powers to local government in The Gambia. An interviewee was clear in expressing it that:

The leadership at the centre is not ready to devolve power but rather enjoying the present absolute power. This cannot be unconnected with the fear of unknown, perhaps the fear of becoming irrelevant politically. In addition, there is that lack of trust between the two tiers of government.

Along the same line, another respondent expressed it that:

“Central government is not helping us. They are sitting down there and remote controlling us and according to the Local Government Act, we should have a higher degree of autonomy”.

Some other respondents expressed it that the overbearing power of the central government resulting in the meddling in the affairs of local government cannot be unconnected with the fact that all the powers within a unitary system like The Gambia case reside with the central government. It was also added that the breadth and depth of autonomy that local government is accorded by the central government determines the extent and nature of its engagement and level of performance in the locality.

A contradictory opinion is that the councils are faced with weak capacity, especially human capital. For central government to decentralize and devolve power to the local government as expected it is believed would require having a functional structure by having right kind and caliber of manpower to be able to assume the responsibilities that would be devolved to them. It is believed that if such a condition is not met the burden of the responsibilities might still fall on the central government.

This therefore calls for full devolution of power to the local government as this provides for better problem-solving capacity, which takes into account local knowledge and conditions. Devolution makes democracy stronger by giving people more say in matters relating to their own local affairs as they actively participate in agenda setting and decision-making (Nhede, 2013). Even going by the thesis of the efficiency service theory, there is need for the Gambian government to devolve power fully without which decision-making and policy formulation and implementation generally will not be as fast as expected. Sometimes such decisions and policies may not be in line with regional priorities. Through devolution, it is believed that local communities will be given the right to self-management, their potentials recognized in the process, and equitable distribution of resources promoted with the necessary checks and balances. This, in essence, will foster development and national unity through acceptance of diversity as a unifying factor.

The challenges facing effective local government administration as a result of the centralization of the political system were also investigated and majority of the respondents agreed that there is lack of political autonomy of councils. Corroborating this, some interviewees observed that:

There is no decentralization. Fiscally the revenue base has been transferred to central government. Examples include sand mining, livestock, car park dues and bill boards. All of the revenues for the above are collected by the central government through the GRA. We do not know how much we are given although they claim that it is 100%". It is believed that the government at the centre is merely dabbling into the affairs that should ordinarily be reserved for local governments so that the government at the centre would be able to concentrate on strategic decision making, planning and coordination and even make decision making easier and faster.

Another interviewee noted as a challenge, the fact that there is no autonomy for the local government. The interviewee explained:

We need to have our autonomy. We should decide our emoluments and many other things for the council especially that space for self-determination so as to be able to adjust to change rather than waiting for policies to be handed down by the central government. We should decide who to appoint to do the job for us so that we can build in them from the beginning the spirit of commitment to local government's goals and objectives rather than employing those that merely use us as a stepping stone for better offers. These are challenges we live with today and God help the West Coast.

To some other interviewees, the problem of local government was said to have gone beyond political control opportunities the central government has over it. It was noted that the main challenge facing effective local government administration was that local governments in most cases lack capacity to explore their revenue sources to the fullest. Other problems affirmed include delay in taking decisions as approval has to be sought from the ministry, absence of opportunities for innovation and creativity, persistent influence of the central government on most decisions, plans and priorities, reduction in citizen participation in the management of the local affairs, and so on. Another critical problem identified was that the so-called councilors do not understand the Local Government Act and consequently do not understand their roles and responsibilities as well as the nature and structure of the interaction that should even exist between the two.

Summary and Concluding Remarks

Findings revealed that the central government enjoys political control over the local government in The Gambia going by the array of areas such controls are exercised. These include the creation of local governments by Local Government Act (2002) as passed by the Parliament to regulate local government system for The Gambia and the Act states the functions, powers, duties and limitations of the local governments and which only the National Assembly can amend; the imposition of political responsibilities on local governments by the central government; the determination of the level of fiscal autonomy of local governments by the central government; the appointment of a certain percentage of local government council members and the Seyfos and Alkalos by the central government; Local Government Bye Laws being subject to the certification of the Minister of the Ministry of Lands, Regional Government and Religious Affairs; the establishment of the Local

Government Service Commission to manage appointment, promotion, transfer and discipline of local government officers; the appointment of the Area Administrator (the Governor) by the central government; the conduct of election and appointment into Local Government Council resting with the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC), the financial affairs of the local governments being regulated in accordance with the Local Government (Finance and Audit) Law enacted by the National Assembly; the power to monitor, coordinate, approve budget estimates, scrutinize contract awards and introduction/implementation of new projects, harmonize central government initiatives and policies as they apply to local government, and even power to inspect the premises or property of any local government, etc residing in the office of the Minister, Ministry of Lands, Regional Government and Religious Affairs; the determination of the powers of local government in areas like education, agriculture, natural resources, public and environmental health, land transactions, roads; and many other areas. These controls are in accordance with the Local Government Act. It is therefore obvious that there is a high degree of political control by the central government over the local governments in The Gambia.

The study also delved into the challenges arising from the array of political controls being enjoyed by the central government and which cannot go without hindering effective local government administration no matter how little. Findings revealed that such controls cause administrative delays especially in taking decisions as approvals have to be sought from the supervisory Ministry and other central government's agencies which may not be suitable in case of emergencies. Others include the fact that local governments are not given space for innovation and creativity in handling issues and adjust to change; it decreases employee job satisfaction and commitment as the central government has too much control over personnel matters at the local government level; citizen participation and roles in the management of local affairs is reduced because of the influence and control of the central government; most decisions on local plans and priorities influenced by the central government may not lead to better results that benefit the locals; the expected healthy competition among different local governments and administrative levels that should lead to policy innovation is discouraged; central government may lose focus on strategic decision making and planning by delving into the affairs of the local government too much; centralization was said to be inappropriate in an ethnically divided society like The Gambia as policies may be poorly responsive to regional and local needs; and a host of others.

It is hereby imperative to make some suggestions on how to institute a system that guarantees best practices which include the following:

First, to achieve effective functioning of the local governments, there should be freedom from excessive control by the central government. This does not rule out the need for some form of functional chain of command for the purpose of coordination. With autonomy;

1. Effective engagement of the leadership by the citizens because of the resource flow to the local government is guaranteed.
2. Decisions can be taken with dispatch and be able to handle emergencies without the need to seek approval from any central agency;
3. Local governments will enjoy better space for innovation and creativity and be able to

- adjust to change with ease. Such opportunities for innovation encourage healthy competition among the local governments;
4. They will be able to enjoy the right to recruit, promote, develop and discipline their own employees in conformity with the existing national standard. This will increase job satisfaction and organizational commitment among the employees;
 5. They are able to make their own laws, rules and regulations without being subjected to the certification of the Central government. What is expected of the central government in this case is to have a framework within which such laws are made by the Local Government Council so that they will be in consonance with the national laws and avoid possible abuses;
 6. They develop their own annual budget estimates and plans and introduce their new rates or levies without being subjected to the approval and scrutiny of any central government agency;
 7. Full control over the nature, extent and implementation of local/rural development programs and projects;
 8. Citizen participation in the management of local affairs will grow with the reduction or elimination of the influence of the central government. This makes government more responsive to regional and local needs;
 9. The central government is relieved of the burden of providing services that are local in nature and focus on strategic decision making and plans.
 10. And a host of others

Arising from all above, the central government will be required to match the responsibilities of the local governments with the fiscal power to enable them have access to the financial resources that will enable them to perform those roles and responsibilities that are devolved to them better. What this means is that the fiscal jurisdiction of each tier of government should be re-examined and reviewed especially with regards to management of natural resources. Each tier must also be empowered to create its own sources of revenue and determine rates of levies and charges. Also, all tax sources within the jurisdiction of the local governments but which have been taken over by the central government agency (Gambia Revenue Authority) on the account of incapacity should be returned to them and work towards building capacity of the local governments. With this, local governments will have their autonomous capacity to determine their expenditure.

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