Decentralization and Citizens' Participation: Some Theoretical and Conceptual Perspectives

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Abstract

Although the terms decentralization and citizens' participation sound familiar to scholars and policy makers, their meanings, forms and scope are controversial in the current literature of local governance. The usage of these terms appears to be restricted to abstraction. For instance, the question of measurement has been highly contested in the literature such that any discussion concerning more power to the people and improvement of local governance is "often viewed by critics as no more than a theoretical exercise." The critical question therefore is how to move these terms from their state of abstraction to a concrete reality. The purpose of this article is therefore to review some theoretical and conceptual issues on decentralization and citizens' participation in order to question the often-emphasized positive relationship attached to them and their empirical application.

Introduction

Although the terms decentralization and citizens' participation sound familiar to scholars and policy makers, their meanings, forms and scope are controversial in the current literature on local governance. In general, decentralization has become a "byword associated with public sector reform in developing and transitional countries …the popularity of the word was due to in part to its adoption by people from across the political spectrum…" (Rees and Hossain, 2010:581). On the other hand, citizens' participation is also a contested concept (Callahan, 2007). Indeed, a number of important questions can be addressed here like the following: "What exactly is meant by these terms? Why are they seen as important elements in the current discourse on local governance? What forms of decentralization and citizens'

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participation are described in the literature? What theories guide these debates?" Extra space and time would be required to provide comprehensive answers to some of these questions. As parameters for study, these terms cut across political, economic and social dimensions beyond the scope of this paper. For example, there is a myriad of problems associated with the study of decentralization such as forms, scope and other issues associated with it. For example, in the study of decentralization in one country, there could be a variation of local government functions and responsibilities (Saito, 2011). In the same way, citizens' participation can be studied within the realm of the public sphere rather than the private sphere and hence, public political participation. In other instances, citizens' participation can be studied in the way a citizen interacts with the political system through voting in elections, attending council meetings or participating in local committees created by the local government authorities and civil society organizations. In this case, the terms political participation would be used here.

This paper is organized as follows. First, it highlights some underlying theoretical issues informing the interpretation of decentralization and citizens' participation. Second, it explores the rationale for decentralization and citizens' participation. Third, it looks at the mutual relationship existing between decentralization and citizens' participation in local governance perspective and how they relate with a plethora of other closely interconnected issues. Fourth, the paper summarises the main arguments of the advocates and critics of the two concepts. Fifth, the paper reviews a proposed Second Generation Theory (SGT) which attempts to move the debate of decentralization and citizens' participation from its abstract to concrete levels. Finally, the paper ties up the discussion by summarizing the key arguments of the debate on the two concepts.

Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks
Decentralization
Definitions of decentralization have one characteristic in common. They construe the process of decentralization as an initiative engineered to empower people by giving them an opportunity to decide on matters of significance to their lives. Literally, the word means, "reversing the concentration of administration at a single centre and conferring powers to local government" (Smith, 1985:1). Decentralization is also viewed as an articulate strategy for governance that seeks to empower citizens by bringing decision-making powers closer to people. For example, Agrawal and Ribot (1999:475) observe that "decentralization is a strategy of governance to

facilitate transfers of power closer to those who are most affected by the exercise of power." Viewed from any perspective, what is clear is that definitions of decentralization tend to treat it as an indispensable tool for attaining development, efficiency, democracy and more importantly, bringing about citizens' participation.

Decentralization as a concept in the context of a state revolves around how the state structure is designed to allow sharing of power between the centre and its sub-national units. Theoretically, most national governments distribute their powers both 'areally' (sic) and 'functionally' (Humes, 1991:4). On an areal (sic) basis, "power is distributed to regional and local governments, while on a functional basis, power is distributed among the specialised ministries and others agencies that are specialised in one or more related activities" (Humes, 1991: 2). In this process, the areal and functional aspects are complementary in the process of execution of public duties. However, not all governments apply the same level of interdependency in all their functions. Some functions will be more controlled by the ministries while other will be shared by the local authorities. For example, education, water, and heath sectors have tended to be highly centralised in developing countries (Cheema and Rondinelli, 1983; Crook and Manor, 1998; Mawhood, 1983; Rondinelli, et. al., 1983). This form of decentralization is popularly known as "political decentralization." It can be said that political decentralization, among other things, entails democratization at the local level by enabling local people participate in decision-making processes. In this form of decentralization, leaders are elected through free and fair elections and occupy public offices for a fixed period. Moreover, the leaders become accountable and responsible to local people (Smith, 1985).

There are several decentralization typologies. One common typology is to distinguish de-concentration, delegation and devolution. De-concentration refers to a situation where specific responsibilities and services are transferred from the central government to the lower levels such as regional offices and branches. Devolution happens when authority for decision-making and finance is transferred from central government to sub-national level, which enjoys a relatively higher degree of autonomy. Delegation is a problematic typology to define. Some analysts prefer to define the term as something between de-concentration and devolution, depending on the degree of autonomy transferred from central to sub-national governments. There is also another typology of decentralization, privatization, which some analysts see as not part of decentralization because it is essentially

understood as division of tasks among political offices (see Saito, 2011). What becomes problematic with these typologies is that they often become blurred in practical application (Kessy and McCourt, 2010). More importantly, reality surrounding debates about typologies of decentralization is a profoundly complex 'messy' situation and the debate still remains unclear especially related to empirical questions (that is, how they translate these abstract terms into reality). Also it should be noted that one country can demonstrate more than one typology of decentralization at the same time. Therefore, it is impractical to attempt to fit one typology or decentralization measure into a single category as either being devolution or de-concentration (Saito, 2011; Kessy and McCourt, 2010).

Citizens' Participation

The term 'participation' takes different forms and meanings. As used in politics, and hence political participation, it can be defined as:

> …activity by individuals formally intended to influence who governs or the decisions taken by those who do so. Citizens can be classified both by the extent of their political involvement (e.g. gladiators, spectators and apathetics) and by the form their engagement takes (e.g. conventional, unconventional or both) (Hague and Harrop, 2004:123).

As used in the development perspective, participation can be defined as:

> The redistribution of power that enables the have-not citizens, presently excluded from the political and economic processes, to be deliberately included in the future. It is the strategy by which the have-nots join in determining how information is shared, goals and policies are set, tax resources are allocated, programs are operated, and benefits like contracts and patronage are parcelled out (Arnstein, 1969:1).

The two definitions clearly capture the major two forms of citizens' participation in politics and development projects. For example, Arnstein's definition fits better in the development context rather than in the political realm of citizens' participation and apparently, excluding voting in elections, attending political meetings, demonstrations and political campaigns. While the two definitions point to two directions about the role of citizens in governance, nevertheless, they share one common characteristic, which is citizen's power or citizen control. For example, Therkildsen, (1988:61) shares this view when argues that citizens' participation aims at "empowering the

intended beneficiaries so that they may share in the control of resources, organise to control their means of livelihood and take action to bring about structural changes that increase their power" (Therkildsen, 1988:61). Unfortunately, majority of empirical studies have been broadly content with this form of participation as an automatic sharing of political power by all local people, which is more apparent than real. In practice, the few have control of community power over the majority. Ideally, public participation entails that citizens are involved in various stages of the decision-making process right from the beginning of the process with agenda setting to the final stage of decision-making (Rowe and Frewer, 2005).

Indeed, there has been controversy over these forms of citizens' participation as genuinely representing interests of majority poor and disadvantaged groups. Although some studies claim that when indigenous organizations are involved in development projects, they can play a significant role in mobilization of the disadvantaged groups to participate in the political system (Blaser, et. al., 2003). Similar studies have questioned this view. For example, the requirement for citizens to participate in development projects has been regarded to be adding credibility to the projects, either for qualification of getting funded or legitimizing decisions and plans conceived elsewhere as well as implemented at local levels rather than truly representing interests of majority (Gaventa and Valderrama, 1999). One would also observe that the dominant literature on participation in the 1980s to late 1990s focused on participatory approaches to development such as Participatory Poverty Assessments (PPAs), Participatory Rural Appraisals (PRAs) and other similar forms of citizens' participation. Accordingly, for the past three decades, we have witnessed many African countries embracing initiatives towards decentralization. Arguably, this follows the gloom period of centralization policies pursued by most African states immediately after their independence (Johns and Riley, 1975). It is therefore argued that their inability to guarantee citizens' participation is one perhaps among several conspicuous failures for most post independent centralized African states although some countries like Tanzania stayed with the system of local government until 1972. For that matter, African countries have been urged to embrace decentralization measures in order to achieve, among other things, citizens' participation (ECA, 2003). In other words, strong local governments are critical for citizens' participation. Nonetheless, their autonomy and strength have been constrained throughout their history (Samoff, 1989; REPOA, 2008). It is worth noting that in some contexts, the terms citizens' participation and citizens' engagement have been used interchangeably to

mean the same thing. Yet, in some contexts, the two terms are viewed in the set and subset relationship whereby citizens' participation is thought to be a much broader (universal) concept, which subsumes citizens' engagement as just one among several forms by which citizens' participation is expressed (Rowe and Frewer, 2005). In this case, the words citizens' participation have been used throughout the paper to mean also citizens' engagement.

Arnstein's Classical Ladder of Citizens' Participation

In attempting to measure citizens' participation, several theories and models have been advanced to explain the relationship between the governed and those who govern (Callahan, 2007), polarized into uninformed and informed citizen models. One of the oldest and often used theories of citizens' participation is the one advanced by Arnstein (1969). The central importance of Arnstein's theory stems from the growing recognition that there are different levels of participation, from manipulation or therapy. However, the theory has some limitations including each of the eight steps representing a broad category, where one can find a wide range of experiences. For example, at the third level of 'informing', some significant differences in the type and quality of the information being conveyed can be identified. In short, this model is not chosen as the best among others in analysing citizens' participation, but it is conceptually sound in terms of how we view different levels of empowering the citizens in decision-making processes and policy implementation. This model is subdivided into main three extremes of citizens' power: non-participation, tokenism and citizen power (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Arnstein's Ladder of Citizens' Participation
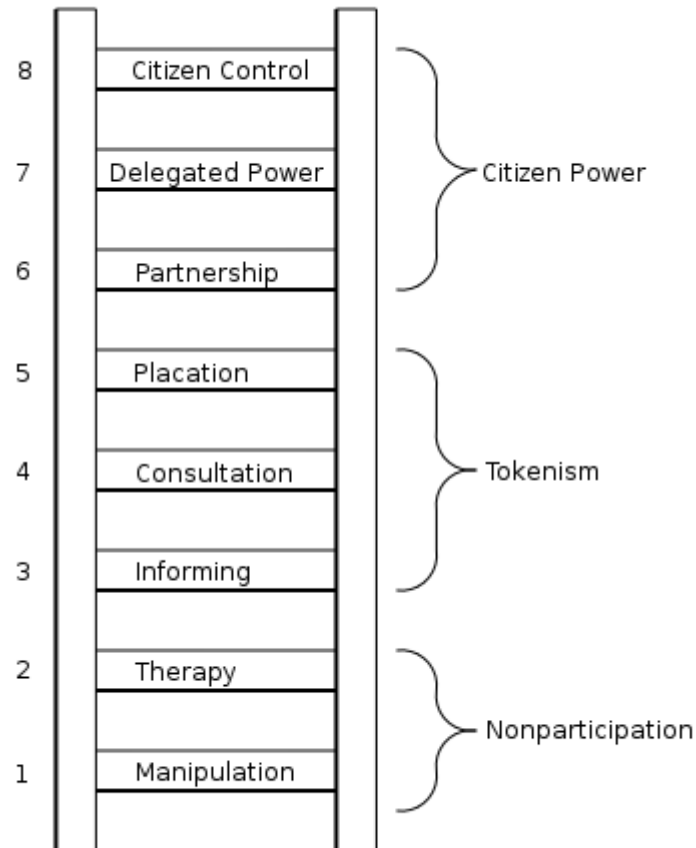
Source: Arnstein's (1969) Ladder of Citizens Participation

The three forms comprise a ladder of eight rungs of citizens' participation. Non-participation is at the bottom rung of the ladder and includes forms of participation such as manipulation and therapy (Figure 1). These two forms are not regarded as genuine citizens' participation but rather, they enable power holders to 'educate' or 'cure' participants in participating in programmes. Tokenism includes informing, placation and consultation, which provide minimal opportunity for citizens' participation. Lastly, citizen power, which comprises the top three rungs of the ladder, involves partnership, delegated power and citizen control: citizens can try to reach a

compromise, make tradeoffs and can have a stake in the decision-making process.

Criticism of Arnstein's (1969) Ladder of Citizens Participation

While the central thesis on the theory is anchored on citizen control, this is an ideal form, which seems to be difficult to attain in the real situation of power relations (Burns et al, 1994). In a general sense, the theory of citizens' participation does not include citizens' participation in elections as one of the main forms of citizen control. Similarly, the argument that argument that, "there is a critical difference between going through the empty ritual of participation and having the real power needed to affect the outcome of the process" (see Armstein, 1969: 216) is a valid one. However, Burns and colleagues (1994) argue that this theory is specifically useful for the study of citizens in specific government programmes and in development projects and thus, inappropriate for the study of citizens' participation in local government such that the model needs modification to include individuals or groups of citizens' spheres of influence. Some critics have also strongly argued that "in the real world of people and programs, there might be 150 rungs with less sharp and 'pure' distinctions among them" (Gates and Stout, (2000:244). The model also seems to emphasize the gap between the "haves" and "have-nots," whose boundaries are difficult to establish in practice (See for example, Burns et al., 1994).

Nonetheless, since Arnstein, there have been complex theories of participation which have been advanced and new terminologies added. These other models include: Five Rungs of Citizens Participation (Thomas, 1995); Freeriders (clients), watchdogs (middle) and activists [(owners) Box, 1998]; Three Models of Citizens Participation- active, passive and transitional (Timney, 1998); an evolutionary continuum of public administrator and citizen interaction (Vigoda, 2002); A value-centered model (Schacter, 1997); the Owner Model (Schacter, 1997); and seven rungs of participatory planning (Pretty, 1995). It should be noted here that some of these models overlap, suggesting that there is no single model, which can be regarded conclusive in the study of citizens' participation. The majority of these models had been a shift towards understanding participation in terms of the empowerment of individuals and communities. In other words, the rationale for these models is to conceptualize the interaction between citizens and their leaders in the decision-making bodies, although they have some strengths as well as limitations and more.

Rationale for Decentralization and Citizen Participation
While it can be fruitful to discuss the complexities involved in conceptualizing the concepts of decentralization and citizens' participation, it is also important to discuss about their rationales. The arguments that are given as justification for both decentralization and citizens' participation portray the enduring mutual relationship, which exists between the two concepts. In the foregoing, the two trends of arguments are discussed. The first justification wraps economic reasons, while the second justification bundles political reasons. The first justification for decentralization is grounded on economic reasons. For example, it has been argued that decentralization is a solution to a number of economic problems, which faced African countries. It is argued that centralization policies, which were pursued by African governments, proved failure as they dragged these countries into the predicament of mismanaged and poorly performing economies (Cheema and Rondinelli, 1983; 2007). It is against this backdrop that decentralization was introduced as a substitute and an alternative model for state planned development (Maro and Mlay, 1979). Thus, decentralization is seen as a tool for speeding up development, improving service delivery, attaining efficiency and increasing accountability in management of resources as well as economy.

The second justification for decentralization is grounded on political reasons. Decentralization is an important ingredient for instituting democracy and widening the civic space for citizen participation. For example, Francis and James (2003) argue that decentralization sparkles good governance and the empowerment of local citizens (See also Kabemba, 2003). It should be noted that these words were virtually absent or vanished with the rise of post-independent African military and authoritarian regimes. These regimes either seriously curtailed the autonomy or abolished local governments altogether (Johns and Riley, 1975). Decentralization has been introduced as a coherent strategy for ensuring citizen participation (Samoff, 1979; REPOA, 2008). The rationale often held by the decentralists is that local governments are located closer to people and thus, better suited than central government to the kinds of services that local people need. In other words, local governments can produce services that are more responsive than central government to the local public aspirations given that needs differ from one locality to another, which can only be provided by local governments through decentralization (See Olowu and Wunsch, 2004; Shah, 2006; Shah and Shah, 2006). Local governments can provide tailor made solutions in each locality against standardised services often held by the anti-decentralists

(Saito, 2011). Accordingly, the greater citizen engagement through decentralization increases government's responsiveness to citizens' needs and preferences (Marschall, 2004). Public participation is an end in itself and capable of improving efficiency, equity and development (Agrawal and Ribot, 1999). This implies that there is a link between decentralization, citizen participation, democracy and development. That being the case, some scholars argue that the debate is not whether or not citizen participation is desirable but what forms of citizen participation should be put in place (Irvin and Stansbury, 2004; Rowe and Frewer, 2005).

However, there are some critics against all claims made by pro-decentralists. Saito (2011) provides an excellent summary of counterarguments. First, the argument based on economic efficiency of local governments to provide better services is challenged on the ground that local governments have little capacity to translate their claimed advantage of proximity into reality because local people do not necessarily have knowledge on their local issues. The second critique is on information advantage held by the decentralised governments in that local governments often face an increased cost of coordination as many tasks are devolved and more players are involved in service delivery. In this regard, coordination becomes a problem as managing complex problems is seen to be one of the paradoxes of decentralization. Third, the argument that local governments are closer to the local people does not always result into positive impacts. For instance, local governments are often captives of the local powerful elites who often abuse powers and resources available at local levels. Fourth, critics of decentralization disagree with the assumption that decentralization pushes for more decentralization. For instance, the grassroots poor are not used to participation and often not consulted by the government officials. That being the case, critics of decentralization argue that the newly granted local autonomy may actually reinforce the idea of elite capture. Fifth, the idea of ethnic harmonization, which is often associated for push towards a decentralized government, is questioned. It is argued by the critics of decentralization that granting regional authority to sub-national governments only shifts ethnic tensions from the national to the local levels. Coupled up with the danger of elite capture, achieving ethnic harmony can become problematic and also it is due to the fact that decentralization measures tend to jeopardise equity among different localities. Accordingly, what comes out clearly from this debate of pro-decentralists and anti-decentralists is that the same reasons are used toward their own ends. Saito (2011) cements this idea by quoting Qalo (1985) who argues that "arguments

for and against decentralization are often "like proverbs" with most principles answerable by an equally plausible and acceptable contradictory principle.

Relationship between Decentralization and Citizens' Participation

> There are very disappointing outcomes of decentralisation in practice and, simultaneously, a continued "belief" and high expectations among scholars as well as policy makers on its impact on citizens' participation (Andrews and De Vries, 2005:3)

The relation between decentralization and participation has been hotly debated in the agenda of local governance. There have been numerous volumes of commissioned studies by the World Bank (Rondinelli, et. al., 1983; Crook and Manor, 2001; Litvack and Bird, 1998) on the study of decentralization and citizens' participation particularly in developing countries. Why? Merilee Grindle (2007) in her recent study of effects of decentralization on thirty Mexican municipalities provides a more convincing answer to this question. She (Grindle, 2007:176) observes that "countries will differ in the policies and processes that surround decentralization initiatives. They may also differ in terms of how new policies and processes interact with the historical and cultural legacies left behind by prior governments or regimes." Majority of case studies have found a slight increase in participation because of decentralization reforms though outcomes of the reforms were ambiguous and sometimes contradictory. The reason for these mixed results of decentralization policies can be that decentralization and citizens' participation are always about power and control. These issues are addressed with difficulty by policy reformers as they will have to surrender much of their power to local people by letting them decide about programmes and decisions that affect them. In this sense, decentralization and citizens' participation can be constructed differently to meet different agendas. Unfortunately, the relationship is often viewed as an end in itself rather than a means towards achieving local governance. In other words, decentralization is assumed to provide for wide avenues for citizens to participate in the governance process.

On the other hand, despite the contradictions involved in the study of this contentious relationship, the World Bank has often continued to make it clear that decentralization accompanied by forms of citizens' participation should be regarded as one of the barometers for local governance (see Andrews and De Vries, 2007). However, except for the case of Sweden, a developed welfare

state, Andrews and De Vries (2007) caution that the general thesis that decentralization enhances public participation is not corroborated by their findings. Accordingly, they (Andrews and De Vries, 2007:1) recommend that "decentralization should be carefully designed and not recommended to all and every country." Crook and Manor (1998) investigated effects of decentralization in four cases from Africa and Asia and found that in only two of the cases participation increased. However, in their later study in 2000, they recommended to the World Bank that decentralization should be emphasized for developing countries because it increases the power of citizens by making the system more accountable and transparent. They (ibid.) acknowledged that in both cases, there could be some bias in clearly identifying what form of participation to measure. However, this depends on the political competence of citizens, commitment of political leaders, availability of resources and more importantly, country or area specific.

Arguments around Decentralization and Citizens' Participation
One among the main objectives for adopting decentralization in most developing countries was to ensure citizens' participation. With the implementation of decentralization being on course for some time now, a critical question that remains to be answered is: Do we have a common understanding on the two terms: decentralization and citizens' participation? If the answer is yes, the second question would be: has decentralization facilitated citizen engagement as it is contended? As we have already discussed in the previous sections and in the following Sub-Section, evidence so far gathered suggests mixed results as far as the two are concerned. On one hand, there is the view that contends decentralization has boosted citizen participation. On the other hand, the second view holds that although decentralization has been in place for quite some time now, it has not been able to unleash higher degree of citizens' participation. These two opposing views are discussed in the next Sub-sections.

Advocates of Decentralization and Citizens' Participation
> Around the world, heterogeneous coalitions of political and social actors spanning the ideological spectrum supported the movement toward decentralization. Politicians of the right and the left; democrats and authoritarian leaders; policymakers in finance, education, health, and urban development; international financial institutions; and scholars in academia all advocated for decentralization (Falleti, 2010:4).

This quotation above represents the long held perspective contending that decentralization is a solution to political and economic problems, especially for countries that had experienced centralized economic programs and exclusionary politics. According to Falleti (2010:5), the advocates of decentralization drew their support from local government theories, which argue that "decentralization improves democracy by bringing the government closer to the people". In a way, the pro-decentralists argue that decentralization provides the local people with the legitimate right to voice their concerns in matters, which affect their lives (Saito, 2011). Two major arguments emerge in support of this view. Both arguments convey a proposition that the on-going local government reforms in many developing countries have provided the basic conditions for citizen participation to take place. The two arguments are briefly summarized here:-

The first argument posits that the on-going local government reforms in the developing countries have created an institutional framework for citizen participation. Arguably, this has improved citizen participation (see, for example, Crook and Manor, 1998). It is argued that decentralization has created various structures in the local government system, which caters for citizen participation right from the grassroots levels. These structures act as the medium of communication between two points: the centre and the local (Saxena et. al, 2010). Democratically elected local councils are described as good examples (Gaventa, 2002). These structures provide citizens with the opportunity to participate either directly or indirectly. It is argued that presence of these structures has strengthened the civic space for meaningful citizen participation. The second argument is that the on-going local government reform programs in the developing countries are driven under decentralization by devolution principle, which is arguably the most preferable and effective form of decentralization (Crook and Manor, 1998;). This is because when decentralization is pursued through devolution, it results into an autonomous entity with powers to make their own decisions (Mutahaba, 1989). Moreover, devolutionary local governments engenders specific positive attitudes to the local grassroots people as it increases popular participation, commitment, and identification with development initiatives pursued by their localities (Kiggundu, 2001). Consequently, citizens are empowered to make decisions based on their local conditions. Accordingly, this has helped to achieve meaningful citizen participation. Furthermore, there is the tacit argument that purports decentralization policies are heading into the right direction and at the satisfactory pace. The decentralization programs in most countries have recognized the role of local

governments by devolving responsibilities and functions to the latter. The acquired new responsibilities and functions have enhanced these local entities and transformed them into developmental local governments (Nel and Binns, 2003) described as the local governments embracing citizens' participation in seeking for viable solutions to local socio-economic needs.

Critics of Decentralization and Citizens' Participation

Critics of decentralization have often argued that decentralization has not changed significantly the status of citizens' participation in affairs that affect their daily lives (Kessy and McCourt, 2010). A general proposition here is that despite presence of an institutional framework for citizen participation still, some optimal conditions are lacking for any meaningful citizen participation. Maluka (2011: VII) makes a strong argument against the direct link between decentralization and community engagement in his recent work in Tanzania:

> …despite the obvious national rhetoric on decentralisation, actual practice in the district involved little community participation. The findings showed that decentralisation, in whatever form, does not automatically provide space for community engagement. The assumption that devolution to local government promotes transparency, accountability and community participation, is far from reality.

Other counterarguments on decentralization and citizens' participation can be summarized as follows: First, the decentralization initiatives in the developing countries have partially been able to set the local authorities as autonomous institutions ideal for citizen participation. However, the local governments have only managed to afford a curtailed autonomy (REPOA, 2008, Lutaya and West, 2009) as their respective central governments have continued to retain control over critical issues including fiscal autonomy. For the case of Tanzania, the grant system is blamed for this because it sets minimum national standards, compelling local authorities to frame their budgets according to guidelines and procedures spelt out by the central government. Accordingly, this denies autonomy to the local governments (Braathen, et. al., 2005). This is also true in Uganda where the local governments have limited autonomy over revenues, and a number of weaknesses and problems with policies governing revenue generation including citizen engagement continue to exist (Lutaya and West, 2009). Arguably, the limited local authorities' autonomy, in turn, affects negatively

their capacity and commitment to implement citizen participation (REPOA, 2008).

There are several reasons that are advanced as the culprit behind this. They include reluctance shown by the central governments to devolve substantial powers to the grassroots levels; and secondly, there is lack of both political will and commitment to carry out decentralization by devolution to its logical limit. Unfortunately, such reluctance characterizes most Southern African Development Community (SADC) countries (Kabemba, 2003). Presence of these two factors makes the stated goal of promoting citizen engagement to be questionable in eyes of most scholars, and hence, it remains mere political rhetoric. For the case of Tanzania, such rhetoric of decentralization and popular participation have been around since the British colonial administration and in the post-independence government, while in fact, what has been practiced is bureaucratic authoritarianism (Eckert, 2007; Kessy, 2008). The vivid example is the Tanzania's 1972 decentralization initiatives, which proclaimed to pursue popular participation but actually viewed people's participation as the constraint and thus, worked against it (Mutahaba, 1989).

Second, the framework within which decentralization measures take place contains some inherent weaknesses, which compromise attainment of popular participation. For example, it is has been noted that in Uganda, there is presence of overriding national strategies for poverty reductions, which conflict with the quest for participatory approach (Francis and Robert, 2003). The former is described to be national in character and calls for central coordination and inevitably the need for centralization. Consequently, two contrasting modes of local governance have emerged, namely, technocratic and patronage modes. The former mode prioritizes poverty reduction, driven by national targets and is closely associated with poverty reduction strategy plans (PRSPs). The latter mode emphasizes on participatory planning. However, the patronage mode operates in the context of lack of resources and capture by local elites, which consequently ensures little meaningful citizen involvement. Their analysis questions whether or not objectives of poverty reduction and community participation can be reconciled indeed (Francis and Robert, 2003).

Critics of Citizens' Participation in Local Governance
Although participation is one of the concepts with "strong normative overtones, very few people think that participation is a bad thing" (Birch,

2007:145). Supporters of participation argue that an increase in participation is likely to enhance political efficacy (Birch, 2007; White, 1996) because political participation means sharing political power (White, 1996). To some extent, participation can be qualified as the ticket for any democratic government though some forms of participation are also engineered in other non-democratic government. Participation also leads to better decision-making and is assumed to create social stability by developing sense of community and promoting collective decision-making (Callahan, 2007). In short, participation can improve quality and efficiency of democracy if participation level is increased (Birch, 2007). By using the Arnstein's (1969) ladder of citizen participation, rungs five to eight apply here. Similar arguments in favour of participation revolve around a variant of "decentralization equals democracy" (Andrews and De Vries, 2007). This is also the main justification for having local government authorities as they are assumed to facilitate sharing of power at the lowest levels of government. In other words, in order for participation to occur, an interface between the citizens and the local decision-makers is essential. In short, arguments fall under two headings: direct versus indirect citizen participation. Those who favour indirect involvement of citizens in governance stress that, "in a representative democracy, elected officials and professional administrators should act on behalf of the citizens and in the best interest of the state". Those who favour the direct form argue that "citizens are the 'owners' of government and should therefore be involved in decisions of the state" (Callahan, 2007:1179). Thus, it is becoming increasingly accepted that citizens' participation provides numerous advantages to the citizens through gaining some control over the local decision space and facilitating better policy making as well as implementation (Kim, 2011).

However, some critics have questioned validity of participation as the only available barometer for measuring the level of democracy in a particular country. Similarly, since participation is often regarded as an intrinsic value rather than fundamental value, some (see Andrews and De Vries, 2005) have argued that it should be carefully studied and implemented. In the same way, participation has some marked repercussions including the problem of local elite capture, human and financial costs, and the danger of tyranny of participation, which may create stalemate in local decision-making bodies. Thomas (1995) warns us that too much representation of actors in decision-making is not an end in itself but rather, it is costly at reaching consensus. Moreover, involving too many levels of government in decision-making is also a problem – not that too much participation is a bad thing, but it needs

proper rules of engagement. Despite political participation being regarded as a significant component of any definition of local democracy, good governance and a well-functioning system of governance, this does not mean that participation is universally accepted and practised. Various scholars have strongly argued that participation depends on those who participate and whether or not citizens' interests are taken into consideration in decisions that affect their lives (Kettunen, 2002; White, 1996). Birch (2007) contends that a proper system of government must provide opportunities for political participation by the citizens. Hence, participation and control in local governance are regarded as important aspects for opening doors to good governance. Unfortunately, this ignores challenges involved in designing and implementing participatory approaches.

What becomes clear from the debate above on decentralization and citizens' participation is that the same rationales are used towards their own ends both by the advocates and critics. This debate further suggests that both advocates and critics of decentralization and citizens' participation cannot totally eliminate the opposing views. What also comes out strongly from this debate is that the two concepts are still at the abstract levels. Given these difficulties in clearly interpreting the concepts, many governments have resorted to operationalize the concepts in various different forms and approaches. For example, "the type of decentralization adopted by a specific central government will necessarily reflect the expressed political ideology and stated objectives of the government in question". In other words, the different interpretations of decentralization are noticeable in the various forms of decentralization that have emerged since the 1960s where advocates were embracing decentralization from different ideological positions (Rees and Hossain, 2010:583). It is from this angle that the paper is proposing for a new shift in the conceptualization of decentralization and citizens' participation in the following section.

The Second Generation Theory (SGT)
Looking down at the history of decentralization and citizens' participation, one can find that the two concepts have evolved over the past half century, taking diverse and varied meanings. The first generation can be associated with the wave of post–World War II in the 1970s and 1980s, which focused on deconcentrating hierarchical government structures and bureaucracies. The first generation also moved into the mid-1980s by expanding further the concepts of decentralization and citizens' participation by including political power sharing, democratization, and market liberalization (Cheema and

Rondinelli, 2007). As already discussed, all these attempts to operationalize the concepts appear to have remained at the abstract level with many governments and development partners lacking a common understanding about them.

Accordingly, the difficulties experienced by both the theorists and practitioners in their attempts to conceptualize decentralization and citizens' participation could be one of the main reasons calling for a Second Generation Theory (SGT). According to Saito (2011), this proposed theory has the following main characteristics: a) it emphasizes on political economy in its approach, whether or not incentives for diverse stakeholders are congruent in order to attain common objectives; b) it acknowledges that information is not equitably shared among these stakeholders; c) it goes beyond idealized normative assumptions by paying relatively more attention to empirical results; and d) it moves beyond North America and industrialized countries to global comparisons. SGT is welcomed for various reasons. First, decentralization is not an end to itself but a means toward a range of broader objectives including enhancing citizens' participation and effective local governance. Second, SGT is suited in diagnosing contradictions inherent in decentralization. One of the dilemmas in this case is how to create a central government, which is simultaneously strong and limited. As some scholars such as Rodden (2006:17 cited in Saito, 2011) have argued, "the center must be strong enough to achieve the desired collective goods-like free trade, common defense, and the like - but weak enough to preserve a robust sense of local autonomy." In this case, Saito strongly observes that the dilemma of decentralization to achieve its objectives is highlighted in the context of decentralization being often implemented in tandem with marketization and Public Private Partnership (PPP). Third, SGT is welcomed because local governments are at strategic crossroads. For instance, local governments are important actors for both vertical (central-local relations) and horizontal (public –private) coordination. It is also at the local levels that three distinct reform agendas need to be integrated, which are decentralization for administrative reform, expansion of markets for economic transaction; and empowerment for civil society. In this case, proper integration and coronation are needed to realize the objectives of partnerships and effective engagement of local government and staff. The SGT seems to be more practical oriented and contingent in the sense that it moves both the debates about decentralization and citizens' participation from the normatively idealized notions of decentralization to more realistic assessment of difficulties in implementing the very complex agenda of

decentralization. In other words, clear conceptualization of the terms is more important than trying to take them as magic bullets to solve societal problems. Furthermore, since the definitions of the two terms have not agreed among many scholars, the study of decentralization and citizens' participation remains at an abstract level.

Conclusion

From this conceptual and empirical review on decentralization and citizens' participation, the following major conclusions can be advanced. Firstly, there are ambiguities in the definition of the term decentralization, which result from ambiguities in the language used to describe decentralization especially in the developing world. For example, the early conception of decentralization is different from current usage of term for the case of developing countries. Moreover, when national leaders of developing countries were referring to decentralization, what they really meant was decentralization in form of de-concentration and delegation, which ended up establishing units of local administration that were similar to those found at the national levels. Secondly, there has been a new emphasis for conceptual thinking about the nature of local government studies from local government to local governance. This has been influenced mainly by the New Public Management (NPM), which emphasises on the role of the private sector in social service delivery. Thirdly, evidence from literature suggests that decentralization can only be successful when local governments are given enough resources and high commitment from national leaders. More importantly, decentralization of financial resources has been the most difficult task to implement. Evidence further suggests that it is only possible to have successful decentralization once financial resources have been devolved to the local government. Although other resources can be easily decentralized like human resources and decision-making power, financial resources are the bedrock for effective decentralization and better service delivery. Fourthly, there is lack of consensus as to what decentralization can achieve and what it cannot achieve. Most advocates of decentralization will point to potential benefits of the process without at the same time looking at dangers associated with decentralization when it comes to practice, for example, elite capture, corruption, social inequity and the like. Finally, the question of measurement has been highly contested in the literature on decentralization and citizens' participation. Thus, any discussion of the terms such as more power to people and improving local governance are "often viewed by critics as no more than a theoretical exercise" (Edem, 2003:68). Therefore, this paper concludes by re-emphasising that greater conceptual

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and empirical clarity is needed to understand clearly the relationship between decentralization and citizens' participation.

In light of these observations, it seems reasonable to conclude that the concept of citizens' participation cannot be fully studied in a single study because many forms exist, each needing a particular methodology. Likewise, it appears that there are a myriad theoretical models but only imperial investigation can prove their validity in a study of citizens' participation. Finally, this paper welcomes the debate on 'Second Generation Theory' (SGT), which has emerged in literature in the past five years. According to Saito (2011), this theory is heartily welcomed for the simple fact that decentralization is not an end in itself but a means toward a range of broader objectives, encompassing democratic deepening and economic progress. We should, as Saito (2011) argues, strive to embark on further clarification of the terms to reach at a point that the terms can be made workable in different contexts across the countries. This remains to the main challenge of the SGT and its impact on decentralization and citizens' participation.

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