Local Autonomy and Endogenous Development: 
The Experience of Informal Associations in Upper East Region, Ghana

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<OUTLINE>

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I. Summary

• English Summary

This report was written based on the field work conducted from 3rd, August to 26th, December in 2015. It took form of studying abroad at the University for Development Studies (UDS) under the supervision by Professor David Millar. This opportunity was realized through the support by Global Leader Training Program of United Nations University in Japan.

The UDS was established in 1992 and it is the first and only public university in Northern part of Ghana. At the UDS, ‘Endogenous Development’ program was founded in the Faculty of integrated development in 2008, through initiative of Prof. Millar and several other Ghanaian scholars. They have tried to promote the philosophy and new approach of ‘Endogenous Development’ both in Academic and practical level. They have implemented many projects in the rural communities in Northern part of Ghana in collaboration with international NGOs. I was interested in this movement and my initial objective in this program was, therefore, to learn what in philosophy and approach of ‘Endogenous Development’ in Ghanaian context.

Through field work in Ghana, however, my focus has shifted from the UDS and NGOs to the people living in the communities. At the beginning, I was regarding the UDS and local NGOs as main actor in ‘Endogenous Development’ approach. Through readings and the discussion with professors and people in the communities, however, I learned that people themselves should be regarded as main actor of developmental process of the communities, rather than interventionist including UDS or NGOs. The philosophy of endogenous development claimed that the development process first of all should be found in people’s ongoing life in which they are constantly changing themselves in reaction to changing environment around them. And people’s own initiative and autonomous choice is regarded to be the central issue of the process.

Based on this awareness, in the field work, I tried to see the process of social change from people’s point of view. I selected Gowie community in Bongo district as study area and stayed there and experienced rural life of people. I collected information mainly based on participant observation and interviews. Through the field work, I found that people are organizing many informal association, which is called as ‘youth association’ by themselves, for objective of self-help. It was also revealed that the movement of organizing association was started around same period in the region and they have had played significant role in process of social change of rural communities. Furthermore, along the line I investigated the experience of the associations from historical point of view, it was found that the autonomy, nature and activity of associations have been greatly influenced by the policy of each regime and also by the relationship with governmental sector.
日本語要約

本報告は、2015年8月3日から12月26日にかけてガーナで実施した現地調査に基づいて執筆されている。現地調査は、国連大学のGlobal Leadership Training Program（GLTP）による援助によって、現地にあるUniversity for Development StudiesにてDavid Millar先生を現地指導教官として調査を実施する形で実施した。

UDSは1992年にガーナ北部で最初の国立大学として設立され、現在に至るまで北部唯一の国立高等教育機関である。2008年にMillar先生などを一部の教員が旗揚げ役となってUDSのFaculty of Integrated Development内に‘Endogenous Development’のコースが設置され、教員らによって国際NGOとの連携の下、Endogenous Development Approachを推進する活動が学術面と実践面の両方において進められてきた。その動向に関心を抱いていた私が本プログラムに申し込みをした当初の研究課題は、ガーナの文脈における‘Endogenous Development’とはどのようなものか、その理念と実践アプローチを学ぶことであった。

当初私は、‘Endogenous Development’のアクターとして、大学であるUDSやNGOを想定していたと言える。しかしその後、現地での新たに得られた視点の為に、私の調査対象はUDSやNGOからコミュニティの人々へと変更されることとなった。現地で文献を読んで、教員らと議論の機会を持つなどの学習を通して、私は‘Endogenous Development’のプロセスの中心的アクターはそこに生きる人々自身であり、外部からの介入者であるUDSやNGOはそこに参加するに過ぎない、という考えを学んだ。人々は変化し続ける環境に対応しながら、自らもまた生活の中で変化し続けている。

‘Endogenous Development’のプロセスとはそれ生活と切り離された形で外部から持ち込まれる単発のプロジェクトとしてあるのではなく、何よりもまず人々のそうした生活の変遷の長期的な過程であり、外部からの介入者はそのプロセスに参加し、援助するに過ぎないと見なす視点であった。

上記のような視点の転換を経て、私は村でのフィールドワークを通して、社会変化のプロセスを人々の目線から捉えることを目指した。インタビューや参与観察を主とし、村で人々と共に生活しながら調査を行った。その過程で、コミュニティの人々が自発的にInformalな自助グループであるYouth associationを組織してきたこと、そうした組織が人々の問題解決の中心的役割を担ってきたことが浮き彫りとなった。さらに、このようなYouth associationを組織する動きは、ある歴史的時点で地域全体に起こっていたことが分かってきた。また、そうしたグループがそのように起こり、どのような活動を行ってきたかという歴史的変遷に焦点を当てて調査を進めるうち、そうしたグループの自律的活動の性質や内容が、政策の変化やその時の政権との関係性から大きな影響を受けて変化してきたことが見えてきた。
II. Research Activity

1. Introduction

History or process of ‘Development’ has tended to been explained by the state-oriented perspective. This study, on the other hand, tried to see the social process from people’s point of view by examining the historical experiences of people in the rural communities in Upper East Region, Ghana.

Throughout the 1970s, people in rural communities in the region were suffering with severe poverty under unstable military regime. At that time, people in rural communities were excluded from decision making process about development and were regarded as mere ‘receiver’ of intervention. Since late 1970s, however, numerous informal associations were organized by people and have played active role in social, political and economic process of the country. By organizing themselves, they made appeal of their presence as actor who can also take decision and responsibility about development of their own environment, with the aid of other stakeholders.

It is believed that shedding light on initiative of people and describing them as main actor of creation of ‘history’ will be empowerment toward autonomy of grass-root movement.

2. Study Area

2.1 General Overview of the Upper East Region

The Upper East Region is located in the north-eastern corner of the country, between longitude 00 and 10 West and latitudes 100 30°N and 110N. (Map 1).

Map1. Upper East Region
The population of the Region is 1,046,545, which is 4.2% of the national population. About eighty percent of the economically active population engages in agriculture. Currently, Upper East Region has 3 municipality including capital town, Bolgatanga, and 13 districts.

The Upper East Region is the second poorest country while there is wide variation in the level of poverty across district within the region. The highest incidence of poverty observed in Builsa South District (84.4%) followed by Bawku West (68.1%), Bongo (67.4%) and Nabdam (63.0%). Kassena Nankana West District (13.1%) has the lowest poverty incidence in the region.

2.2 Bolgatanga Municipal and Bongo District

I implemented my field work especially in Bongo district and Bolgatanga municipality in Upper East region.

- Bolgatanga Municipality

Bolgatanga Municipality has total population of 131,550 and the district’s share of the regional population is 12.6 percent. Although urbanization is fact catching up with the area, the rural population still account for around 50 percent of the population. Agricultural households constitute 59.8 percent of households. The traditional system of governance revolves around the chief while ‘Tindaana’ is the custodian of lands in the area. Tindanas are literally the land owners and are responsible for pacifying the gods in times of adversity. They also make sacrifices on behalf of the chiefs.

- Bongo District

The district has a total population of 84,545 and the district’s share of the regional population is 8.08 percent. About 93.9 percent of the population of the district is classified as rural and 6.1 percent urban. About 95.7
percent of the households in the district are engaged in agricultural activities. The Bongo District Assembly was created in 1988 with introduction of District Assembly system.

The traditional authority of the district resides in the paramount chief known as Bonaba with 11 divisional chiefs and 31 sub-chiefs who support the Bonaba in the administration. There are also Tindaanas who hail from Zorko in Brukina faso.

3. Methodology

Followings are the techniques and approach I employed to collect data during the field work.

- Gate keeper and key informant

Having gate keeper or key informant (Whyte, 1995) is one of most critical issues which affect all about sampling strategy. There are many difficulties for outsider to conduct research only by herself. For example, if I was not with someone who come from the area, the person may have suspicious toward me and never open his mind to me. Also, it is difficult for me to know who will be ‘right’ person to ask about certain issues.

- Participatory Observation

In the field, to get general picture of people’s situation and life style, I tried to make myself to be the part of the environment. I participated to lively food activity including farming, cooking, weaving and fetching water from borehole. Living in the area was also important to make schedule flexible. Since farming job is affected by many factors including whether, it is difficult for people to fix the time for me. It was necessary to make myself always ready to start interview whenever people think that they can make time for me.

- Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA)

Transect work & Community map

In the first and second day of community enter, I have done observatory walks with informant. After walking, we drew map together and put important elements and natural resources such as sacred groves, farm, Dam, forest, valley and also structures such as school, clinic, library, bar, houses and community center. During the field work, when I got new stories or information through interview, I often referred this map and I added objects on the map.

Time trend diagram

I used this technique combined with interview. When interviewee accounted something about historical change, I asked person to draw the picture of the issue at different points in time. While this technique is usually used for pictorial representation of landscape of area, I used this in form of cognitive map to help interviewee to effectively show his perspective on the issue.

- Interviews

Interview was conducted both individual and groups, structural and non-structural and formal and informal. Some of most important information were gained in informal conversation in the livelihood activities rather than formally designed interview. Since I am not a speaker of local language (Frafra), I got several interpreters from
the community. The technique I used in early stage of field work was ‘Life-History Approach’ (Sakurai, 2002). This approach was introduced to let people share their own history from their point of view and it helped me to capture general picture of history of the community. Along the line, as my research interest come to focus on specific theme, I started to ask people to account for specific events.

- Documentary Search

Apart from collecting data through field survey, I also combined documentary search to understand the common experience and historical background of what I hear from people individually. It was needed to compensate information since rural people seldom keep written records and had to rely on their memories in exploring their experience. I mainly searched academic paper and statistics. The places I visited were Ghana Statistical Service, radio station, public library and library of public universities.

4. Research Findings

4.1 Previous study about ‘Youth Associations’ in Ghana

According to Lentz (1995), since mid-1970s in northern Ghana, numerous associations have been founded by people which call themselves ‘Youth Associations’ or ‘Youth and Development Associations’. Lentz (1995) explained that the term ‘youth’ used in those informal youth associations in rural communities generally implies no age limit on members and it is rather a socio-political category. Those associations combine the forms of organization and types of function of ‘voluntary associations’ with ascribed membership based on origin in a particular territory or ethnic affiliation. According to their own rules, youth associations aim to further the ‘unity’ and ‘understanding’ of the members among themselves and to contribute to the cultural, social and economic ‘development’ of the community (Lentz, 1995). The associations tried to pursue this goal by mobilizing the people for the objective of ‘self-help’.

From literature review, it was also found that in spite of significant role of those associations played, they have been paid very limited attention by researchers and nature and meaning of the movement have never been examined well.

4.2 Findings from Field Survey

In Upper East Region, the movement of organizing youth association started in late 1970s, relatively late than other regions. By that time, those organizations or associations were already very active especially in southern part of the country. When youth from Upper East went to south for job or schooling, they saw people in southern area organizing themselves to gain greater benefit there. They brought the idea back to their communities in Upper East and also started organizing people.

It was also found in the field survey that youth associations in the region have cultural continuity from traditional farming groups. In the rural communities in the region, people have culture to do farming in the group. These groups are divided into ‘age mates’ with different kind of jobs. Age mates are not a group only for farming but also ‘colleagues’ who always stay together, chat and exchange ideas. When idea of association has brought it was formed based on those existed age groups.

- Influence of Political Transition
The time ‘youth association’ became active in Upper East Region is corresponded with the period of Ghana’s political transition. Throughout the 1970s, economy of Ghana had undergone a comprehensive and pervasive decline under unstable military rule. It was inherited also under the rule of new civilian regime of Dr. Hilla Limann and People’s National Party (PNP), which came in power in 1979.

On 31st December, 1981, Jerry John Rawlings, leader of Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) overthrew the Limann-PNP government and seized power, then established the Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC) regime. For Rawlings, the objective was ‘to establish alternative non-bourgeois political institution that would link the State to civil society, and facilitate the incorporation of the masses in the prevailing power structure’ (Boadi et al. 1993, pp100).

Under PNDC, many institution for mass mobilization was formed. Rawlings built Democratic Youth League of Ghana (DYLG) which is volunteer institution consisted by ordinary people in rural communities under governmental youth department. People’s Defence Committees and Worker’s Defence Committees (PDCs and WDCs) were also set up at community and workplaces. Later, DYLG, PDCs were replaced by another similar institution called CDRs which was established in 1884. Rawlings aimed to locate these institutions as:

‘[…] the democratic bedrock of the new people’s power that the Revolution is building… organs through which the oppressed must organize and educate themselves and mobilize the people to destroy oppressive power relations and institutions’

Lentz (1995) evaluates that the attitude of the PNDC government towards youth associations has been flexible, not to say ambivalent, because of that the self-help philosophy of the associations was quite close to the government’s populist concept of grass-roots democracy and the principle of self-reliance. Actually, many members of youth association in rural communities also joined these groups and engaged in communal works.

According to Ninsin (1993), however, the role of CDRs as agents of mass mobilization started to be de-emphasized by 1985 and ‘District Assemblies’ system was introduced instead in 1988 as part of decentralization policy. In 1992, PNDC became constitutional government.

These changes in policies for mass mobilization have greatly influenced on nature and activities of informal associations in rural communities.

· Experience of Gowie Youth Association

In this section, I would like to introduce the experience of Youth Association in Gowie Community. Gowie community is one of communities in Bongo district.

How it started

First youth association in the community was founded in 1980 in this communities. It was the period of radical change of society, and founding member of first youth associations were the first group of people who started going to school around this area. These new experiences of schooling and working in the southern cities were different from what their fathers have experienced and it made youth to start thinking differently from the traditional values. One of members commented:

‘This is my family, I only help my family to grow. I won’t help any outsider to grow because you don’t belong to.’ That was notion people had. … It was limited to clan development rather than social development, inter-clan development, which bring people in same community together.’

Through organizing youth association, people in the community started to came together and did a lot of communal projects: constructing the road, community meetings, building clinic and corporate farming. Apart
from this, in 1982, 1983, people in Guwie community claimed to the commercial farmers, who had dominated the irrigation area around the Dam, to give the land back to people. Getting the support from District secretary, they gain the land back and build communal rice farm.

Influence of Revolution on Youth

The evolution led by Rawlings absorbed the initiative of youth who wanted change. One of members said:

‘It was whole of change in the societies ... not only in Gowie but in Ghanaian society. You had your boss in the office, your boss is not doing something right, you are labor or technical officer, don’t have right to question (at that time). But revolution turned whole things out.’

Encouraged by revolution, youth became more active. Fighting for irrigation farm was one of those activities and they also made claim to government for their right to get drinking water. One member commented how revolution mentally influenced on them:

‘For so many years, this community had no water. They pump the water here, and send it to Bolga and people in Bolga was drinking it. So during the revolution time, we questioned. It opened some of our mind to question some of things whether it was rational, so revolution taught us how to question... We started thinking about it, question ourselves. Is it that don’t we also need to drink this water? [sic]’

Ironic result of ‘decentralization’?: decline of autonomy

On the other hand, although Assembly System introduced in 1988 was intended to strengthen such power of grass root people, it was heard from people that ‘what intended to be wasn’t work on so’ and now ‘structure is there just by name.’ One of member said that changes in the political structure influenced on people’s mentality negatively:

‘Me as a person, I have seen that the thing is rather lying down. People are now waiting for government to bring resources put up project for them. Unlike those days people that themselves understand themselves, mobilizing themselves. ... People are now looking up to the assembly men, to bring them water and all those things. But those days, people don’t look up anybody.’

Although revolution was welcomed by local people and had active involvement of them, after a period of time, based on the field survey, it seems that ‘autonomy’ and ‘subjectivity’ of people were rather declined in the gradual process of decentralization.

5. Discussion

It can be said that by organizing themselves into association, they started making appeal of their presence to outside and came into arena of negotiation with other stakeholders. Through interview, however, is was also heard that such spirit of self-help has declined compared to before. During the revolution time, youth were working closely with governmental sector in community development. However, people are perceiving that in the process of decentralization, they rather came to be excluded from decision making process again. It means that the nature and activities of civil movement can be greatly influenced by the political situation of the time. Therefore, it will be rewarding to analyze nature and autonomy of association from historical point of view in relationship with wider social and political situation. To examine how relationship with the state/government influenced on ‘Subjectivity’ and ‘Autonomy’ of people and to find out the factors or elements of encouragement and discouraged will be what to do in the future.
6. Conclusion

In the rural community in the Upper East Region, movement of bringing people inside the communities together by organizing youth associations started around 1980. By doing so, they claim their interests, make appeal of their presence as actor of process of community development. Revolution absorbed the initiative and made it bigger movement of fight for making change in the environment by themselves.

What I have heard through the interview with people suggested that although revolution succeeded to have active involvement of them into political process, after a period of time, it seems that ‘autonomy’ of people rather declined in the gradual process of decentralization. If it is true, the process and factor which brought such ironical result should be the objective of future study.
Acknowledgement

I would like to start my acknowledgement by showing my gratitude and deep respect to the people in communities I stayed. Their words with full of wisdom led me to start looking at their initiative and autonomy in the experiences of youth associations. Especially, my warm thanks go to Mr. Aniah and his families. I am looking forward to go back and continue learning many things from them.

I would like to express my special thanks to my local supervisor, Professor David Millar. When I was struggling with many new things I encountered, he always gave me insightful advices and encouraged me to keep developing my interest. I could not done this field work without his warm support and sincere guidance. I would also like to thank to other professors in Millar institute, especially Dr. Akanburi and Dr. Azure for their constructive comments and warm encouragement.

I am sincerely grateful to support of Dr. Gordana Kranjac Berisavljevic and other teachers and staffs at the UDS. She and her staff assisted me from preparation and during the stay, and arranged great opportunity to do the final presentation at the UDS.

My sincere thanks also goes to professors and staffs in the GLTP program, especially to Professor Osamu Saito, Ms. Yuki Nakano, Ms. Natsuko Imai for the generous support I received from them.

Although it is difficult to list all the name here, I express my warm thanks to my many local friends. I always received encouragement from them.

Finally, I express special thanks to my family and my precious. Their warm support was what sustained me thus far.

References


- Appendix

- Map1. Upper East Region
III. Reflection to the GLTP in Africa

Motivation to participate in the GLTP

Before I got to know about the GLTP program, I was looking for assistance to go to Ghana for my field survey. Since I was in the first year of doctoral journey, I wanted to spend longer time in the field and determine my research theme carefully.

While there are many founding programs for overseas research and also many scholarship program for studying abroad, former seldom to have linkage with local university and latter tend to limited only for getting degree in foreign universities. This program, different from others, combined both advantages of overseas field work and studying abroad. It was also lucky for me that this program is based on close relationship with local universities so that I could study under the supervision of Prof. Millar. I had read his paper many times in Japan, so it was the great opportunity for me to develop my research interest through discussions with him.

Field experiences

The period of my stay in Ghana can be divided mainly into two stages. First stage was study at campus and modification of research proposal. Second stage is field survey at local community.

3.1 Timeline of Stay in Ghana

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<td>Readings &amp; Discussion at the campus, Development of research proposal</td>
<td>Field work at communities</td>
<td>Literature review &amp; interview at governmental offices</td>
<td>Summarizing data &amp; Final presentation</td>
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(1) August, September: Research Proposal Development

First two months were the period for revising research proposal based on better understanding about philosophy of ‘endogenous development.’ I shaped my research interest through readings and discussion with professors at the campus. I also attended classes with other students. In the end of September, I had presentation of revised research proposal.
This is the campus of Millar Open University, the private university Prof. Millar founded.

While I was studying abroad the UDS, I was mainly stayed here and learned under Prof. Millar. Other professors from the UDS were frequently coming to have lecture here and I also participated to those classes.

Picture 2 The staff in CECIK

This is the picture with staffs of CECIK, the NGO founded by Prof. Millar. I accompanied them and joined sanitary project in rural communities. CECIK has only 3 staff. It is because they find out the partner within the community in every each project rather than to have fixed staffs. The philosophy of endogenous development also can be found in the unique style.

Picture 3 One week stay in the community

While first two months was mainly for study at the campus, I stayed for only 1 week in one rural community in Bolgatanga since I couldn’t wait to experience what the community life is like! The picture was taken in the last day with children.

(2) October: Field Work in Gowie Community

I started my field work in the Gowie community in Bongo district from beginning of October. Through the field work, I got know about presence of informal associations and interested in it. I started to collect information focusing on this topic.

Picture 4 The compound I stayed

This picture showed the compound which I lived throughout 3 months stay in Gowie community. There are 3 families living there. The wall is made with soil. Traditionally the roof is made with straw but some of them were replaced by zinc seat.
Picture.5,6 Cooking and having meal with family

I learned how to cook from them and enjoyed fresh and seasonal vegetables every day!

(3) November: Field Work in Several Communities & Visit to Governmental Offices

From November, I focused more on youth association and widen my scope and target to get more general picture about the topic. I visited several communities around the district and also governmental offices concerned with community development. I also visited library at Legon University to find previous studies about informal associations in Ghana.

Picture.7 ‘War dance’ in funeral

Luckily, I had opportunity to experience traditional funeral of ‘Frafra’ linguistic group of people. The funeral last for whole night and young men entertain people with ‘war dance.’

Picture.8 Items used by ‘Tindaana’

The picture shows the items which Tindaana use in consultation. In funeral, Tindaana has important role to tell the place to bury the body. It is determined based on the consultation with God through these items.
While I was mainly stayed in community in September, I begun to see people in different sector to collect information about the period of revolutionary regime and also about youth association. This is when I visited local radio station, ‘Gurune Radio’. Radio has played critical role in community development in this region by collaborating local people and also international donors.

(4) December: Summarizing Data & Presentation

In the last month, I briefly summarized data and had final presentation in front of professors and staffs at the UDS, Tamale campus. I talked about what I learned and found throughout my field work, and my future plan for doctoral research. I got many comments and feedbacks from them.

In the community, I spent precious time with people. During the stay, I participated to lively food activity including farming, cooking, weaving and fetching water from borehole. I even enjoyed dancing and a kind of game with them.

In the last night of my stay in the community, not only family I was living together but also ‘extended’ who living different compound visited me and had dinner together.

The last day of my stay in the community. We played game and sang and danced together.
Challenges

The biggest challenge for me was that my research theme was tremendously changed according to what I have learned and found in the field. But it was so helpful that GLTP was so flexible to let me constantly modify my approach so that I didn’t have to be rigid and could maximize my learning opportunities.

Though there are also mental challenges that sometimes I felt nervous about my research, I could find easily find people to talk to and some get advices, including supervisor and friends.

How to make use of this experience to future career development

The most thing what I have gain is local network for my research. I had interacted with people in several communities in the region, people who has rich experiences in community development including professors, NGO staffs, influential farmers. I also met people in local government such as regional minister and district assembly.

Also the connection with UDS will continue to be advantage for me in future as far as I continue research in Ghana.

Encouragement to other students

In Africa, it will be difficult for student to come to the field and conduct research alone without any connection or assistance. Therefore, it will be better to collaborate with local researchers and institution to broaden the network and access for valuable information. In that sense, this program may be the best choice especially for students who want to do research in Africa to get both research network and field experiences. I hope many other students will also develop his/her own research through participating this program.