

## **ABSTRACT**

### **DEMOCRATISATION OF POLYCENTRIC GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES: DYNAMICS OF LOCAL POLITICAL ARENAS IN NORTHERN GHANA**

**Wolfram Laube**

**Center for Development Research (ZEF), University of Bonn**

Ghana has been celebrated for the successful democratisation that it has achieved since the passing of the 1992 constitution. The country has seen four relatively free and fair elections since 1996 and power has been handed from incumbent governments to opposition parties in 2001 and 2008. On the national level, despite of some degree of violence and intolerance in places where party politics has become enmeshed in tribal rivalry or competition over traditional authority and natural resources, democratisation has been a success.

However, as research results from northern Ghana show, patterns of political competition and governance on the local level have not undergone large changes. In a setting with polycentric governance, where politicians and bureaucrats share power and responsibilities with traditional authorities and local big men, political competition is not a matter of ideological dissent or an exchange of arguments about pertinent issues. Local power politics within and in between parties, continues to depend on local patronage networks as well as the successful manipulation of traditional authorities and local opinion leaders. For the local electorate, often entire communities, the selection of candidates and voting, thus is dictated by the loyalty to chiefs, but also by assumptions about the presumed benefits, in the form of access to development resources, of electoral choices, rather than by an informed evaluation of party programmes. However, this does not mean that local voters are easily manipulated. Since local politics is rife with (petty) conflict, which becomes easily articulated in party-political terms, local alliances and patterns of loyalty frequently shift and politicians are frequently surprised by the outcome of local elections.