Abstract
In countries experiencing conflict and fragility, carrying out the tasks of rebuilding and synchronising political, economic and social institutions to bring about systemic stability is a knotty exercise. This difficulty impose the need to take the most critical steps to ensure governance restoration. Utilising relevant scholarly materials on organisation research and previous qualitative fieldwork, this paper interrogates how grassroots institutions can participate in the critical responsibility of providing the much needed nourishment to states experiencing fragility to ensure stabilisation, reconstruction and governance restoration. It argues that the application of centralised and decentralised approaches in the task of carrying out stabilisation, reconstruction and governance restoration by way of fortifying central and grassroots institutions at different points in time should be viewed in the context of degree of fragility and the progress recorded. The paper concludes that a pragmatic alignment of the role of central and sub-national governments by intermeshing centralised and grassroots approaches will lead to sustainable outcomes in the task of fixing governance challenges in fragile states.

Keywords: State fragility, Governance, Decentralisation, Centre-periphery relations, Local elites.

Introduction
Governance has to do with the capacity of the state to aggregate diverse interests of its citizenry and facilitate harmonious integration of these interests in such a way that ensures that their needs and desires are accommodated. Effective governance therefore is predicated on the entrenched ability of government to meet the articulated demands of the citizenry by instituting and sustaining social, economic and political programmes in an even-handed manner that engenders their cooperation and support. Nevertheless, it is common knowledge that the entrenched capacity to facilitate the harmonious integration of the various interest groups in society varies from state to state (Brinkerhoff & Johnson, 2008). While some states exhibit a high capacity to take action on the demands of the citizenry by way of accommodating their needs and desires, others have low a capacity. Putting in place state institutions that will ensure that all interest groups in society are adequately accommodated is a complex task at all levels of government, particularly in those societies that have poor resource base and/or are encumbered by conflict.

The peculiarities of countries notwithstanding, needs to address the task of living up to the expectations of the citizenry by providing security and delivering basic services. Unfortunately, many countries, particularly those encumbered by conflict are unable to create the required

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milieu that will facilitate sustainable social, economic and political advancement to enthrone harmonious integration of the cluster of interests in their jurisdiction. Brinkerhoff and Johnson (2008) in their well-researched paper rightly noted that the failure of political leaders in many developing countries to adopt appropriate and well articulated strategies in managing pressure for centralised jurisdictional and administrative units on one hand and grassroots institutions that will take care of diversity and flexibility on the other, have been a major source responsible for accentuating the existing fragile situations instead of mitigating it.

In states experiencing fragility as a result of conflict, the task of bringing such states back to normalcy by stabilising and reconstructing state apparatus has always been a knotty exercise because of the complexity involved (Brinkerhoff, 2007). The complexity makes it essential to take the right and most critical steps to ensure governance restoration. This paper focuses on the role grassroots governance institutions can play in providing nourishment to states with stability deficit. The paper posits that the task of stabilisation, reconstruction and governance restoration in fragile states need not be performed solely nor principally by national or central institutions. Grassroots governance institutions have a critical role in lending credence to the authenticity of the governance system. Intermeshing top-bottom and bottom-up approaches in a manner that ensures centre-grassroots nexus will impact positively in resolving the tensions associated with fragile states (Jones et al., 2008).

**Conceptualising state fragility, decentralisation and governance**

There are no concise definitions of what constitutes a fragile state. However, most characterisations reflect limitation or failure occasioned by inability of state institutions to provide vital and indispensable services such as maintenance of law and order, basic social services, profitable engagements in the form of jobs as well as inability to muster the required credibility to effectively utilise vested legal authority to sustain support and confidence of the citizenry. A state that is fragile, may also be characterised by its inability to manage long and entrenched history of rivalry arising from inter-ethnic, inter-religious as well inter-class differences. As this deficit in the capacity of the state to manage the heterogeneity in ethnic, religious and class configuration in society increases, the confidence among stakeholders to cooperate and reach working agreement diminishes. The result is dearth of the ingredients of good governance and weak governance features such as deteriorating conflict leading to instability in the political system in the form of militarisation and proliferation of arms with colossal adverse effects on social, economic and political development. The negative stressors thus generated in the environment create involuntary mobility of human capital to safer and more stable social, economic and political states (Brinkerhoff & Johnson, 2008). Triggered events such as high level corruption can plunge countries into catastrophic state of affairs, thereby leading to degeneration and breakdown of state governance apparatus.

Development agencies at the international level define state fragility from the perspective of a states’ inability to deliver basic services in terms of guaranteed law and order, well established and functional judicial system and basic social and economic infrastructure to the citizenry (DFID, 2005; OECD, 2006)). In effect, for these agencies, the existence of unresolved conflict is not a fundamental requirement for the existence of a state of fragility. Thus, a country like Thailand which is battling with autonomists with some degree of success in terms of containment
of their anti-state activities is not a fragile state. This is because basic services in Thailand are still very much up and running in spite of the activities of the separatists.

A broader perspective with regards to the definition of a fragile state is adopted by Canada’s Country Indicators for Foreign Policy Project (CIFP, 2006). CIFP defines a fragile state as one which is deficient in its ability to provide and sustain the minimum security arrangements needed to protect its territorial boundaries and lack the competence institutionally to make available vital social amenities to their populace and also devoid of legitimate authority to be effectual in representing the citizenry both locally and internationally.

In conceptualising state fragility, several points are worth noting. Firstly, there is considerable disparity in the categorisation of states that are fragile and this restricts the ability to attempt generalisation transversely in the categories. Secondly, states that are considered fragile are characterised by their dynamism as they exhibit movement from a stable path to a conflict ridden path and recover and come out again to attain some level of stability. This dynamism has limited the ability of analysts to accurately assess the level of fragility within a specified time-frame. It is harder for analysts to accurately project into the future.

Thirdly, considering the fact that every country has its peculiar pathway, its strengths and weaknesses, there is the need to contextualise these peculiarities in applying the broad lessons in the process of putting in place appropriate strategies in carrying out the task of stabilising and restoring good governance in states experiencing fragility.

As a device for stabilising, and restoring good governance in fragile states, a far-reaching worldwide interest and contestation has developed around the subject of decentralisation (Smoke, 2003). Decentralisation can be conceptualised from a broad perspective to involve the transfer of political, administrative as well as fiscal power. This may be progressively done. First, by way of deconcentration which entails the reassignment of administrative task to sub-national governments, including local governments or delegation in the form of establishing publicly owned enterprises, semi-autonomous bodies and special agencies with requisite powers to act independently to take charge of specific government functions. Second, and more importantly, by devolution which is the granting of autonomous decision-making powers to lower level governments; and also privatisation which is the taking over of state-owned and managed organisations by the private sector for the purpose of enhancing efficiency (Martinussen, 1997). For Crook (2003), decentralisation occurs when the government at the centre officially relinquish specific political, administrative as well as fiscal powers to government functionaries at the lower level to carry out governmental activities or functions independently to clearly reflect the powers so relinquished. The fundamental consideration for decentralisation is the widely accepted view that government at lower levels, particularly local or grassroots government are closer to all and sundry. Thus governments at the lower levels are in a better position to feel the pulse of citizenry more effectively and respond more quickly and appropriately to their needs. Thus, proximity put local authorities in an advantageous position to appreciate locally felt needs, mobilise available sources of revenue and propel entrepreneurship at the local level and garner local support for programmes and projects mounted for the betterment of the people.
In effect, the reasons for decentralisation are numerous and these include: political, administrative and fiscal. From the administrative perspective, it serves as a vehicle for advancing effectiveness in delivering much needed services to the citizens. On the political front, decentralisation with the attendant autonomous status increases the enthusiasm of the local populace to want to participate in their local affairs to tackle the multi-dimensional challenges of injustice, deprivation, social and ethnic stress as well as imbalance in several aspects of life. Also, on the financial side, decentralisation tends to propel local authorities to manage available funds in a more prudent manner so as to be cost effective and accountable in delivering more services to the people.

While the whole idea of decentralisation is no doubt attractive, not everyone is a proponent. It is argued that decentralisation enlarges the size of the public sector, increases corruption, destabilises the local population (especially in culturally and ethnically heterogeneous settings); slows down economic growth and foreign direct investment; and delivers poor public services to the citizenry (Sharma, 2006).

Governance is a dominant aspect of a country’s ability to people and maintain social and economic development. Governance is central to decision making processes which in turn propels the attainment and maintenance of social and economic development. There are multiple and varied definitions of governance (Grindle, 2007). Some scholars conceptualise governance as the exercise of vested political power to run society and manage available resources for the development of its social and economic potentials (Landell-Mills & Serageldin, 1991). This definition essentially highlights the political context of governance without capturing the connection between those who exercise power and the populace which is a critical variable in dynamics of governance.

Charlick (1992) definition of governance focuses on the ability of a state to institutionalise a functional system that is able to manage effectively the business of the state by putting in place acceptable rules and regulations aimed at promoting core values in society among its inhabitants individually and collectively. What is obvious from Charlick’s definition is that he adopts a normative perspective in his conceptualisation of the term governance. He emphasises the end product of processes involved in governance in the context of the value of core management processes and the character of the bond between those who exercise authority and the populace.

From the functional perspective, the governance system is expected to fulfil three core functions (Brinkerhoff, 2007). Security is the first of these core functions. The state owes it a duty to the citizenry to utilise the instrumentality of state authority including its exclusive right to the use of force to defend in a sustainable manner the territorial integrity of the state by enforcing instituted rules and regulations for societal good. In effect, governance is about the state taking up the responsibility of providing protection for the citizenry and their assets which is a core and invaluable function in society.

The second function of governance has to do with its administrative and economic dimension. This requires effectiveness and efficiency in the delivery of core services with some degree of state involvement to ensure the provision of economic opportunities by clearly laying out appropriate rules and regulations as well as transparency in policy-making, financial pacts and
collaborations as it relates to public private partnership in the administration of the state. The third core function is political. In performing this function, governance generates and sustains legitimacy through the institutionalisation of representative government, independence of organs of government, transparency, accountability, due process in government business to approximate the benefits of good governance (Brinkerhoff & Johnson, 2008).

**Utilising the centralised strategy for fixing governance challenges in fragile states**

It is usually not unexpected for policy makers to strengthen and rely on central authorities in the task of stabilising and restoring good governance in highly fragile states. It is perceived that adopting centralised strategy by concentrating power to act at the centre will enhance the capacity of government to achieve the task of stabilising and restoring good governance unhindered and more quickly. The argument is that when there is a highly volatile state of affairs, time is of critical concern in bringing the situation back to normalcy even if brute force is ultimately required to achieve this feat. Further, because of several preconditions of international donours in tackling state fragility in terms of rules, regulations and procedures as it affects financial and other material assistance for infrastructural intervention that have nation-wide coverage, central authorities appear to be more handy to effectively execute the projects. This is not to say that several other governance issues such as peace building may be not be addressed better in a sustainable manner by decentralising some level of power to grassroots institutions (Picard et al., 2006).

There are a number of difficulties that beset the use of centralised strategy as the sole and overriding approach in the task of stabilising and restoring fragile states without recourse to grassroots authorities (Brinkerhoff & Johnson, 2008). No doubt, adopting a centralised strategy by using central government institutions that have a high degree of legitimacy and good record of service delivery in the eyes of the citizenry can vitalise the process of stabilising and restoring governance. However, a centralised strategy devoid of entrenched grassroots support stands the high risk of being intrinsically susceptible to instability. Research has shown that failure to incorporate grassroots authorities and smaller groups considered not important in the polity has turned to be a major cause of aggravation of state fragility. Sierra Leone stands out as one country where central level actors adoption of a centralised strategy by concentrating on utilising the government in capital city of Freetown alone in managing the challenge of conflict aggravated fragility. From Freetown, central government attempted to rule the periphery by meandering through traditional chiefs. This strategy created a fragile and unsustainable governance situation as it only brought disaffection and disenfranchisement to communities in the interior. It was not surprising that disaffection and disenfranchisement of these communities led to the formation of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) which prosecuted a decade long civil war with its attendant fragile state situation (Prest et al., 2005).

Secondly, in task of allocating and redistributing resources in an even-handed, the central governments have hardly performed well. The result is negative impact on the level of social and welfare services available to the people. A centralised strategy tends to negatively affect economic efficiency well as the management of ethnic problems. This is largely because distributive mechanisms are inclined to be guided by clandestine considerations instead fairness and equity (Hegarty et al., 2004).
Thirdly, in highly fragile states, it is difficult for the central government to effectively control social, economic and political affairs within its specified sphere of jurisdiction and by extension the exercise of sovereign power becomes illusive. This lapse in terms of the inability of to exercise firm control all over the length and breadth of the country by the central government, creates opportunity for ethnic and religious groupings to consolidate their local power base to function independently and become powerful enough to oppose the power at the centre.

Beyond decentralising central power to enhance the autonomous status of the localities, is the challenge of ensuring that decentralisation is done in way that it circumvents disintegration of the state or does not further increase its volatility. In Afghanistan, for example, attempts to embark on the task of stabilisation and restoration of good governance have been fraught with difficulties because of the fluid regional territory controlled by warlords (Lister & Wilder, 2007). Also, stark impoverishment and the inability of the national government in Papua New Guinea to advance the fortunes of the state economically have engendered all manner of societal negatives and the attendant lack of confidence of the citizenry in the ability of the state to legitimise its existence (Windybank & Manning, 2003).

**Using the grassroots strategy to restoring good governance**

While the need for urgency to attain some level of stability in a highly fragile state by adopting a centralised strategy must be appreciated, it is important to state that as long term measure, the involvement of the grassroots citizenry through their grassroots institutions in fragile states must be properly appreciated. Research and practice reveal clearly that adopting a solely centralised approach in carrying out the task of stabilisation and restoration in fragile states have hardly yielded satisfactory results (Brinkerhoff & Johnson, 2008). It is argued that there are several advantages which can accrue from decentralising specific powers to governments at the grassroots and thus move fragile states in the direction of stabilising restoring of good governance (Azfar et al., 2001).

Even in the height of state crisis, grassroots authorities can be used as good contact points that can help determine and attend to the daily priority requirements people in the local communities and thus help to prop up stability. Where the infrastructure base of a country have become dilapidated arising from unresolved conflict, the task of rehabilitating, maintenance and extending urgently needed services to citizenry is better accomplished in a sustainable manner by adopting a grassroots approach as against top-down approach. The grassroots approach can be local labour driven with assistance from central authorities can substantially help enhance the legitimacy and national institutions.

The local citizenry are in a good position to learn democratic skills and more effectively exercise their rights where there is ample devolution of decision-making authority, along with adequate resources to execute decisions taken at the local level. In effect, with sufficient devolution and resource provision, governance institutions at the grassroots can act as focal points for building participatory and conflict management capacities (Brinkerhoff & Azfar, 2006). Consequently, these local institutions are able to facilitate face to face interaction in resolving all matters of general and specific importance to the locality.
Through the extended governance space afforded by decentralised local government system, a unique opportunity is created for the grassroots citizenry to expand their dexterity in leadership as they take part in the local democratic process. As the local governance system stabilises, the positive impact of local politicians who have taken advantage of democracy to enhance their leadership skillfulness and management capacities being felt at the higher levels of government as a result of devolution, especially when they contest successfully elections and occupy political offices at the central level. Such leaders with their experience at the grassroots are ultimately in a better position to add value to the process of stabilising, reconstructing and restoring good governance in fragile states.

Decentralised governance in the form of up and running grassroots government system obviates centralised leviathan by creating several authority platforms, thereby dousing the tension arising from a “winner-take all” situations. This may manifest in leaders that are unlikely to win elections at the centre may win overwhelmingly in local elections. While it may be argued that the emergence of such local leaders may represent a form of elite capture, it is certainly a good beginning for a new and more robust social pact in a fragile state situation. With the opposition leaders in government at the local level, a centralised, single-party dominance is checked relatively if local elites can consolidate their hold at grassroots as authentic leaders to dare constituted authorities at the centre. This kind of check on central hegemony by implication positions grassroots institutions to assert their role in the amphitheatre for stabilisation and restoration in fragile states (Jones et al., 2008).

Johnson (1978) observed that working with decentralised authorities permits several experiments in the form of trying or adopting different strategies to establish a sustainable footing and elicit the backing of the local populace in fixing governance challenges. Also, since local governance institutions are characterised by their smallness in terms of jurisdiction and number of players, the grassroots strategy has the advantage of comparative speed in getting responses from stakeholders in the process of experimentation which help in prompt determination of positive and negative outcomes (Wunsch, 2005).

A significant benefit of decentralisation is that it provides opportunity for the local citizenry to effectively communicate and participate in local governance as a dynamic community (Smoke, 2003). There are however some challenges in implementing decentralisation through the instrumentality of local governments. Firstly, the expertise required for the implementation of decentralised system may be feeble and sometimes non-existent. Also, centripetal activists who do not want power to gravitate to the periphery may contend with centrifugal forces for fear of eminent diminished sphere of authority arising from decentralisation of administrative and financial powers.

Secondly, the enhancement of the powers of local elites and local government capacity may not guarantee popular participation that lead to pro-community policies and decisions, except there are in-built checks and balances connecting governments at all levels. (Migdal, 1988; Crook, 2003). Citizens may even be forced to request for amenities from the central authorities where local functionaries are insensitive to their needs and aspirations (Brinkerhoff & Goldsmith, 2004).
Thirdly, when the decentralisation strategy is perceived not to be achieving its anticipated purpose, popular support for the strategy may diminish and this may cause a u-turn in the direction of centralisation (Blair, 2000).

**Intermeshing the centralised and grassroots strategies**

The governance system in many fragile states is highly centralised. The perceived urgent need to provide security and maintain the flow of essential services to the citizenry nation-wide is usually given as the reason for central authorities holding on to and administering national resources. The process of decentralising a centralised system usually takes time as it requires administrative/technical capacity as well as political will (Smoke, 2003). A successful decentralisation process tends to start with deconcentration and then progresses towards devolution.

As starting point strategy, deconcentration or delegation of some powers to local authorities may help restore essential services, reduce poverty and stop further deterioration of the level of fragility in the short term. A lasting solution to state fragility using the grassroots strategy will require a super structure that will facilitate eventual devolution of powers to local communities (Marten, 2007)). The end goal is to institute sustainable governance mechanism that engenders representation, responsiveness, and accountability and legitimacy.

Building capacity at the central and sub-regional levels is of vital importance in the success of any decentralisation effort. There is the need to identify issues that are of broad national interests and those that are of sub-national interests for the purposes of skill acquisition for their effective management. Central authorities for example should be saddled with the task of analysing policy, instituting policy framework for action and carrying out oversight functions; while the major preoccupation of local institutions armed with administrative and technical skills should be in the sphere engaging the citizenry in the task of assessing local requirements, prioritising, planning, and implementing programmes. The goal of national and sub-national public officials should always be to mitigate conflict and contribute to national identity and integration by bridging ethnic and religious differences.

**Methodology**

This study utilised secondary data and relevant scholarly materials on organisation research as well as previous qualitative fieldworks in interrogating how grassroots institutions can participate in the critical responsibility of providing the much needed nourishment to states experiencing fragility to ensure stabilisation, reconstruction and governance restoration.

**Conclusions**

Achieving the right balance of spheres between local and central level governance in the task of stabilisation, reconstruction and restoration in fragile states is far from being a straightforward affair. This is largely due to the fact that the causes and consequences of state fragility are very challenging to resolve through the instrumentality of policy. The complexity arises from the viciousness of causes and consequences mix. Causes are expected to have consequences and as such need to be tackled expeditiously. However, consequences may turn out to be potential causes of continually increasing fragility. The implication of this viciousness in causes and consequences mix is that, great care has to be taken in the elimination of causes, management
consequences and the tracking of potential factors that can trigger fragility. To task of stabilising, reconstructing and restoring health to a battered governance system requires looking beyond the centre. Local governments have a critical role to play. There is the need to take cognisance this by intermeshing the centralised and grassroots approaches. Taking this step will speed up the pace at which sustainable normalcy can be achieved in fragile states through intervention policies to strengthen, reform and replace institutions.

**Recommendations**

Fragility in any state is a precarious and dire situation that needs a pragmatic solution. To stem the tide, government and all concerned stake-holders should take steps to:

- restore good governance by aggregating the diverse interests of its citizenry and facilitate harmonious integration of these interests in such a way that ensures that their needs and desires are accommodated.
- institute and sustain social, economic and political programmes in an even-handed manner that engenders the cooperation and support of the citizens.
- provide nourishment to the exiting stability deficit by adopting the strategy of intermeshing top-bottom and bottom-up approaches in a manner that ensures centre-grassroots nexus that will impact positively on the task of stabilisation, reconstruction and governance restoration.
- elicit the support development agencies at the international to deliver essential services in terms of guaranteed law and order, functional judicial system and critical social and economic infrastructure to the citizenry.
- ensure that experts and analysts factor in the dynamism fragile states exhibit in terms of their movement from a stable path to a conflict ridden path and again recovery to attain some level of stability in the sphere of state fragility to guarantee accurate assessment of the level of fragility within a specified time-frame.
- contextualise local peculiarities in applying the broad lessons learnt in the process of putting in place appropriate strategies in carrying out the task of stabilisation and restoration of good governance.
REFERENCES


