

Decentralisation Programme and Local People's Participation in the Upper Denkyira East Municipality of Ghana

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Abstract

The study sought to investigate Ghana's decentralisation programme and its influence on local people's participation in the Upper Denkyira East Municipality. In conducting the study, a qualitative research approach with a case study design was employed. A sample size of 62 respondents was purposively and conveniently selected for the study. Data for the study was collected using focus group discussion and interview guides. Data collected were analysed qualitatively on occurring themes from the interviews and the focus group discussions. The outcome of the study was that the local community members do not participate in the Assembly's development programme because the Assembly does not create the opportunity for them to do so. Based on the outcome of the study, it was recommended that the key Assembly officials must use their expertise to promote participatory governance in the Municipality to enable community members participate in the development of their own communities. In addition, the self-help spirit of the community members must be boosted to enable them understand the need to fund some projects to complement the Municipal Assembly's development initiative.

Keywords

Decentralisation Programme, Development, Ghana, Local People, Participation, Upper Denkyira East Municipality

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1. Introduction

Olowu and Wunsch assert that with the adoption of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) in the late 1980s, African countries also adopted the decentralisation programme [1]. The new political economy introduced by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank (WB) stressed economic reforms in which decentralisation was seen as a means of reducing the size of the state. African governments, had however, prior to this period, inherited from their colonial administrators a machinery of administration which was highly centralised. The colonial administrators in African countries used centralisation as a means to consolidate their authority over the colonies in an era when they were mainly concerned with the maintenance

of law and order. With little involvement of local communities, the system resulted in the planning of projects that did not serve the interest of most communities

African governments thus, inherited a legacy of underdevelopment from the colonial administrators. Immediately after independence, the governments therefore, had an arduous task of addressing rural underdevelopment. Their efforts, however, yielded minimum dividends because their development policies rather improved the conditions in the urban centres while those of the rural communities got worse [2]. Advocates of development are, however, of the view that internal political and social failures in African countries themselves have also been a contributory factor. These, in their view, include the pervasive lack of democracy and popular-participation in decision making and anti-rural

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bias of official policy [3]. Rasheed and Tomri further asserted that development planning in African countries has always been done from the centre and imposed on the people in the local communities [3]. According to them, many of such projects planned at the centre failed to meet the needs and expectations of the local communities because the local people were not involved in the planning and execution of these projects. To improve the conditions of rural communities, African government replaced one strategy with another with the view to finding lasting solutions to rural underdevelopment to bridge the gap between the urban and rural areas [3].

Olowu and Wunsch posited that, results from African countries after the adjustment period showed that the continent still had many challenges in the areas of education, sanitation, infrastructure and employment [1]. These crucial politico-economic challenges brought decentralisation again to the front stage. Politically, with the end of the Cold War toward the end of the 1980s, democratisation came to be an international trend. Decentralisation, particularly through promoting citizen participation in decision-making, was seen as a driving force towards democratisation and development [4].

The main features of Ghana's decentralisation programme are enshrined in Chapter 20 of the 1992 Constitution of Ghana. It states that Ghana shall have a system of local government and administration which shall, as far as practicable, be decentralised [5]. The legal basis for the implementation of the decentralisation programme was further broadened by amending the Local Government Law of 1988 (PNDC Law 207) into the Local Government Law of 1993 (Act 462) and then the Local Government Law 2016, Act 936. Other legislative provisions which have facilitated the implementation of Ghana's decentralisation programme include the Civil Service Law of 1993 (Act 327), National Development Planning Commission Act of 1994 (Act 479), National Development Planning Systems Act of 1994 (Act 480), Local Government (Urban, Zonal and Town Council and Unit Committees) Legislative Instrument of 1994, LI 1589 and the District Assemblies Common Fund Act of 1993 (Act 455) [5].

Decentralisation is one of the essential institutional reforms which various countries have embarked upon to bring development to their people in order to improve their lives. Decentralisation promotes the existence of democratic mechanisms that allow local governments to discern the needs and preferences of their constituents, as well as provide a way for these constituents to hold local governments accountable to them. According to Inkoom, Ghana's decentralisation is aimed at bringing government closer to the people to empower them to take decisions and to respond to

their needs more effectively [2]. The Act that established Ghana's decentralisation programme recognises that District Assemblies are to ensure the participation of the local inhabitants in the development of their communities (Local Government Law 1993, Act 462) [6]. That is, the Law recognises the need for District Assemblies to promote the participation of the local people in the identification, design, implementation and management of projects. Decentralisation is intended to bring several benefits such as smore efficient public administration, more effective development and good governance.

According to Akpan, decentralisation gives the local populace the power, voice and choice for better participation and to influence government to work according to community needs and demands [7]. In this case, decentralisation is an important channel in securing and guaranteeing improved quality of service delivered to local communities. This participation in turn contributes to improve accountability of public services because people can scrutinise local governments more closely than central governments. The services can also be delivered more speedily than in the case of a centralised administration since decentralisation reduces lengthy bureaucratic procedures for decision-making and implementation. The services then become more responsive to and tailored towards different needs of different localities.

By encouraging people's participation in the entire development process, people are informed about community work, involved in decision-making process (planning stage), and in the implementation stages. Thus, the involvement of people in all stages of the development process creates mutual partnership between the government/donors and communities. Community participation thus creates true democratic processes in development process [8].

The main aim of Ghana's decentralisation programme is to change the top-down development strategy to a bottom-up one in order to empower the local people to participate in the programmes and projects which affect their lives and, thus promote local level development. Conyers, maintains that the significant thing about Ghana's decentralisation is a concern for direct participation in decision-making, particularly on the part of the mass of the rural poor who have received little or no benefit as a result of earlier approaches to development [9].

The issues the study seeks to address are decentralisation and rural development in the Upper Denkyira East Municipality. These issues are very important because it is believed that government-led rural development programme would fail if local communities do not participate fully in the process of project selection, implementation and maintenance.

According to Sulemana, the objective of rural development is designed to improve the general welfare of the rural people and the only way this can be achieved is through their active involvement in the decision-making process [10]. Sulemana contended that this is the only way to make the process self-sustaining. He contends that earlier approaches to rural development did not take into consideration the important role that the people themselves can play in their development to achieve their desired objectives [10]. This shows that by bringing decision-making closer to local communities and encouraging their direct involvement in the political process, the prospects for sustained rural development would be significantly enhanced.

The motivation for the study was to examine the above issues – decentralisation and rural development in the Upper Denkyira East Municipality in order to determine whether the much talk about relationship between decentralisation and rural development is just a mere rhetoric or a reality. It is, therefore, important to study these issues to actually determine how the decentralisation programme is promoting rural development in Ghana, and especially in the Upper Denkyira East Municipality.

The purpose of the study was to examine the decentralisation programme as practised by the Upper Denkyira East Municipal Assembly and how it is promoting rural development in the Municipality. This research was guided by this question-How has the decentralisation programme influenced the local communities' participation in the development programme of the Municipal Assembly? The study was delimited to Upper Denkyira East Municipal Assembly of Ghana. It was further delimited to how the decentralisation programme has influenced the local communities' participation in the development process.

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Perspectives

This section reviews theories and literature on the practice of decentralisation and rural development. The theories that guided the study are the Decentralisation Theory, Developmentalist theory, Communitarian and the Empowerment theories. The Decentralisation Theory explains that the differences in the needs among regions is the best-known reason for the adoption of decentralisation policy or a decentralised structure of government. The theory states that central government is not responsive to the differences in the needs of the regions and, consequently is only able to implement uniform policies.

The decentralisation programme of Ghana is set out in the Local Government Law 1993, Act 462 and National

Development Planning System (NDPS) Law 1994, Act 480. Sections 1 (3, 4) and 2 to 11 of the NDPS Law mandate the National Development Planning Commission (NDPC) as the body responsible for providing guidelines to facilitate the preparation of development plans by the Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies. The Local Government Law, Act 462 and NDPS Act, Act 480 designate District, Municipal and Metropolitan Assemblies as the planning authorities, charged with the overall development of the districts [6]. To Oyugi, decentralisation is simply the transfer of authority on geographical basis [11]. It is, thus, simply the off-loading or spreading of governmental or management powers across geographical parts of a state; that is, from the centre to the periphery-regional, district and local levels. Decentralisation is thus any act in which a central government formally cedes power to actors and institutions at lower levels in a political-administrative and territorial hierarchy. From all the definitions, the meaning of decentralisation is made very clear, that it is the process of dispersing decision-making governance closer to the people or citizens

According to Oates, by decentralising, policies that are formulated to provide public services and infrastructure that are sensitive to local or regional conditions are likely to be more effective in promoting development than centrally-determined policies which do not consider or take into account these geographical differences [12].

According to Koethenbueger, decentralisation ensures that the provision of public goods satisfies local taste. The Decentralisation Theory, therefore, contends that public services should be provided by the government body having control over the minimum geographical area that would enjoy the benefits and also bear the costs of such public services [13]. The theory also argues that local governments would allow for greater participation and this would empower the local people to control, own and promote their own development.

Also, the Developmentalist Theory emerged as a more recent school of thought in the writings of Maddick, Cohen, Cheema, Rondinelli, Mawhood, Conyers, Nellis and Uphoff, among others. The theory is built on the premise that development should be people-oriented. According to them, through decentralisation there will be political, economic, and social development. Manor argues that there were five factors which led to the latest waves of decentralisation, namely degeneration of patronage system and ruling parties; over centralisation of power; influence of public choice approach; failure of government to increase resources; and the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of Cold War [14].

Decentralisation, according to developmentalist theorists, promotes better co-ordination of development activities. Conyers observed that by employing decentralisation, it is easier to produce integrated plans for specific areas and increase the efficiency and flexibility [15]. Decentralisation, according to developmentalists, undoubtedly leads to greater government accountability. People in decentralised systems have better access to representatives and officials; they can seek clarification from the representatives for their omission and commission. Decentralisation, as per the developmentalist view, is a measure for meeting the needs of the poor. Conyers contends that if development means the eradication of poverty, inequality and material deprivation, it must engage the involvement and the mobilisation of the poor [15].

The above theories are relevant to the study because they all support the main objective of the decentralisation programme as practised by various countries to promote good governance by giving the local community members, that is, those at the grassroot who previously were neglected in the development process, the opportunity to participate in their own development. The practice of decentralisation also ensures that quality information about local needs are obtained by local authority officials for their planning. This will ensure that community's priorities, that is, people's needs as a community are considered by the district level or local authority officials in the planning and implementation of development projects.

With participation, there is a growing consensus that people everywhere have a basic human right to take part in decisions which affect their lives. According to the World Bank, cited in Zadeh and Ahmad (2010), participation is a process through which stakeholders' influence and share control over development initiatives and decisions and resources which affect them [8].

Ghana's New Planning Act (Act 480) mandates the District Planning Authority to conduct a public hearing on any District development plan and consider the views expressed at the hearing on any proposed development plan [16]. According to Mollah, in democracy, traditionally, people use their rights to elect their representatives, who then hold the bureaucrats accountable for implementing any decisions that affect the local people [17]. This is supported by Bardhan who opined that actually the common practice in representative democracy or representative local governance is where people elect their representatives and are ruled by them [18]. This means people should participate in the governing process through their representatives to get services from the government. However, Sarker asserted that this scenario is changing as researchers argue that people no longer want to be considered as clients in the representative

form of democracy [19]. Today, most of the citizens, mainly in developed societies, want to put forward their opinions regarding any decision that has any future effect over them [20].

Though some researchers believe that direct participation is against or undermines the norms of democracy, it is found that representative democracy is not working as expected to meet the people's aspiration through their representation in many countries [21]. A research conducted by Holzer and Kloby revealed that direct public deliberation is useful in reducing a school budget and crafting state education policy in the USA [20]. Similarly, a national survey study on several Chief Executive Officers of cities with populations greater than 50,000 within the USA, revealed that collaboration between elected officials, public managers and citizens is associated with meeting public needs, building consensus, and improving public trust in government [22].

According to Denhardt, Terry, Delacruz and Andonoska, several researchers are now arguing for direct democracy, where people will be directly consulted to identify and implement their desired programmes [23]. This direct democracy is actually instrumental in terms of good governance, which supports the view that involved citizens become more informed and eager to dedicate their intellectual energy in pursuit of a solution [20]. Hope Sr. noted that today, many academics, politicians, donor agencies and civil societies are seeking direct participation of people in the governing process [21]. Their belief is that people are entitled to participate in all public affairs that have effects on their lives, and that this participation will remain at the heart of today's governance. Presently, the increasing trend of awareness by people of public matters has also forced the government to share their authority with people. Azmat, Alam and Coghill maintained that the best outcome of sharing this authority has finally forced all concerned institutions to place people at the centre of governance [24].

On the other hand, the attributes of good governance, those pointed out by the international development agencies, indicate a growing emphasis on economic development through an effective people-oriented government process, that is, governance. The governance indicators, including accountability, efficiency, effectiveness, transparency and participation, need to meet the public expectation of good governance [25]. Conceptually, the four major elements of good governance tend to be mutually supportive [24]. But, according to Rahman, people's participation is the central element among these [26]. More clearly, a people-participatory government ensures more transparency, accountability and predictability governance to its people. Underpinning this perception, the concept of good governance is seen as not just pro-people or people-centred;

it has to be owned by the people. In this sense, in governance, people become an inseparable part of decision making and the implementation of decided programmes.

Stivers contended that participation is a process of making active citizens, which in return hold accountability and transparency of the government works [27]. This is a kind of egg or chicken debate [28]. On the one hand, the supporters of former view asked for developing government institutions' capacity, decentralise administrative authorities, increase officials capability, introduce anti-corruption measures, and reform regulations related to media to make government accountable, transparent and legitimate; that is, to take government closer to the people by ensuring pro-people reforms. And thus good, governance will enhance responsibility, accountability and participation [21].

Participation as the World Bank defined it is a process through which people influence and share control over development initiatives and the decisions and resources which affect them [29]. Roberts defined people's participation as 'the process by which members of a society share power with public officials in making substantive decisions and in taking actions related to the community' (p. 320) [30].

Roberts argued that people's participation is a continuous process, and it passes through a few stages [30]. According to the view of the latter researchers, first, people are informed and then reach the control position of the decision through a continuous participation process or stages. People should participate before beginning a project and then take control over the project for the sustainable use of the outcomes.

Different researchers have described different stages of people's participation process in local development programmes. There are several models to that effects. One of the models which is the metaphoric eight rung ladder of participation process has been developed by Arnstein, and it consist of Manipulation, Therapy, Informing, Consultation, Placation, Partnership, Delegated power and Citizen Control [31]. In contrast, Wilcox proposed five stages of people's participation, and they are: Inform: one way communication, Consult: two-way communication; Involve: Deciding together; Collaborate: Acting together; and Empower: Supporting independent community interests [32].

A World Bank report cited in Akpan posited that three instruments used for people's participation are described, namely: staff of the governing agency; community groups or workers; and target or user groups [7]. This implies that development as a process of increasing people's capacity to determine their future means that people need to be included in the process of planning their needs and development.

Currently, participatory planning at local level is important because decentralised development planning remains a valid framework for sustainable development and good governance agenda. Participation as used in this study refers to local population being part of project identification and implementation. This is because individuals should fully participate and decide on their needs for their development.

3. Methodology

This study employed the qualitative research method because of its ability to provide valuable insights into the local perspectives of the participants. According to Denzin and Lincoln, a qualitative research focuses on the interpretation of phenomena in their natural settings to make sense in terms of the meanings people bring to these settings [33]. The research design adopted for the study was a case study. Punch contends that a case study aims to understand the case in-depth and its natural settings, reorganising its complexity and its context [34]. Punch further asserts that the case study also has a holistic focus, aiming to preserve and understand the wholeness and unity of a case [34].

The population for the study included the adult population of all the rural communities in the Upper Denkyira East Municipality (UDEM). That is, all residents who were 18 years and above. The population also included all the traditional authorities as well as the Assembly and Unit Committee members of various communities in the Municipality. Also included in the population were the key officials of the Assembly, Member of Parliament, Officials from the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development and the Office of the Common Fund Administrator.

The respondents for the research were purposively and conveniently sampled. The key Assembly officials were selected because of their role in the work of the Assembly as well as their knowledge and the expertise they have in promoting local level governance. In line with this, the Municipal Chief Executive (MCE), Municipal Coordinating Director (MCD), Municipal Planning Officer (MPO) and the Municipal Budget Officer (MBO) were purposively selected for the study.

The Upper Denkyira East Municipality is divided into five Area Councils. An Area Council is made up of several communities. One community each was conveniently selected from each Area Council. The communities selected for the study were Sobroso, Oponso, Kyekyewere, Mfuom and Buabinso. In addition to the key Assembly officials and the Assembly members, the purposive sampling technique was also employed in selecting the five Unit Committee members each from the five study communities. As the

representatives of the communities at the Assembly, the Assembly and the Unit Committee members were sampled for the study in order to get their views about the role they play at the Assembly and in their communities respectively, in helping to bring development to their communities.

Five traditional authorities made up of four chiefs and one queen of the study communities were also purposively sampled for the study. Indeed, their views and the kinds of consultation that go on between them and the Assembly as well as the Assembly member before they give out lands for project execution were important in drawing conclusions for the study. A queen instead of a chief was selected in one of the communities because the community in question had no chief.

Seven other members each from the five selected communities were either conveniently or purposively selected for the study. That is, 35 other residents including teachers, women and youth leaders, religious leaders, market women, farmers and artisans (masons, electricians, carpenters, etc), among others, were selected for the study. This was done to obtain information on how other residents of the communities participate in the Assembly's development programme. The Member of Parliament (MP) for the Upper Denkyira East Constituency was purposively selected for the study because as an ex-officio member of the UDEMA, his views about the Assembly's role in promoting the development of communities in his constituency was very important. Finally, one official each from the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development (MLGRD) and Office of the Common Fund Administrator were purposely sampled for the study. In all, 62 respondents were involved in the study. A summary of respondents sampled for the study is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. A Summary of Respondents Sampled for the Study.

Sample Group	Number	Sampling Method
Key Assembly Officials	4	Purposive
Chiefs	4	Purposive
Queenmother	1	Purposive
Assembly members	5	Purposive
Unit Committee members	10	Purposive
Other Community Members	35	Purposive/ Convenient
Member of Parliament	1	Purposive
Official from the MLGRD	1	Purposive
Official from the Office of the Common Fund Administrator	1	Purposive
Total	62	

Source: Field Data, 2018

Focus group discussion and interview guides were the instruments employed for gathering of data for the study. Three focus group discussions were held with the members of various identifiable groups and other community residents in three selected communities. The selection of participants

for the focus group discussion in three communities was not done arbitrary but was done carefully to ensure that all identifiable groups were represented. The identifiable groups, the number of participants selected for each group and their sexes are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Focus group discussion participants.

Identifiable group	Male	Female	Total
Unit Committee	1	1	2
Teachers	1	0	1
Women Leader	0	1	1
Youth Leader	1	0	1
Religious Leader	1	1	2
Market women	0	1	1
Farmers	1	1	2
Artisans	1	0	1
Total	6	5	11

Source: Field Data, 2018

The focus group discussion became an essential part of this study in order to examine how community members, including identifiable groups and Unit Committee members, teachers, women leader, youth leader, religious leaders, market women and artisans participate in the Municipal Assembly's development programme. Three focus group discussions were separately held at Kyekyewere, Mfoum and Sobroso. Kyekyewere was the first community selected for focus group. And here, the researcher engaged 11 people made up of 6 men and 5 women to share their opinions on how they participate the Assembly's development programmes.

Sobroso was the second community where 11 people, mostly adults from two communities, namely Sobroso and Oponso participated in the discussion. They were made up of 6 women and 5 men. At Sobroso, instead of the usual 6 men and 5 women participants in the focus group discussion, it was rather the opposite. That is, 6 women and 5 men participated. The reason was that all the two farmers selected were women instead of the usual 1 woman and 1 man. As adults, these respondents were passionate about their communities' and by extension their Municipality's development. They were, therefore, more than ready to participate in the discussion.

The third and final focus group discussion was held at Mfoum and here too 11 people made up of 6 men and 4 women participated in the discussion. The ages of the participants ranged between 22 and 51 years. The participants were eager to participate in the discussion because they heard that the study was about the Assembly's development activities which they were interested in.

To ensure that all members participate fully in the discussions, ground rules were set to guide the sessions. The researcher also doubled as the facilitator, and with the help of

the discussion guide, raised questions for discussion. In addition, he asked probing questions to solicit views and other pieces of information relevant to the study. The issues discussed centred on the participation of community members in the Assembly's development programme, including needs assessment, prioritising, implementation, monitoring and evaluation as well as issues regarding indigenous resources in the communities and whether or not the Assembly harnesses them in its development programme.

In addition to the focus group discussions, Key Assembly Officials, Chiefs, Assembly Members, Unit Committee Members, the MP for the Upper Denkyira East Constituency and an official each from the MLGRD and the Office of the Common Fund Administrator were interviewed for the study. In general, the interview sought information on the participation of the local people in the Assembly's development programme.

A cross-case analysis procedure was adopted to a common answer provided by all the respondents in each category were classified under a common theme [35]. The views of participants of the five groups were then compared for consistency of responses.

4. Findings and Discussions

Respondents' views about participation in the development programme in the UDEMA are presented in this section. By local communities' participation, the study sought to establish the detailed proposal established by the Assembly which is commonly referred to as project planning, starting from project identification, prioritisation and design to implementation, monitoring and evaluation and how the local communities participate in all these stages.

4.1. Knowledge of Community Members and Identifiable Groups About the Assembly's Development Plan

When community respondents, including members of identifiable groups such as youth and women movements, religious groups and teachers were asked if they were aware of the Assembly's development plan, all the respondents responded in the negative. One respondent from Oponso, a market woman remarked, "I don't even know that such a thing exists at the Assembly".

All but one chief and a queen were aware of the Assembly's development plan. But, asked to tell how the Assembly drew its development plan, all the three chiefs who said that they were aware of the plan maintained that they did not know how it was drawn. However, all the Assembly members, said that they were aware of the Assembly's development plan and added that they took part in its

preparation as it went through all the stages as prescribed by the NPDC. When the MP for the Upper Denkyira East Constituency (UDEC) was asked whether he was aware of the Assembly's development plan, he responded in the affirmative but declined to comment on whether or not he took part in its preparation.

On the information on projects made available to community members before their implementation, it was also found through the focus group discussion that community members had very little information about a project before implementation. The study revealed that those who had some information about any project obtained it either through rumours or from the executing contractor when he moved to the project site to begin work. Through interviews with traditional authorities in the study communities, it was established that chiefs were informed about a project when the Assembly needed land to start it. The data above make two things clear. First, members of the local communities knew that they were entitled to information about a project to be executed in their communities, but they expected the Assembly to provide this information without asking for it. Second, the Assembly knew that it must provide information on a project to be executed in a community but such information would not be made available until it was demanded by the communities. When the issue is looked at this way, then it may appear the Assembly cannot be blamed for not providing information on a project to the communities. But, the 1992 Republican Constitution of Ghana which gives legal backing to the MMDAs mandate them to promote participation of local communities in their programmes. It is specifically provided in Article 240 (e) that, to ensure accountability of local government authorities, people in particular local government areas shall, be afforded the opportunity to participate effectively in their governance [5].

The constitutional provision above means that it is mandatory for the MMDAs to provide all the necessary information about projects they wish to execute in the selected communities to the people to enable them offer their support to the MMDAs to ensure project success. A study by Putnam found that local governments that provided the requisite information on projects to the local people delivered services more efficiently than those which concealed information [36]. Putnam's findings further showed that the apparent mistrust that usually characterise the relationship between the Assembly and community members gives way to mutual respect and cooperation if information were made available to the people on projects executed by the Assembly [36].

4.2. Information Community Members Have on Projects Executed by the Assembly

The study revealed that, the Assembly provided very little information to community members about projects before it implemented them. It emerged from the study that those who had information about projects obtained it through rumours, especially those who are close to the chiefs. A trader at Buabinso said, "The Assembly usually contacts my chief for land to be released to execute its projects and it is during this time that we become aware of the Assembly's intention to execute the project". The following were the community identifying group members' views on their participation.

4.2.1. Community and Identifiable Group Members' Views on Their Participation in Projects Executed by Assembly in the Communities

All the respondents in the study communities, namely Oponso, Sobroso, Kyekyewere, Buabinso and Mfuom admitted that they do not participate in the development programme of UDEMA. For example, one male resident of Sobroso had this to say:

All the projects the Assembly had executed in the community followed the same pattern; the officials came to see our chief for land, and we were here when the contractor came with his materials and workers, and started working till the work was completed.

A female respondent of Oponso when asked about whether she participates in the Assembly's development programme said, "This is the first time I am being made aware that the residents of this community are supposed to play a role whenever the Assembly is to execute a project here".

A resident teacher at Kyekyewere was quick to remark when the question of participation was put to him. He asked, "Is the so-called participation a new thing being introduced by the Assemblies in Ghana or it has been there already". According to him, he has been teaching in the community for the past eight years but had never heard of or seen the practice where the Assembly took any step to get the residents participate in projects executed there.

Residents were asked whether their representatives, the Assembly members had ever organised meetings in their communities to deliberate on the projects they desire to have. Almost all the respondents responded in the negative. For example, a male resident of Buabinso said,

"Even though several meetings have been organised several times by our Assembly members, they are not meant to deliberate on the projects that we will need here".

The study found out that such meetings were organised rather

to brief them on some decisions taken at the Assembly's meetings and sometimes, a project to be implemented in the community that had already been approved. A male resident of Oponso had this to say:

Our Assembly member is good; he helps us in several ways; he makes good donation at funerals and naming ceremonies. He also settles disputes and handles cases that need to be sent to the police station for redress. But he has never discussed with us at our meetings, the projects that we wish to have in this community.

When the respondents were asked if they were satisfied with the projects executed by the Assembly in their communities despite their non-involvement in the selection of those projects, the majority of the respondents responded in the affirmative. One woman from Sobroso commented, "All the projects the Assembly has executed here are good. They address our needs. Now we have water every day because of the water project the Assembly has executed here".

4.2.2. The Traditional Authorities' Participation in the Assembly's Projects Executed in the Communities

Like the community and identifiable group members, the traditional authorities were also asked whether or not they knew about the Assembly's development plan. All but the queen responded in the affirmative that, they had knowledge of the Assembly's plans.

Asked about their role in the preparation of the plan, all the four chiefs said that they played no role and rather asked about the role they were expected to play. One of the chiefs asked, "If the Assembly in its own wisdom thinks that it has money to execute projects and pays for all of them without bothering me and my people, what role do I have to play in this regard"? Generally, none of the chiefs played any role in the Assembly's plan preparation, but that did not affect them in any way because they saw nothing wrong about that.

When the traditional authorities were asked if they participate in the Assembly's projects executed in their communities, they said that they are informed of the project to be implemented when the Assembly needs them to release land for the execution of the project. For example, when asked to tell whether he took part in the selection of projects executed in his community, a chief maintained:

Nobody has ever consulted me on the type of project to be considered for execution in this community. The only time the Assembly member or the Municipal Chief Executive (MCE) spoke to me and my elders about a school project was when land was needed from us for the execution of the project.

Another chief maintained that even though the Assembly had

provided the community with a modern water supply facility which is very good and is helping the community residents in several ways, he was not informed about it until the Assembly member returned from one of the Assembly's meetings to inform him about the project. This was at a stage that the project had already received approval of the Executive Committee of the Assembly and land was needed to start the project. The chief also added:

It is not only in the area of project selection that I have been side-lined. On different occasions, people have been appointed as government appointees at the Assembly, but I know nothing about such appointments. I am simply not consulted.

Citing Article 242 (d) of the 1992 Republican Constitution of Ghana to support his claim: "Other members of not being more than 30 percent of all the members of the District Assembly, appointed by the President in consultation with traditional authorities and other interest groups in the district". The chief lamented, "I am sad and highly disappointed about such treatment meted out to me by the Assembly". Another chief intimated:

The Assembly, in addition to consulting me when it needs a land for a project, also consults me when I am needed to assist in organising a durbar to inaugurate a project. As for the selection of projects, I have never been consulted.

But the chief was quick to add that, for the Municipality to develop, the Assembly is needed to play the crucial role of ensuring that all its stakeholders, including traditional authorities, Assembly members, unit committees and community residents participate in the development process. The chief concluded, "Involving, for example, community members and their traditional authorities would ensure that projects would meet the aspirations of the people".

One other chief, in response to whether or not he participated in the projects implemented in his community contended:

May be the Assembly member, our representative at the Assembly participated in the projects selected and implemented here, but I did not. On two different occasions that we were that lucky to receive from two projects, namely boreholes and a classroom block from the Assembly, the Assembly member just walked to my palace and introduced the contractors. Apart from that, the details of the contract, including the cost of the projects were never disclosed to me.

The chiefs were also asked whether they had gone to the Assembly to complain about the poor relationship between them and the Assembly, to which all of them responded in the negative.

4.3. The Views of Key Officials at the Assembly About the Assembly's Planning Process

In this section, the views of the key officials at the Assembly concerning how they promote participatory development in the Municipality are presented. The key officials are the: Municipal Chief Executive (MCE), Municipal Coordinating Director (MCD), Municipal Planning Officer (MPO) and the Municipal Budget Officer (MBO). First of all, the Municipal Planning Officer was asked to explain how Assembly prepares its development plan. In answering the question, he explained:

In the preparation of the Assembly's development plan, there is the need for the Assembly to undertake the Municipality's situational analysis which usually starts at the community level, called the community action plan. In this action plan, the communities or their representatives, including the Assembly member, unit committee members and traditional authorities identify and prioritise the needs of the community.

One other official maintained that the next stage of the plan is the organisation of public forum where a presentation is made on the plans obtained from the Area and Zonal Councils. This is followed by identification and prioritisation of the development needs of the communities presented by the Councils. According to the official, the next step is the harmonisation of issues and public hearing of the plans at Area Councils meeting. This is followed by another public hearing, according to the MPO, where the plans are adopted and approved. After all these, there is a final step in the form of a written report on the public hearing. This written report becomes the proposed District Plan and together with written submissions by individuals, groups, organisations and communities, it is presented to the National Development Planning Commission (NDPC) for approval. Another official corroborated the position of the MPO by pointing out that the Assembly prepared its plans in line with the guidelines provided by the NDPC. She, however, did not elaborate on the guidelines.

Reacting to the same question how the Assembly prepares its development plan, the MCD contended that the Assembly's development plans are prepared through an elaborate process. He maintained that the problems and opportunities of various communities are considered by the sub-committees of the Executive Committee. In addition, the sub-committees define, prioritise and present them to the Executive Committee. The Municipal Assembly, specialists of various sectors and other functional agencies then collaborate with one another to come out with a plan. The official, however, said that the plan is budgeted and presented for debate by the Assembly after initial approval by the Executive Committee

of the Assembly.

In an answer to the question of whether all the steps mentioned above are followed by the Assembly in its development plan preparation, all of them said no with the explanation that if all the steps were to be followed, it would take a very long time for the Municipality to get its development plan ready. For example, one official lamented, "If all the steps are to be followed, it will take the Assembly more than one year to get its development plan ready".

He continued:

Apart from the long period of time needed to successfully go through the long steps, it is also very expensive to operate. If the Assembly is bent on implementing it, the Assembly would be left with no funds to start implementing the projects in the plan.

Adding her voice to the position of the said official, one female contended:

The Assembly does not have adequate staff with the requisite expertise to go to all the communities to carry out this role. And with this and other constraints, it is difficult for the Assembly to go through the long process to prepare the proposed plan for the Municipality.

The official maintained that if the complex procedures that the Assembly has to go through are followed, nothing can be done to improve the conditions of the communities in the Municipality. What the Assembly does is to eliminate the consultative processes to make way for the speedy implementation of projects. She said, "The Assembly cannot be a slave to the cumbersome consultation processes. Consequently, on issues that Assembly needs to act swiftly, it uses its discretionary powers to do that".

According to official, the selection and execution of projects in various communities usually start from the reports submitted by various heads of department and also through the visits the officials of the Assembly, especially the MCE and the MCD pay to the communities to assess their needs. According to the said official, these visits are made occasionally. He added that the reports received from various heads of department such as feeder roads, health, water and education are very important for the preparation of the Assembly's development plan.

One other means for getting reports from the communities is through the Assembly members as noted by a female official. According to her:

As the people's representatives, the Assembly members have the responsibility of meeting their people periodically and briefing them about the

decisions taken at the Assembly's meetings. It is also their responsibility to carry the concerns of the people, including the projects they want to have to the Assembly.

When the officials were asked whether the Assembly has a mechanism in place to ensure that the Assembly members periodically meet their people to deliberate on their problems, and inform the Assembly about the outcome of such meetings, and also ensure that they (the Assembly members) inform the people of the decisions usually arrived at the Assembly, the officials responded that, that is not their mandate. The female official replied, "We, the officials have no role to play in this respect. That is why it is important for the community members to vote for people who can do the work expected of Assembly members". The response given by the official was in line with the view held by the MLGRD official when he was asked the role the Ministry plays in ensuring that MMDAS involve the communities in the planning process. The official said that the Ministry cannot monitor what goes on in all the Assemblies and besides, the Regional Coordinating Council in each region has oversight responsibilities of such a role and so they should do that.

The responses given by the key officials of the Assembly show that the guidelines provided by the NDPC in drawing its development plan are not negotiable; they must be followed to the letter. The planning process which starts from the community demands the participation of all stakeholders. However, the study found out that the community members' participation in the Assembly's planning process, including the identification, prioritising, implementing, monitoring and evaluating of projects was absent. It was simply non-existent.

When the MP was asked whether or not he participates in the planning process of the Assembly, he contended that his position at the Assembly as an ex-officio member places a limitation on the role he plays there. He said, "If I am not permitted to take part in voting to arrive at decisions at the Assembly, how can I participate in their development programme".

According to him, the only thing he does as far as the Assembly's development programme is concerned is to lobby for projects for various communities from the appropriate Ministries. Asked to give an example of such projects, the MP stated that when Assembly members complain about the poor nature of their community roads, he usually goes to the Assembly to discuss with the MCE, in most cases, for the release of the road construction equipment of the Assembly to work on such roads.

The MP also maintained that his work in Parliament takes him out of the Constituency for most of the time and this affects his participation in the Assembly's meetings. He said,

“most times, they take decisions in my absence, and I am briefed on such decisions when I return to the Constituency and pay visits to the Assembly”.

4.4. Participation of Communities in Planning

Evidence from the focus group discussions indicate that the ordinary community members do not participate in the identification and selection of projects that are implemented in the communities.

The reason is that the Assembly’s officials consider participation in development planning as time-consuming and expensive to implement. Thus, from the foregoing analysis, it appears that the local people’s participation in the development process has been deliberately overlooked by the officials at the Assembly. This is because as the key officials at the Assembly, they are aware of the consultative processes outlined in the NDPC guidelines to prepare the Municipality’s development plan. However, they ignore the process because of its numerous challenges it poses to them. The situation, therefore, is that because the consultative process is long and arduous, the Assembly has taken advantage of the community members’ silence to demand participation and has thus, resorted to its own convenient way of development planning. The key officials at the Assembly are, therefore, behaving as if no consultative process exists to guide their preparation of the Municipality’s development plan. It can be inferred from the foregoing discussion that the Municipal Assembly officials fear that the empowerment of local communities through participation is likely to increase their workload and ultimately slow down the process of project implementation.

The process of participation has been limited to the mere giving of information to communities by the Assembly. Community members, including their chiefs are informed when contractors are about to begin work on a project. The mere giving of information has also been reported elsewhere in Africa. In her study of the local government system in Zimbabwe, Conyers discovered that communities were merely informed about a project being executed. They were not consulted at the planning stage about the nature and form of the project. All decisions regarding a project were taken by the local government officials [37]. The present study supports these findings that community members in the study area were not given the opportunity to select and implement their own projects.

From the interviews and the focus group discussions conducted, the study has established that the ordinary community members as well as their chiefs do not participate in the Assembly’s planning process, including identification and prioritising of projects that the Assembly implements. In

fact, none of the respondents from the communities and their four chiefs and the queen participate in the Assembly’s development programme. It also appears that the Assembly officials see community participation as a waste of time and also expensive to operate.

From the above, it is clear that the communities do not participate in the planning process of the Assembly because the officials of the Assembly have overlooked it. The officials are aware of the NDPC guidelines that they are to adopt to prepare the Assembly’s development plan, but because the consultative process is long, time-consuming and expensive, the officials have taken advantage of the community members’ ignorance and have employed their own method to select projects to be implemented. There was no consultation between the Assembly officials and the communities that benefited from projects, leaving the key officials of the Assembly to take all decisions concerning the projects they execute in various communities. This confirms the assertion by Stewart and Taylor that in determining which issues the community is allowed to be involved in, public officials who control the agenda for discussion usually put the operational issues on the agenda while the strategic ones are decided elsewhere [38]. The study identifies with this observation and indicates that details about a project such as its cost, duration and how the contractor was selected are not disclosed. But as Stewart and Taylor again observed, people are expected to be responsible for themselves and should, therefore, be active in public service decision-making [38]. This is important because public officials see power as a finite resource and, therefore, by empowering the local communities through participation in decision-making, they end up diluting their own power. This seems to suggest that until the local people themselves demand participation, public officials on their own, will not deliver it to them.

But Ghana’s decentralisation policy requires communities to participate in the design of project. Msewa, found that projects that were designed by the Assemblies for communities were first presented at stakeholder forums for approval before implementation [39]. In the study area, the artistic impressions of classroom blocks or markets that were constructed were never presented at stakeholder forums or meetings to enable communities have a prior view of how the projects would look like upon completion. They are designed, approved and implemented by the Assembly alone.

Evidence from interviews with chiefs established that it was not only in the planning and implementation of projects that chiefs did not participate in the Assembly’s programme, but also in matters that the law mandates it to involve them. For example, the Constitution of Ghana requires the President, acting through the MMDAs, to consult chiefs and other opinion leaders in the District when appointing members into

the Assemblies. All of the Traditional Authorities (chiefs and the queen) were of the view that these appointments were made without their knowledge. Even though the researcher did not make any attempt to get the Assembly officials to state their side, it appears the violation of this constitutional provision is a widespread phenomenon. Chiefs in other Districts in Ghana also suffer similar fate.

Ahwoi, seems to know why chiefs are not consulted in the appointment of the 30 percent membership of the Assembly [40]. He explain that partisan caucuses are formed in the Assemblies so that they can at any point in time, obtain the two thirds majority necessary to approve the President's nominee for the position of MMDAs. The violation of the constitutional provision and the appointment of party loyalists to constitute the thirty percent membership of the Assemblies, implies the President has interest in the composition of the Assembly's membership, so that the approval of the DCE can be done with ease. This study identifies with Ahwoi's claim and further reveals that the thirty percent appointment to the Assembly in the study area has always been filled with party loyalists who have at various times facilitated the approval of the President's nominee as DCE.

Msewa, however provides a contrast to what obtains in the study area in his study of the local government system in the Lilognwe District of Malawi [39]. He found that chiefs in the District were rather powerful individuals who together with the District bureaucrats determined what should be done in the communities. Unlike the situation in the study area, chiefs in Lilognwe together with District officials made decisions and planned development which was handed to the communities in a top-down fashion. This, according to him, led to more community inputs.

4.5. The Participation of Assembly and Unit Committee Members in the Assembly's Development Programme

The five study communities have five Assembly members and the researcher sought to establish how they together with the ten unit committee members participate in the Assembly's development programme to promote the development of their electoral areas. The study revealed that to promote the development of the Municipality, the Assembly members perform two separate responsibilities, namely their responsibilities to their communities and to the Assembly. The study further revealed that Assembly members take part in the deliberations at the Assembly's meetings and also serve on various sub-committees at the Assembly. Asked to mention the sub-committees of the Assembly, one Assembly member identified the following: Development Planning, Social Services, Work, Justice and Security, and Finance and

administration sub-committees. He added that the Assembly has the power to create any other sub-committee as it may deem necessary.

All the five Assembly members saw the various roles that they play whether in their respective committees or at the Assembly, as a means of helping the Assembly to bring development to the Municipality. One Assembly member of maintained that he sometimes plays the role of a policeman. He noted:

If somebody goes to steal from somebody's farm and a report is made to me, sometimes, I arrange with the two parties and settle the matter amicably, of course with the thief being asked to return or pay for the stolen item. After that I make the thief compensate the owner of the item. At other times, I ensure that the case is sent to the police station, especially if the thief does not cooperate with me.

According to him, very serious cases are reported to the police at Dunkwa, the capital town of the Municipality. He added that, included in the role he plays is that of humanitarian. That is, he supports the education of needy children at both the basic and senior high school levels. According to him, he also facilitates the admission of the children of community members into senior high schools and nursing training institutions. On his participation in the Assembly's work, he maintained, "The Assembly work is done through the committee system and members belong to, at least, one committee depending on their qualifications, skills and experiences. I am a member of the social services sub-committee". He was, however, unable to tell his actual role at the said committee.

Another Assembly member, a female maintained that she participates in the Assembly's meetings and also belongs to the Development Planning Sub-Committee. She contended, "This sub-committee harmonises all the planning activities of Area and Zonal councils". She also did not specify her actual role in this sub-committee. However, she admitted that she plays other several roles in her community. For example, as the representative of her community at the Assembly. She said, "I meet the members of my community after which I take their concerns to the Assembly. I also inform the people of the decisions arrived at the Assembly".

Another male Assembly member spoke about his participation in the Assembly's development programme but, first, noted his contributions to his community. He admitted that his work at the Assembly is not an easy one because he lacks funds to support whatever he wants to do. According to him:

He mobilises the people to undertake clean-up

exercises especially on the National Sanitation Day which usually falls on the first week of every month. By this, the community is able to clear all bushes in and around the community, desilt gutters and sweep all the major and minor streets to promote a healthy and clean environment.

According to another male Assembly member, the role of Assembly member cuts across every aspect of community life. He opined:

Everybody sees you as the leader of the community. I settle marriage disputes, attend to problems in our basic schools, ensure that people settle their indebtedness to others and lead them to provide various services to the community.

According to him, though he serves on the Development Planning committee, the Executive Committee of the Assembly usually sets aside their decisions and implements its own. As he rightly said, "The Assembly members are actually seen to be working at the Assembly when it comes to deliberations at sittings and taking part in voting."

All the ten unit committee members, however, contended that they do not participate in the Assembly's development programme. They said that they did not directly deal with the Assembly. They rather deal with the Assembly members and their communities. The chairman of one of the Unit Committees insisted, "We do not go to the Assembly to enquire about anything. We don't also take part in the Assembly's meetings. Members of the unit Committee act on the information we receive from our Assembly member and then together with him, we act on it".

Asked to mention how they participated in the projects executed by the Assembly, all the ten unit committee members admitted that they did not play any role and that the projects executed by the Assembly usually get to their attention when such projects had already been approved by the Assembly and are about to take off. The usual practice is that they always hear about project implementation when the contractor comes to the community to introduce himself to the chiefs. For example, another Unit Committee Chairman of said:

I was called to the chief's palace when the contractor who had been awarded the contract to extend electricity from Dunkwa to this community came here for the first time to introduce himself. When he came here, the contract had already been awarded and all issues relating to it had been concluded. We as Unit Committee members, were just told about it, in fact, we suggested or added nothing to the project design.

Asked to mention their responsibilities, the Unit Committee members stated that they team up with the Assembly member to organise meetings to discuss matters of interest to the community and also initiate and supervise communal activities such as weeding and cleaning, renovating school buildings, arresting criminals and taking them to the police station at Dunkwa, among others.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

The members of the community, including their chiefs, Unit Committee members and identifiable groups do not participate in the Assembly's development programmes because the officials of the Assembly have not created the opportunity for their participation.

Such a practice will have far reaching consequences on the development of the local communities. That is, this will lead to a situation where the actual needs of the people will need not be provided by the Assembly. That is, the Assembly will always end up imposing projects on the people for lack of consultation.

From the study, members of the communities know nothing about the role they are expected to play in the Assembly's governance system. There is, therefore, the urgent need for the Assembly to sensitise or educate community members in the Municipality to understand the role they are expected to play in the Assembly's planning process. In addition, identifiable local groups such as youth movements, women groups, traditional authorities, political and religious groups in various communities should team up with their Assembly members and Unit committee members to make project proposals to the Municipal Assembly for consideration. The Municipal Assembly must also employ additional staff and equip them with skills in participatory governance system and deploy them to the communities to sensitise the people about their role in the Assembly's governance system.

The NCCE must be resourced to go to the communities to sensitise the people on the need for them to contribute to their development. The Assembly should also institute outreach programmes in various communities to sensitise the members on its development programmes and activities and the role the members are expected to play. This can be done by using the local radio stations, mobile vans and community announcement points to promote community members' knowledge and understanding of the Assembly's programmes and activities.

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