

# Ghana's Decentralization Policy and Community Participation in Development Planning: A Study of the Amansie West District

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## Abstract

The study investigated Ghana's decentralization policy and its influence on community participation in development planning in the Amansie West District of Ashanti, Ghana. The descriptive survey design was adopted for the study and guided by the random sampling technique, 72 respondents from six (6) community-based groups were selected to constitute the first group of respondents. In addition, purposive sampling was employed to select three (3) assembly officials and five (5) assembly members for the study. In all, eighty (80) respondents participated in the study. Questionnaire and interview guide were the main instruments for data collection. The study established that a large proportion of the respondents knew that they should participate in the assembly's development planning but they did not consider it necessary to do so because the assembly officials are paid to engage in the planning of the district. The assembly officials also knew that they must follow the NDPC's guidelines in preparing their development plans but they did not follow them because they considered the guidelines too cumbersome and expensive to follow. Rather, they resorted to field reports and requests from community members to draw up their plans. The study recommended that the National Commission on Civic Education must strengthen awareness among community members about their role in development planning. In addition, it is recommended that the Regional Coordinating Councils (RCCs) must not approve the plans of any assembly that does not follow the NDPC guidelines in preparing its plans.

## Keywords

Decentralization Policy, Community Participation, Development Planning

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## 1. Introduction

Decentralization creates an essential environment for true participatory development to emerge. All the ideas embraced in good local governance are those espoused in people-centred development. Advocates of community participation in development planning believe that participation brings many lasting benefits to people instead of only serving as a means of getting things done.

Hoverman and Buchy, argue that decentralized development

planning is one of the many ways of devolving decision-making from the government to the people. They explain planning as a process that connects scientific and technical knowledge with activities in the public domain to enhance social transformation processes [1]. In more specific terms and in the context of this study, decentralized planning is the participatory process of local development where the knowledge, experience, and felt needs and priorities of community members as actors in the development process are taken into consideration in the formulation of local plans through the spaces available to them.

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Decentralized planning, according to Olowu and Wunsch, became a global trend following the collapse of Communist Regimes and the adoption of Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) by African governments in the 1980s [2]. Kumar, observes that it was in the context of this awakening that the European Charter of Self-Government was adopted in the 1980s which paved the way for several European Union member countries to embark on reforms aimed at strengthening governance at the local level. For instance, as part of the democratic reforms in Albania, new laws were enacted while old ones were changed to give local government institutions the power to act and perform [3]. Kumar further notes that the process of decentralization in Macedonia started with the Local Government Law of 2002 which extended responsibilities of municipalities by giving them the right to perform their responsibilities independently and being subject only to legality oversight [3].

In Russia, Armenia and Azerbaijan, local government was made legally autonomous and institutionally separated from the structures of the state [4]. Gaventa, contends that in both the North and South new voice mechanisms had been explored since the 1980s which argued for more direct connections between the people and the bureaucracies which affected them [4]. Similarly, the Commonwealth Foundation argues that the connection between states and communities must be based on participation and inclusion rather than on traditional modes of representation through intermediaries and political party members and structures [5].

Prior to this period, the assumption was that representative democracies provided avenues for citizens to express their preferences through electoral politics, and, in turn, it was the job of the elected representatives to make policy, initiate and plan development and also to hold the state accountable. In contemporary representative democracies, citizens are very much active in the political space and are always bent on participating directly in matters that affect them.

In Africa, the Structural Adjustment Programme of the 1980s came along with decentralization in which community or grass root participation in development planning became the mantra and popular slogan. Ghana responded to the international trend and adopted the decentralization policy in 1988. The policy, as set out in the Local Governance Act, 2016 (Act 936) designates the Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies as the planning authorities charged with the overall responsibilities of developing the districts. The benefits of community participation in development planning have been espoused variously by researchers and development advocates. For instance, Ahwoi, observes that participation in development planning helps to overcome the indifferences, pessimism and passivity of local communities, securing their commitment to developments that need a

change of attitudes [6]. The World Bank, associates citizen participation with citizen power and control as, “the redistribution of power that enables the have-not citizens presently excluded from the political and economic processes to be deliberately included in the future. It was in the context of these anticipated benefits of community participation in development planning that Article 40 of the Ghana Local Governance Act, 2016 (Act 936) provided that district level stakeholders may, “participate in the deliberative functions of the district assembly by the publication of a draft by-law or fee-fixing resolution of the district that includes radio, the print media, notice boards on the premises of the District Assembly, and in the major towns and settlements in the district before the commencement of proceedings on the draft by-law, or fee-fixing resolution”. The National Development Planning Commission’s (NDPC) guidelines which District Assemblies use in the preparation of their development plans also enjoin the Assemblies to involve the local communities in the identification, design, implementation and monitoring of projects [7]. This study agrees with the establishment of these structures to ensure community participation in development planning. It however argues that simply establishing these new institutional arrangements for participatory governance will not necessarily make it more inclusive. Rather, a lot will depend on the nature of the power relations which surround and imbue these new, potentially more democratic spaces and how the citizens are prepared to utilize them. The study was thus conducted to assess the participation of local communities in Amansie West in the planning of their district’s development.

The problem of the study is that decentralization is seen as particularly relevant to meeting the development needs and aspirations of the local people through the identification of their own priorities. The belief of development practitioners is that if development means the eradication of poverty, inequality and material deprivation, it must engage the participation and mobilization of the rural poor. The Act that established Ghana’s decentralization system itself recognizes the need for the district assemblies to encourage the participation of the local people in the development of the districts [8]. Article 40 of the Ghana Local Governance Act, 2016 (Act 936) specifically provides that district level stakeholders may participate in the deliberative functions of the district assembly by the publication of a draft by-law or fee-fixing resolution in the media of mass communication in the district that includes radio, the print media, notice boards on the premises of the District Assembly before the commencement of proceedings on the draft by-law, or fee-fixing resolution. The National Development Planning Commission’s (NDPCs) guidelines which the District Assemblies use in the preparation of their development plans

also enjoin the Assemblies to involve the local communities in the selection, design and implementation of projects [7]. This means that development planning, especially in the districts, does not only benefit from local expertise but also strengthen stability since people become satisfied that their needs are being taken into account.

Several studies, including those by Ayee, and Asibey-Mensah have taken stock of Ghana's decentralization policy since its inception nearly three decades ago. These studies have examined different aspects of the policy and explored in detail the processes and outcomes in individual sectors such as education, health and sanitation in Ghana [9], [10].

Other studies including those of Olowu and Wunsch, and Smoke, have examined decentralization and performance at national and international levels [2], [11]. One such study carried out by Wunsch, in Ghana, Kenya and Uganda discovered that budgets were still subject to arbitrary oversight by central government officials [12]. This denied the districts the needed financial resources to finance their programmes and activities. Across Africa, several studies have been carried out on community participation in development planning. These studies have however been limited in scope. They did not go far enough for any meaningful assessment to be made on how community members participated in the range of services and programmes which District Assemblies indulged in. For instance, Njunwa's study in the Morogoro District of Tanzania focused on the local communities' participation in two selected primary schools [13]. In addition, Msewa's study of the Lilognwe district of Malawi focused on the traditional rulers' participation in the planning of development in the district [14]. While these studies may provide lessons from best practices and failed cases critical for operational work, they are most useful once they provide a clear understanding of the status of decentralization elsewhere in Africa and in Ghana. Knowledge of the status of the policy will provide a useful starting point for researchers to venture into unexplored areas. For instance, despite the existence of a large number of studies on decentralization, little is known about how community members participate in the planning of development of their districts. The present study thus seeks to fill this gap by examining how the local communities participate in the selection, planning and execution of projects in the Amansie West District of Ashanti. The Amansie West District was selected because the researchers wanted to assess whether or not the initial euphoric expectation which greeted the establishment of the Assembly by community members was translated into participation in development planning. In addition, as a district which has not attracted the attention of scholars and researchers, its selection was to help policy makers learn

about how the decentralization policy was being implemented in one of Ghana's pioneer districts. The research findings presented in this thesis may ultimately contribute towards better planning of the district which will in turn lead to its development.

The purpose of the study was to examine the participation of communities in the Amansie West District in the planning of the district's development. The main thrust of the study was to: (1) Ascertain the local community members' knowledge of the Assembly's functions; (2) Assess community members' awareness of their roles in the planning of the district's development; (3) Examine how community members participate in the planning of their district's development; and (4) Analyze the attitudes of local communities towards the Assembly's programmes.

The significance of the study is grounded in the fact that Ghana's decentralization programme is a monumental attempt to help local communities take charge of their own development. The research had its foundations in the proposition found both in the literature and in the Local Governance Act, 2016 (Act 936) that decentralization will enable local communities participate in the planning and execution of development in their districts [7]. Findings of this study will therefore establish whether the talk of grass root participation and power to the people contained in the Local Governance Act and in official government speeches are a reality or rhetoric. In other words, it will seek to expand the dialogue of what grass root democracy is really about, i.e. the realities and practicalities.

In addition, information that will come up through the study will enable the government institute policies that will strengthen the relationship between the District Assemblies and communities within their areas of operation. Furthermore, this research is of significance to the domain of decentralization as it will extend the knowledge base that currently exists in the field. Though, a number of studies already exist on decentralization, this study, which explores the subject of community participation in development planning, will help raise awareness among those who are unacquainted with the issue. Finally, results of the study will provide baseline information to future researchers on how the decentralization programme is helping communities to select projects which meet their development aspirations.

## 2. Literature Review and Theoretical Perspective

This section reviews the relevant literature on Ghana's decentralization policy and community participation in development planning. It begins with the Ladder of

Participation theory which was the theory that under-girded the study. It is followed by a discussion of the conceptual issues such as Ghana's decentralization policy, development planning and community participation as used in the study. The section ends with a review of empirical studies on decentralization and community participation in development planning.

### 2.1. Ladder of Participation Theory

The ladder of participation theory developed by Arnstein, argues that there are different levels at which citizens can participate in decision-making [15]. She notes that the levels range from manipulation or therapy of citizens, through to consultation and to what she considers as genuine participation, that is, the levels of partnership and citizen control. She maintains that the rungs at the bottom of the ladder which are manipulation and therapy are the ones with the least citizen participation. Informing, consultation and placation which occupy the middle rungs of the ladder are termed *tokenism*. According to Arnstein, at this level, people are allowed to participate only to the extent of expressing their views but have no real say that matters [15]. The last three rungs which are partnership, delegated power and finally citizen control at the top of the ladder termed "citizen control" are where real and meaningful participation takes place [15]. The limitations of Arnstein's framework are obvious. Each of the steps represents a very broad category within which there are likely to be a wide range of experiences. For example, at the level of informing, there could be significant differences in the type and quality of the information being conveyed [15]. Realistically therefore, the levels of participation are likely to reflect a complex continuum than a simple series of steps.

Burns, therefore modified Arnstein's ladder of participation and proposed a ladder of citizen power [16]. He made a qualitative break down of some of the levels of Arnstein's ladder [16]. For instance, he draws a distinction between what he calls 'cynical' and 'genuine' consultation, and also between "entrusted" and "independent" citizen control. This essentially treats community participation as a marketing exercise in which the desired end result is 'sold' to the community.

In summarizing the literature on participation, Stewart and Taylor, suggest that although the idea of empowerment is often implied there is little explicit discussion of the operation of power [17]. At the conceptual level, they describe the issue of whether power is finite and held by particular people or groups, or an infinite resource open to all to grasp. Stewart and Taylor, further note that the importance of this stems from the fact that if finite, the empowerment of some must involve the dilution of the power of others [17].

An alternative view, they maintain is a positive-sum game so that power can be achieved by some without necessarily removing it from others.

On a more practical level, Stewart and Taylor, argue that determining which issues communities are allowed to be involved in is central to an understanding of participation and empowerment. Control of the agenda for discussion they maintain, is a covert dimension of power which is highly important, but often forgotten in practice [17]. They further assert that operational issues tend to get on the agenda, whilst the strategic issues are discussed elsewhere. They conclude that perhaps the principal weakness of the ladder models is their failure to acknowledge the different spheres of decision-making in which their level of participation can occur.

Hart, emphasizes the difference between strategic and operational decisions [18]. He notes that strategic power involves the ability to set targets, allocate priorities and determine policy. Operational power is having the ability to decide how things are carried out. He argues that the local community only ever exercises operational power. However, in addition to identifying the effectiveness of community participation, it is equally important to recognize some of the problems involved in participatory development approaches. For example, he maintains that participation employed as an end in development projects is a time-consuming process and since time is directly proportional to money in such situations, it is quite difficult to justify such an approach due to high expenditures. Besides, there is a fear among governments of uncontrolled empowerment of people and lack of trust in their ability to make sensible decisions which prevent the governments to change their paternalistic approach to decision-making [19]. They conclude that the only way such issues against participation can be resolved is by looking at participation from a broader perspective and by weighing its benefits versus limitations. Social benefits, they contend, are far superior to physical benefits and a realization has to be made on the part of implementing agencies that empowerment of people is necessary to become productive citizens.

### 2.2. Ghana's Decentralization Policy

Ghana's decentralization policy is set out in the Local Governance Act, 2016 (Act 936) 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 producing guidelines to facilitate the preparation of development plans by metropolitan, municipal and district assemblies. The planning process has the following essential stages:

1. Planning at the district level starts with communities' problems, goals and objectives from unit committee level through the town, area, urban and zonal councils to the assemblies.
2. The subcommittees of the executive committee of the district assembly must consider the problems and opportunities of the communities, define, prioritize and submit them to the executive committee of the assembly. The departments of the district, municipal and metropolitan assembly, sectorial specialists, non-governmental organizations and other functional agencies must confer and collaborate with one another to hammer out the ingredients of the district plan.
3. The District Planning Coordinating Unit (DPCU) integrates and co-ordinates the district sectorial plans into short term, medium term and long term plans and budget for the consideration of the executive committee and debate by the district assembly.
4. The approved plan is to be sent to the RCC for coordination and harmonization with the plans of other District Assemblies.

### 2.3. Development Planning

Development planning is one of the many ways of decentralizing decision-making from the government to the people. According to Hoverman and Buchy, this planning paradigm seeks to consider community involvement and participation of interest groups, horizontal and vertical coordination, sustainability, financial feasibility and interaction of physical and economic planning in development planning processes [1].

Hoverman and Buchy, then explain development planning as a process that connects scientific technical knowledge with activities in the public domain to enhance social transformation processes [1]. They maintain that development planning has as its goal the provision of amenities and facilities that can raise the quality of life of the citizenry. The appeal of development planning at the community level resides in the assumption that once community views have been taken into account, the project or policy will respond better to real needs, fit into a social and economic reality and people feeling a sense of ownership will be more compliant to bear the costs [1].

### 2.4. Community Participation

The assumption in representative democracies is that citizens can express their preferences through electoral politics, and in turn, it is the job of the elected representatives to make policy and to hold the state accountable [20]. New voice mechanisms are now being explored in both developed and

developing countries which argue for more direct connections between the people and bureaucracies which affect them. Myers and Hirsch, view community participation as an active process by which client groups or beneficiaries influence the direction and execution of the development programme with the view of enhancing their well-being in terms of income, personal growth, self-reliance and other values they cherish [21]. Rowe and Frewer, contend that community development in development discourse commonly refers to the involvement of local people in decision-making processes and evaluation of development projects as well as the implementation of programmes [22]. This clearly implies that the term community participation is associated with empowerment, and respect for and use of local knowledge and know-how to initiate and execute projects that meet the needs and aspirations of the local people.

### 2.5. How Local Communities Participate in Development Planning

The Local Governance Act, 2016 (Act 938) of Ghana has created spaces and also shown how residents and other stakeholders in the district can participate in their Assembly's programmes and activities. Article 40 of the Act provides that district level stakeholders may:

- A. Participate in the deliberative functions of the District Assembly by the publication of a draft by-law or fee-fixing resolution in the media of mass communication in the district that includes radio, the print media, notice boards on the premises of the District Assemblies and in the major towns and settlements in the district before the commencement of proceedings on the draft by-law or fee-fixing resolution.
- B. Appear before a sub-committee of the Executive Committee to which a draft by-law or fee-fixing resolution is referred to make oral presentation.
- C. Attend the proceedings of the district assembly as observers when a draft by-law or fee-fixing resolution is being debated.
- D. Disseminate the by-law or fee-fixing resolution as widely as possible and play an advocacy role on the contents of the by-law or fee-fixing resolution after the enactment of the by-law or the adoption of the fee-fixing resolution.

### 2.6. Spaces for Participation

Cronwall, reminds us that spaces for participation are not neutral, but are shaped by power relations that both surround and enter them [23]. He notes that power relations help to shape the boundaries of participatory spaces, what is possible within them, and who may enter, with which identities,

discourses and interests. Hickey and Mohan, also argue that the concept of power must be understood as oppositional and in binary terms regarding the powerful and powerless; hegemony and resistances, inclusion and exclusion [20]. Other work on power and spaces provides a more nuanced approach. It argues that those who shape a particular space affect who has power within it and those who are powerful in one space may in fact be less powerful in another.

## 2.7. Factors Which Influence Participation

For people to effectively participate in any project there is the need for them to understand when, how and why they have to participate [24]. The following are the factors which influence participation:

### 2.7.1. Inclusiveness

A healthy community respects diversity and acknowledges that all members have the right to be heard and participate in matters that affect their lives. The barriers to participation in the community decision-making include poverty, literacy levels, disability, age, gender and ethnicity. Community participation process seeks out and facilitates the engagement of people with characteristics such as those likely to be marginalized and excluded [24].

### 2.7.2. Communication

According to Community Development Society, 5-10% of community members will support a community initiative initially and 5-10% will oppose it [25]. Opponents or supporters are unlikely to change their positions. The remaining 80%, who are the silent majority, are undecided, indifferent or skeptical about the project. Failure to bring the silent majority on the winning side can lead to massive opposition and seriously jeopardize the project [25]. According to Community Development Society, various strategies can be used to win the support of this group. This, they say, includes open public participation that is proven to be a successful strategy. It is wise to begin consulting with the community right from the start [25]. This helps to bring trust, understanding and support for the project.

### 2.7.3. Trust

According to Kamuiru, trust is the glue that binds organizations and communities together. Building trust among local community organizations is seen as a viable strategy for the economic development of organizations and communities [24]. He explains that trust is the mutual confidence that no party involved in the exchange of ideas will exploit others. He maintains that a positive change is more likely to occur when community members are an integral part of a programme's development and implementation.

### 2.7.4. Community Awareness

Kamuiru, observes that awareness-raising helps in breaking social, superstitious and other barriers among community members through information sharing and dialogue [24]. He notes that once these barriers have come down, communities are able to express themselves more freely; both as individuals and collectively; internalize the underlying need for development projects and the expected returns. Before citizens can express their opinions, and participate in the public decision-making process, they need information about the subject at hand [24].

## 2.8. Research Gaps and Critique of Existing Literature Relevant to the Study

Most of the existing literature on community participation in development planning have been narrow in terms of scope. The few studies that have been somehow extensive have focused on few sectors such as education or health leaving out the critical issues of how the other sectors were planned by the districts with the participation of community members. This means that the literature has been keen to point out specific issues while wearing a blind eye on others. The quantitative based evidence which were mostly used to bring out the factors influencing community participation in development planning are inadequate to explain why and how community members participate or do not participate in development planning.

Njunwa, in his study of community participation as a tool for development noted that community members regarded community participation as a process which government forced on the local people [13]. According to Msewa, community participation is a process that has been captured by a few elite and prominent traditional rulers to the exclusion of ordinary community members [14]. These studies have tended to take a single approach which is mainly quantitative to explain community participation in development planning, but have failed to explain why community participation has not improved development of local communities.

A clear picture of what influences community members to participate in the planning of different sectors of their districts' development has not emerged from the literature. Mostly, the studies have concentrated more on single sectors of the districts' development plans such as education, health or sanitation. The existing body of literature is not sufficient enough to explain how the districts planned their development with the participation of the community members in the sectors which the assemblies have the responsibility for planning. Thus, this study envisions to fill this research gap.

### 3. Methodology

Mixed method approach to research was employed for this study. The descriptive design was adopted for the study. The design was preferred because it enabled the researcher to collect data to answer questions regarding the current status of the subject of study. The researchers describe phenomenon in terms of attitudes, values and characteristics of respondents.

Denscombe defines a population frame as an object list of the population from which the researcher can make his or her selection of the sample [26]. According to Cooper and Schinder, it is a complete and correct list of population members only [27]. The study's target population were community members living at the headquarters of five Area Councils of Afore, Atwere, Antoakrom, Adubia and Manso Nkwanta. The other target population were Assembly members as well as officials of the Amansie West District Assembly.

The Amansie West District has Twelve Area Councils and Fifty Three Electoral Areas [28]. Simple random technique was employed to select five of these Area Councils. These were Antoakrom, Atwere, Adubia, Afore and Nkwanta. Again, simple random was adopted to select one of these five communities to obtain the first group of respondents, who were the ordinary citizens aged between 18 years and above 44 years. The community selected was Antoakrom. Stratified random sampling was then employed to identify the groups in the community to be studied. Stratified technique is appropriate when the population is heterogeneous and it is possible to establish strata which are reasonably homogenous within each stratum. The population was divided into 6 strata based on group affiliation and interest. These were Youth Association, Drivers' Union, Traders' Association, Religious Association, Farmers Union and Students' Union. Each stratum was then sampled as an independent sub-population out of which twelve respondents were randomly selected from each stratum. The register of each identifiable group was used to determine which respondent was selected. In all, seventy-two (72) respondents constituted the components that were selected from the groups.

In addition, the five (5) assembly members of the participating communities as well as officials of the District Assembly were purposively selected for the study. The Assembly Officials were the District Planning Officer, District Budget Officer and District Finance Officer of the Amansie West District Assembly. These officials were selected purposively. Table 1 shows the summary of the respondents selected for the study.

**Table 1.** Summary of respondents for the study.

Target Group	Frequency	Percentage
Identifiable groups	72	90.0
Assembly members	5	6.3
District Assembly Officials	3	3.7
Total	80	100.00

Source: Field Study, 2019

The study employed well pre-tested questionnaires containing open-ended and close-ended items and interview guide to collect data. The questionnaires were used to obtain data from members of the identifiable groups who constituted majority of the respondents. By their sheer numbers, the questionnaire was considered the most convenient and appropriate instruments to use. An interview guide was designed to collect data from the Assembly members and Assembly officials. Both the questionnaire and interview guide consisted of a list of questions that related to the objectives and research questions of the study.

Before the responses were processed, the completed questionnaires were edited for completeness and consistency. Data cleaning was done to enable the researchers determine inaccurate, incomplete and unreasonable data and then improve the quality through correction of identified errors and omissions. After the data had been cleaned, it was coded and entered into the computer for analysis using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS). Quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequency counts and percentages.

For the qualitative data, the general inductive approach to qualitative data analysis was adopted. The purpose for using this approach was to condense the extensive and varied raw data into a brief, summary format, establish clear links between the research objectives and summary findings derived from the raw data and develop a model of theory about the underlying structure of experience which are evident in the raw data. To be able to achieve this, the researchers read through the responses of the respondents, and identified specific segments of information. The segments of information were labeled to create categories. Information were managed to reduce overlap and redundancy among the categories created and finally, a model incorporating the most important categories was created.

### 4. Findings and Discussions

The researchers collected data using questionnaires and interviews and analyzed results as already indicated in the previous section. The community members were selected from Antoakrom. A total of 80 respondents participated in the study.

#### 4.1. Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

This sections concentrates on the age of respondents and level of education. These are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Demographic characteristics of respondents.

Variable	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Sex		
Male	50	62.5
Female	39	37.5
Age (years)		
18-24	25	31.3
25-34	28	35.0
35-44	20	25.0
Above 44	7	8.7
Level of Education-Tertiary	18	22.5
SHS	22	27.5
JHS	38	41.3
Others (with no education)	7	8.7

Source: Field study, 2019

The table above illustrates the four age categories that participated in the study. The age distribution of the respondents ranged from 18 and above 44 years. Of these, 31.3 percent fell between 18-24 years. Thirty five percent (35) were between the ages 25 to 34 years. Twenty five percent (25) fell between 35-44 years while 8.7 percent were above 44 years. Regardless of the fact that there was no equal representation in age group, all respondents showed positive attitude towards community participation in development planning.

Table 2 shows that nearly 42 percent of the respondents had Junior Senior education. Twenty three percent had tertiary education while 28 percent had senior secondary education. A small percentage of the respondents (9 percent) had no education at all. Even though the respondents had varied educational backgrounds, all of them demonstrated positive attitude towards community participation in development planning.

#### 4.2. Knowledge of Awareness and Community Participation in Development Planning

The first objective of the study was to ascertain the knowledge of community members of the Assembly's functions. The findings of the study indicate that there are differences in the level of knowledge of the Assembly's functions. The intellectual group, that is those with tertiary education and senior high school education had better knowledge of the Assembly's functions than those with junior high school education. The findings indicate that 13 percent did not comment. This shows that there is a proportion of the community members who do not know about the functions of the District Assembly.

About 40 percent of the respondents knew that the Assembly's functions included the deliberation of matters, collection of taxes, initiation of projects, passing bye-laws, issuing of licenses and collection of garbage.

Forty seven (47) percent of the respondents knew only two functions of the Assembly. These are the initiation of development projects and the collection of garbage. Kamuiru, observes that awareness raising helps in breaking social barriers among community members through information-sharing and dialogue [24]. He further notes that before citizens can express their opinions and participate in the public decision-making process, they need information about the subject at hand. When this argument is extended to the subject at hand, it will imply that citizens can only be aware of the functions of the Assembly if responsible officials or institutions provide them with information with which they can act and express their opinions [24].

In their study of decentralized systems across the world, Hickey and Mohan, found that in both developed and developing countries, new voice mechanisms are now being explored which argue for more direct connections between community members and the bureaucrats which affect them [20]. Myers and Hirsch, therefore view citizen role in development planning as an active process by which community members or beneficiaries influence the direction and execution of the development programme with the view to enhancing their well-being [21]. This study identifies with these views and further indicate that the development aspirations of community members will be hard to achieve if they do not play the role assigned them by the Ghana Local Governance Act, 2016 (Act 932) [7].

The second objective of the study assessed the awareness of community members about their role in the planning of the district's development. The findings indicate that nearly fifty-seven (57) of the respondents were aware that they must play a role in the planning of the district's development. The exact roles they must play were listed as voting at district assembly elections, holding Assembly accountable and submitting proposals to the assembly to develop specific projects in their communities.

Thirty (30) percent of the respondents knew that they must perform a role in the planning of the district's development but they could not clearly define this role and how it must be played. Thirteen (13) percent of the respondents did not comment. This implies that there is a proportion of community members who do not know whether they have a role to play in the district's development planning or not.

The third object of the study was to examine how community members participated in the planning of the district's development. From the responses obtained, it could be noted



that most community members within the study area clearly understood how to participate in the planning of their district's development. However, they did not consider it necessary to be involved in the selection, design and implementation of projects. For example, fifty-three (53) percent of the respondents knew that one way by which they could participate in the planning of the Assembly's development was to contribute ideas during community meetings. Fifty (50) reported that they had not attended a single community meeting in the past three years. They cited reasons such as lack of time and the failure to reach consensus as some of the reasons they did not attend community meetings.

Another thirty-eight (38) percent of the respondents knew that they could participate in the planning of their district's development by submitting proposals to the District Assembly through their Assembly Members for the development of specific projects such as schools or clinics in their communities. A small proportion of the respondents, (5 percent) understood their participation in the Assembly's planning as getting jobs directly from the Assembly to improve their material circumstances. The remaining four (4) percent did not comment. In his study of local government systems across the world, Cornwall, discovered that spaces for participation are not neutral, but are shaped by power relations that both surround and enter them. He notes that power relations help to shape the boundaries of participatory spaces, what is possible within them, and who may enter. He further states that government officials always want to act in their own self-interest and therefore if community members do not push for spaces allowed them by law, government officials may behave as if those spaces did not exist. These views by Cornwall aptly describe the situation in the study area where community members know how they must participate in development planning but have not deemed it necessary to do so because they do not have the time to participate. The government officials have also not forced participation on the community members because they consider the apparent refusal of community members to demand participation as something that works in their self-interest.

The fourth objective examined how the District Assembly (DA) prepared its development plans. Interviews with the District Planning Officer (DPO), District Budget Officer (DBO) and District Finance Office (DFO) showed that the Assembly officials knew that they must follow the participatory tools developed by the National Development Planning Commission (NDPC) in developing their plans, these were however never followed. The participatory tools include holding fora in the communities to assess their needs and making these needs reflect in the District's plans. The

reasons given by the officials for not following the NDPC's plans were varied. The DPO for example, said: "The NDPC guidelines are too elaborate and the Assembly cannot be bogged down by these elaborate processes to stall the implementation of its programmes". The DBO shared a similar view. "The consultative processes were sometimes side-stepped to make way for speedy implementation of projects, because if we were to follow them, very little could be done at the end of the day". The DFO intimated that if the Assembly were to organize community fora throughout the District before drawing up its plans, nearly half of the amount required to implement the actual projects will be lost to that activity alone.

On this, he had this to say: "I don't think this is cost-effective. How do you spend part of the meager resources meant for the execution of projects in holding community meetings which come from the same budget we are to use for implementing projects?"

Interviews with the Assembly members also showed that they knew that they should meet with the electorate before they attend Assembly meetings to receive suggestions and after Assembly meetings to brief them about the Assembly's proceedings, but these are rarely done. The reasons for not holding community meetings were also varied: "Community meetings come with cost; you need to hire chairs and canopies. If somebody even gives these for free, you still need to pay somebody to carry them to the meeting grounds. How can an assembly man who is not paid fund these"? One of the Assemblymen lamented. Another Assemblyman, noted that community meetings were poorly attended and therefore he had been discouraged by this low attendance to organize these meetings in his electoral area. "It seems everybody has something to do, and therefore they see community meetings as a waste of time". Another Assembly member observed that he had on some occasions managed to hold community meetings but these meetings ended in confusion. This is because community members were unable to reach consensus on what constituted their needs. "Some of the members may consider a market a priority, others think a toilet is their priority, but since the funds at the disposal of the Assembly cannot finance these two projects at the same time, the Assembly has to step in and develop one of these projects".

The findings indicate that the District Assembly does not follow the NDPC approved guidelines to draw up its programme. Rather it depends on requests made by respective communities to draw up its programmes. It also relies on field information from Assembly members and its own staff to prepare its plans. The reasons cited by the Assembly officials for not following the NDPC guidelines included the cost of engaging in community consultations

and the time that will be spent in going through the consultative process.

Hart, in assessing the problems of participatory development approaches in Third World countries noted that participation employed as an end in development projects is a time-consuming process and since time, according to him, is directly proportional to money in such situations, it is quite difficult to justify such an approach due to high expenditures [18]. In addition, Burns and Taylor, in their assessment of government's attitude towards participatory approaches to development planning also revealed that there is a fear among government officials that citizens lack the ability to make sensible decisions and therefore their participation in the decision-making process must be controlled [19]. The findings of the study support these observations as District Assembly officials have adopted a paternalistic approach to decision making where development planning is done in the district capital and implemented in the communities.

## 5. Conclusions and Recommendations

The study has established that a very high proportion of the Amansie West Districts' citizens are aware of the functions of the Assembly. They are also aware that they must participate in the district's development planning. They however do not consider it necessary to get involved in the development planning of the district because they do not have time. The study has also shown that the Assembly officials do not follow the NDPC guidelines to prepare the districts' development plans because they consider the guidelines too elaborate, time-consuming and expensive.

The Assembly depends on field information from its field staff and requests from Assembly members and other influential members of the communities to prepare its plans.

The study also showed that Assembly members do not call community meetings because such meetings are not always attended by community members and even where they do attend, they are unable to reach consensus on matters discussed because of the varied interests of the community members.

The following recommendations were also given:

The National Commission on Civic Education (NCCE) and Ministry of Local Government should create awareness on the value of community members' role in the planning of their districts' development.

Also, Parliament should pass a legislation that will enable Assembly Members get access to funds from the Central government to organize community meetings and undertake

small developmental activities in their electoral areas.

The Regional Co-ordinating Councils (RCCs) should refuse to approve the development plans of any district assembly that does not follow the NDPCs guidelines to prepare its plans. Furthermore, the Ministry of Local Government should consider remunerating Assembly members so that they will be motivated to give of their best.

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