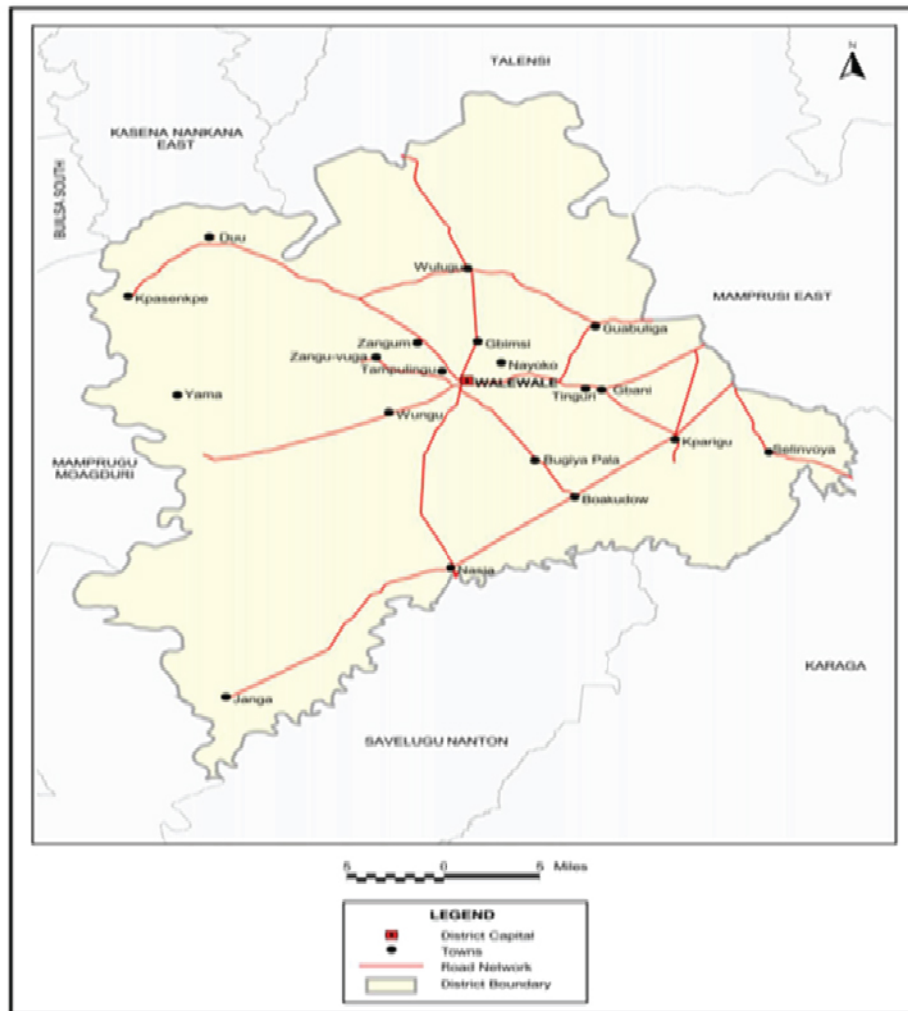![MFWA - Media Foundation for West Africa logo]

Report

CHALLENGES TO CITIZENS' PARTICIPATION IN LOCAL GOVERNANCE IN GHANA:
THE CASE OF WEST MAMPRUSI MUNICIPAL

Media and Good Governance, February 2019

MEDIA FOUNDATION FOR WEST AFRICA

CHALLENGES TO CITIZENS' PARTICIPATION IN LOCAL GOVERNANCE IN GHANA:

THE CASE OF WEST MAMPRUSI DISTRICT

A publication produced under the project **"Enhancing public participation and demand for accountability in local governance in Ghana" being implemented in** *eight municipalities and districts across four (4) regions in Ghana*

Supported by:

STAR Ghana

Strengthening Transparency, Accountability and Responsiveness

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Introduction

In Ghana, citizens' right to access information, participate in, and demand for transparency and accountability in the provision of goods and services are largely guaranteed under the 1992 constitution. When the country adopted the decentralised system of governance, it was to ensure that more citizens participate and be actively involved in the governance processes.

*"The main objective of the Act is to enable as many Ghanaians as possible to participate in decision making processes which affect their daily lives from the village to the national level and to bring government closer to the doorsteps of the people." (*Local Government Law, Act 462, 1993).

The philosophy of the local governance system is that local participation is key in ensuring sustainable development as a result of ownership of development initiatives. Thus, the Local Government Act (Act 963) affirms the importance of local governance for Ghana's development and accordingly established the District, Municipal and Metropolitan Assemblies (MMDAs) as the highest political and administrative authorities at community level.

Over the years, the decentralisation and local governance system has been known to be effective in mobilising indigenous efforts and support for greater impacts of development. The local governance system also creates awareness, and provides relevant policies that directly address the specific needs of members of a specific community.

However, despite the various efforts by Ghana to establish the decentralised system, executive structures and processes, and fiscal support systems, the local government system has not been as effective as it was hoped to be as citizens' participation in local governance processes has remained largely low in many Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies (MMDAs) across the country. The local government system still lags in citizens' participation, access to information and transparency and accountability.

It is regrettable to add that the limited participation of citizens in local governance processes has persisted despite the *Modalities and platforms stipulated in the* Local Governance Act 936 of 2016 to improve the situation. Such *Modalities and platforms* include a number of information communication technology-based platforms; town hall meetings; Budget preparation and validation fora; notice boards announcing jobs, appointments, procurement awards and other important announcements of public interest; visits to development project sites; and other avenues for the participation of the people.

This baseline study highlights the challenges/barriers to citizens' participation in local governance in Ghana, the specific case of the West Mamprusi Municipal and recommendations in addressing the challenges. It forms part of activities by the Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA) under its project "**Enhancing public participation and demand for accountability in local governance in Ghana".** The project is being implemented in eight municipalities and districts across four (4) regions in Ghana namely; Lawra Municpal, Wa West Disrict, Wa East District, Wa Municipal and Sissala East Municipal (Upper West Region); West Mamprusi District (Northern Region), Ellembelle District (Western Region) and Twiffo Atti-Mokwa (Central Region).

The project seeks to strengthen the capacity of target MMDAs on public and media engagement on governance issues. Local assemblies are also supported to develop media and communication strategies for effective communication outreach with their constituents; deploy District Facebook pages that have been created under previous projects as effective tools for public outreach and engagement with both resident and non-resident citizens on governance issues. The project also provides traditional media platforms especially radio to enhance interaction between citizens and local authorities in eight districts across the country (live broadcast town hall meetings and interactive regular radio programmes).

The project is supported by STAR-Ghana.

The Local Government System in Ghana

The constitution of Ghana establishes the local system as "measures to ensure administrative and financial decentralisation and to give opportunities to people to participate in decision-making at every level in national life and government." (Article 35, clause 6d). It also established the District Assemblies' Common Fund (DACF) which receives 10% of total government revenues for the effective running of the system.

Structure of the Local Government

The assemblies which are the highest units of local government are in three types namely the Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies (MMDAs). Currently in Ghana, there are six Metropolitan, 56 Municipal and 154 District Assemblies in Ghana. There are also sub-district political and administrative structures which are subordinate bodies of the Assemblies. These include sub-metropolitan, district, urban, town, zonal and area councils, and unit committees.

The metropolitan assemblies cover urban areas with populations of over 250,000 whereas Municipal Assemblies are single-town councils with populations of 95,000 or more. The District Assemblies cover a wider geographical area combining rural areas and small towns. The metropolitan structure is four-tiered while the municipal and district assemblies have a three-tiered system. The lower tiers are called sub-structures and comprise town, area, zone and units.

The Assemblies System in Ghana

Despite having different tiers, the metropolitan, municipal and district Assemblies all have the same internal political structures. The political/administrative head in each MMDA is the Metropolitan/Municipal/District Chief Executive (MCE/DCE). The MCE/DCE is responsible for the executive and administrative functions of the Assembly. He/she is also the chief representative of the national government in the district.

Seventy percent of the members of MMDAs are elected by the citizens or members of the community whilst 30% are appointed by the president on the basis of their experience and specialised expertise.

The Members of Parliament representing constituencies in each MMDA are ex-officio members of the Assembly. The Assembly is required to meet at least three times each year. The meetings are led by an executive committee comprising not more than one-third of all assembly members, which reports to the assembly.

The executive committee has a number of sub-committees which makes recommendations to it. Some of the committees include the development planning, social services, works, justice and

security and finance. All assembly members must sit on at least one sub-committee, with the exception of the Chairperson.

The Sub-Structures of the Assembly

The Sub-structures of Assemblies comprise the town council, area council, zonal council and unit committees. These committees and councils do not hold any legislative or rating powers. The town, area, zonal councils are composed of five representatives of the district assembly, ten representatives of unit committees in the area and five persons appointed by the government. They are delegated tasks by the assemblies. The intermediate-tier councils and unit committees are composed of representatives of the district assemblies.

Also, the unit committee which is the lowest level of the structure have both elected and appointed members. There are around 16,000 unit committees countrywide.

Profile of West Mamprusi District

The West Mamprusi Municipal came into existence in 1988 by LI 1448 which was replaced with LI 2061 in 2012 as a result of the creation of the Mamprugu Moagduri District. It was carved out of the old Gambaga District. It is located between longitudes 0°35" W and 1°45" W and latitudes 9°55" N and 10°35" N. It has a total area of 2610.44km² and shares boundaries with East Mamprusi and Gushegu districts to the east, North Gonja, Savelugu and Kumbungu districts to the south, Builsa, Kassena-Nankana East districts and Bolgatanga Municipal (Upper East Region) to the north and Mamprusi Moagduri District to the west.

It is one of the twenty-six (26) administrative Assemblies in the Northern Region of Ghana with Walewale as its capital. Administratively, the district is in the Northern Region but commercially, it has strong economic ties with major settlements such as Bolgatanga and Fumbisi in the Upper East Region. The capital, Walewale, having many of the social amenities in the district, is the centre of urbanisation.

Demographics

The district has a population of 121,117; males and females constitute 59566 (49.2%) and 61551 (50.8%) respectively (GSS, 2010 PHC). This accounts for 4.9% of the region's total population. There are eighty-six (86) communities in the district including fishing and farm camps. The Municipality is predominantly rural, with a population of 76,503 (63.2%) living in rural settlements, thus, a little more than six in every ten people are rural dwellers. The population density of West Mamprusi Municipal is 46.4 per km² and a sex ratio of 96.8.

The population of the district is youthful with about two-fifth (46.2%) of the population above 15 years. This is an indication of a broad-base population pyramid which tapers off with a small number (6.5%) of elderly persons aged at least 60 years. The total age dependency ratio for the district is 102.6 and this translates into 109.8 for males and 96.1 for females.

About 67.7% of the population aged 15 years and older are economically active while 32.3% are economically inactive. Of the economically active population, 97.0% are employed while 3.0% are unemployed. Almost half (48.3%) of the unemployed population are first-time job seekers. The proportion of employed males (97.6%) is slightly higher than females (96.4%). For the economically inactive population, a significant percentage of them are students (40.5%) while 34.7% perform household duties. About 80.7% of the working population are into skilled agricultural (forestry and fishery) workers, a mere 6.8% in service and sales work and 5.8% are engaged in craft and related trades.

Mobile telephony and its related services in the district are gradually growing. Of the population 12 years and older, 20.5% own mobile phones. A higher proportion of males (27.5%) than females (14.0%) owns mobile phones. On the other hand, less than one percent (0.9%) of the population 12 years and older have access to internet facilities in the district.

Social and Cultural Structure

Three-fourths of the total population of the West Mamprusi Municipal are Mamprusis. This translates into 75%. Mamprusi is the major language spoken in the district. This group coexists in harmony with minor groups such as the Builsa (4.7%), Frafra (2.7%), Kasena (2.2%), Dagomba (1.8%), and others (2010 PHC, GSS). The proportion of its population who are Ghanaians by birth is 93.2%. Moreover, there are dual-nationality and naturalised dwellers and this category makes 2.8% and 1.1% respectively. In addition, 3.0% of the population in the district are non-Ghanaians. According to the 2010 Population and Housing Census, there are dwellers from the Ashanti Region, Central Region and Upper West Region.

Political Administration

The West Mamprusi Municipal Assembly has (41) assembly members made up of thirty-one (31) elected members and ten (10) government appointees. The District Assembly has legislative, executive and deliberative powers and it is, therefore, responsible for the execution of development projects of communities under its jurisdiction. There is an appointed DCE and administrative head of the assembly. He is ably assisted by the Municipal Coordinating Director (DCD). The administrative wing of the assembly is headed by the DCD who has an oversight responsibility over all other decentralised departments and agencies in the district.

Methodology

A qualitative approach was adopted to identify the challenges to citizens' participation in local governance. The qualitative research strategy was chosen because it afforded much flexibility in assessing the subject matter from different experiences, nuances and subjective views of the respondents.

Data was collected using in-depth interviews. Key informant interviews were conducted with individuals and groups of people who by virtue of their positions and roles in the communities are deemed to have a depth of understanding of activities in the community and its people.

Also, the study adopted a purposive sampling method in choosing the respondents. This is because the researcher aimed at collecting information from respondents who were well-informed and understood the terrain, the practices, the history and background on citizen's participation in local governance in West Mamprusi Municipal Assembly. In all, six key informants were interviewed.

The researcher interviewed key stakeholders in the local governance system process including:

- The Assemblies
- Civil Society Organisations/Community-Based Organisations
- Citizens
- Local-based Media

In total, six key informants were interviewed in the West Mamprusi District. The following were the key informants who were interviewed.

Key Informant	Position
D1	Municipal Chief Executive (MCE)
D2	Municipal Coordinating Director
K1	Opinion Leader in the Community
K2	Opinion Leader in the Community
A1	Assemblyman, Nayiri Fong Electoral Area
R1	Director of Community Radio

The researcher also conducted two focused group discussions with 10 individuals in each group. These were made up of young men (14) and women (6).

KEY FINDINGS

a) Ineffective Sub-structures Owing to Lack of Resources

The study realised that there are no mechanisms, structures and resources allocated to the offices of the sub-structures of the Municipal Assembly. The Assemblymen and unit committee members who play crucial roles in ensuring participation in the communities have therefore been largely operating with their personal finances. Indeed, the only form of resource is sitting monetary allowances given them when the administration of the Municipal Assembly calls for a general meeting, which does not often happen.

"The structure has not actually been very effective. From the MCE to Assemblymen that's a bit better, but from Assemblymen to the Unit Committee members, it is not all that effective because the assembly is supposed to resource the assemblymen for them to also organise the unit committee members after every assembly meeting because in mobilizing the community it involves cost." A1

Nonetheless, these officers in their line of duty are expected to incur administrative costs if indeed they are committed in organising meetings in their electoral areas. Some of these, one Assemblyman key informant explained, range from communication, movement, providing chairs for meetings and water for community members in their meetings.

Thus, the effective running of the sub-structures of the local government system is left to the financial standings of the assemblymen and unit committee members. Therefore, if the officer is not financially sound, participation and citizens' engagement in the electoral area gravely suffers.

b) Lack of Coordination and Communication among the Structures

There appears to be a gap in communication and coordination in the office of the local government system in the municipal. This gap is particularly pronounced at the level of the assemblymen and unit committees. While these offices of the sub-structures are supposed to be an extension of the MCE's office so that they act in lieu of the political head in their electoral areas, there are many instances where the MCE starts developmental projects in the electoral areas without the knowledge or consultation of the assemblymen and unit committee members. Sometimes the MCE visits the communities under the assemblymen without informing assemblymen. The MCEs call on the officers of the sub-structures only when they are faced with challenges where they reckon the input or presence of the assemblymen, for instance, is needed.

"Assembly members [Assemblymen and Unit Committee Members] are mostly involved with regards to issues where the Assembly itself is facing challenges and that's when they will find the need to draw in Assemblymen. But in activities or programmes where they know they will have a smooth sailing in the community, assemblymen will be there only to realise that the [Municipal] assembly is doing so, so and so in the community without their knowledge." K1

This is a setback to the quest to improve citizens' access to information and participation since the officers who are directly in contact with them daily may not have readily available information on the activities and projects of the local government.

c) Undue Emphasis on Vertical form of Engagement

As an extension of the previous challenges identified, there seems to be too much focus and attention placed on the vertical or top-to-down approach to engagement. This is because the lower

structures of the local government lack resources and there are no instituted mechanisms to ensure effective operation. There is also a problem of coordination and flow of information especially at the base of the local government system. This means that officers of the sub-structures are less informed and lack the capacity to also provide information, either to community members or the authorities. The facilitation of information flow is therefore concentrated at the top echelon of the assembly system. The effect of this is that, community members can share information only when there is a gathering where the MCE or an officer from administration of the municipality is present. This is a huge impediment on information flow, acquisition and dissemination. An opinion leader in one of the communities re-echoed same sentiments.

"Most MCEs are still looking at the Assembly concept to be power that's coming from the top to the bottom. Meanwhile it is supposed to be from the bottom to the top. That's what they are still looking at. So, they are thinking that whatever they are going to do they should generate those idea." K2

d) Culture of Partisanship in the Assembly System

Some of the key informants also indicated a prevalent culture of partisanship and politicisation among officers of the local government. Concerns of the citizens are sometimes considered depending on the political affiliation and support. Assistance is sometimes provided to people with much focus on which party they have or are known/perceived to have supported. Community members belonging to an opposition party may not even make advances at the Municipal Assembly since they understand as a norm or culture that they would not be granted attention.

"The MCE when there is a problem he won't just look at it, he wants to be partisan. When it [a concern] is coming from opposition, he may not give it due attention. That's what I have observed. And now even the assemblymen, they are all partisan." R1

Recommendations

The study makes the following recommendations to the challenges identified:

1. Given that there is no instituted form of providing resources in terms of finances to the offices of the substructures of the local governance system, it is advised to the central government, especially parliament, to make legal provisions in the local government act that will ensure the assemblymen and unit committee members are provided with resources and logistics.

2. It is suggested that an appropriate percentage of the Internally Generated Funds (IGF) or the common funds of the Assembly is allocated to the offices of the sub-structures to ensure an effective facilitation of citizens' participation.

3. The office of the MCE must consciously adopt a two-way communication or engagement process that will ensure that the average community member can share concerns through the structures and it will successfully get to his office or an officer of the administration or secretariat for prompt actions.

4. The central government must commence a process that ensures that the heads of the assemblies are not appointed by a sitting president who has been politically elected. The source of the partisanship is often from the political appointments. It is therefore suggested that elections are held for the offices of the MCEs and DCEs. This will detach the political affiliations and support from the offices and subsequently garner local support for it.

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