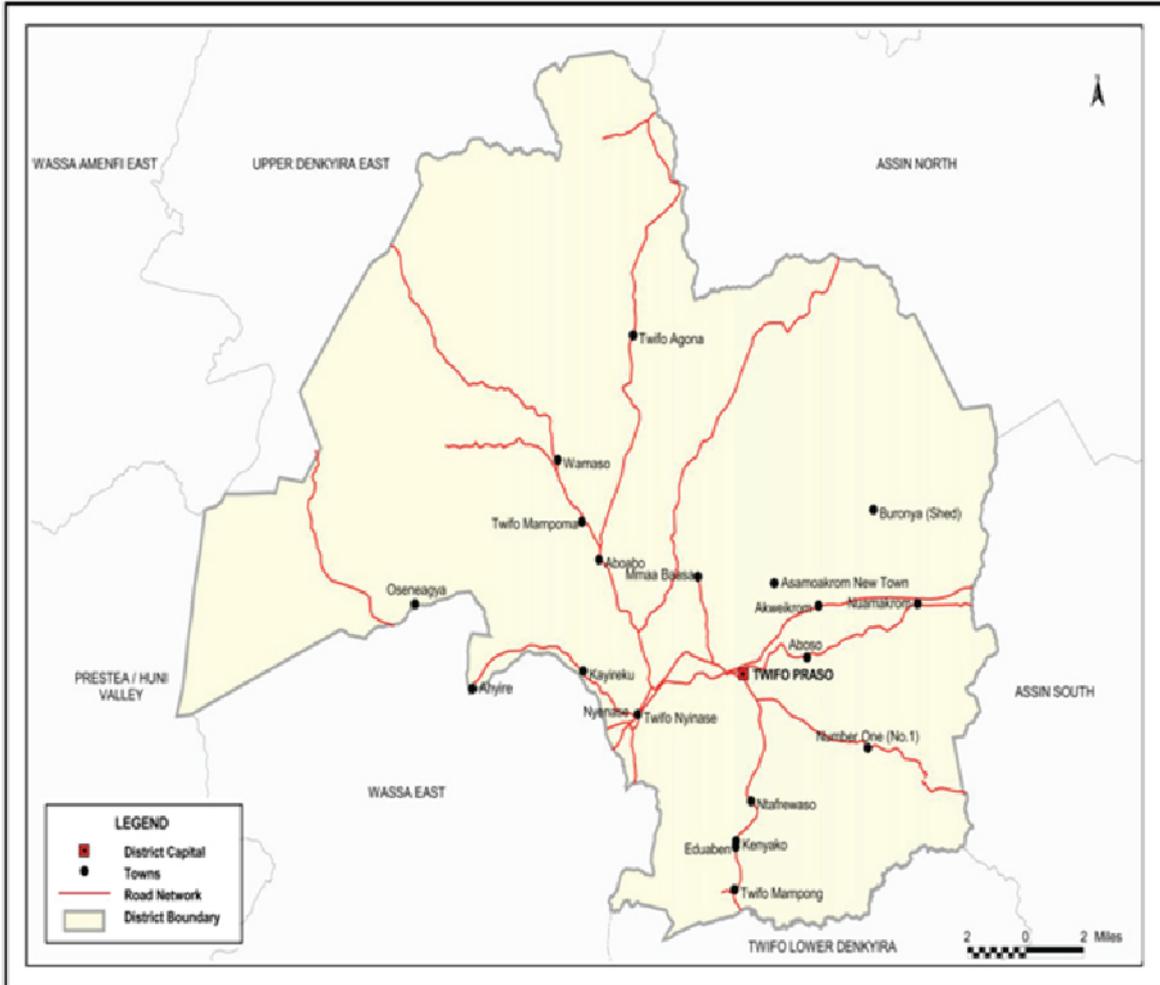


Report



CHALLENGES TO CITIZENS' PARTICIPATION IN LOCAL GOVERNANCE IN GHANA: THE CASE OF TWIIFO ATTI-MOKWA DISTRICT

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CHALLENGES TO CITIZENS' PARTICIPATION IN LOCAL GOVERNANCE IN GHANA:

THE CASE OF TWIFFO ATTI-MOKWA 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

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Table of Content

Introduction	3
The Local Government System in Ghana.....	5
i. Structure of the Local Government.....	5
ii. The Assemblies System in Ghana.....	5
iii. The Sub-Structures of the Assembly.....	6
Profile of Twiffo Atti-Mokwa District.....	7
i. Demographic	7
ii. Social and Cultural Structure	7
iii. Political Administration	7
Methodology	8
Key Findings	10
Recommendations.....	12
Bibliography.....	13

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; ^[11]_{SEP} 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. ^[11]_{SEP}

This baseline study highlights the challenges/barriers to citizens' participation in local governance in Ghana, the specific case of the Twiffo Atti-Mokwa District 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 Municipal, Wa West District, 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 Twifo Atti-Morkwa District

The Central Region has twenty (20) districts one of which is the Twifo Atti-Morkwa District. It was carved from the Denkyira District Council in 1988 by LI 1377 with the name Twifo Hemang Lower Denkyira District. In 2012, the then government split the Twifo Hemang Lower Denkyira District into Twifo Atti-Morkwa and Hemang Lower Denkyira districts under the Local Government Act 462 of 1992 by LI 2023. The District is bounded on the north by the Upper Denkyira East Municipal, on the south by the Hemang Lower Denkyira District, on the west by the Mpohor Wassa East District and on the east by the Assin North Municipal Assembly. It has a total land area of 956Km².

Demographics

In the 2010 Population and Housing Census, the district recorded 61,743 people which corresponds to 2.9% of the population of the Central Region. There were 31,489 females, representing 51% and 30,254 males, representing 49.0%. The sex ratio in the district is 96 which is above that of the region (91). The District is predominantly youthful with children under 15 years old constituting 76.6%. It therefore depicts a broad-base population pyramid showcasing a small number of elderly persons (60+ years). This fraction of the population constitutes 6.8%.

Social and Cultural Structure

The district is dominated by Akans and fractions of other ethnic groups including Twifo, Gomoa, and the Assins. Rural-urban drift has also resulted in indigenes of other groups - Ewes, Ga-Dangmes - settling in the district. Some known languages spoken in the district are Akan (Asante, Fante and Akuapim) and Ewe.

The Twifo and the Atti-Morkwa people are the native settlers and they belong to the Akan ethnic group. The system of inheritance is predominantly matrilineal, suggesting the succession follows the maternal lineage. But there are other ethnic groups, the non-Akan, who practice the patrilineal system. They are the migrants living in the district.

Political Administration

There is a DCE who is in charge of the district and by the Local Government Act, has the mandate to exercise the executive powers on behalf of the President of the Republic. There is an administrative wing supervised by the all departmental heads. Twifo Atti-Morkwa District Assembly consists of thirty-eight (38) members, twenty-eight (28) of whom are elected and ten (10) are appointed. It has five Area Councils including Twifo Praso, Mampong and Nyinase area councils.

The study had a focus group discussion with a group of community members and officers of the District Assembly. The participants in the focus group discussion included the District Chief Executive (DCE), Secretary to the DCE, District Coordinating Officer and Information Officer.

Methodology

The study adopted both inductive and deductive qualitative approach to addressing the objective of study. The qualitative methodology was adopted to produce a non-quantitative, detailed and interpretative account on the challenges to citizens' participation in local governance.

The study used two different qualitative research methods to gather data from respondents. It adopted key informant interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGD). Focus group discussions are a way to gather information from a group of people with similar backgrounds or experience by bringing them together. It is used to provide insight into different opinions among different parties who are involved in a similar thing or process. Key informant interviews are in-depth interviews with people who are well-informed on what is going on in the community. The purpose of key informant interviews is to collect information from a wide range of people—including community leaders, professionals, or residents—who have first-hand knowledge about the community.

The application of two different methods allowed for the gathering of a richer data from the respondents. It however also depended largely on the availability of the respondents, giving the nature of the subject the study considered.

A purposive sampling method was adopted because the study aimed at gathering data from certain key stakeholders who play various roles in popular participation in the local governance system in Twifo-Atti-Morkwa District and understand the critical context and nuance of participation in the district. These stakeholders included:

1. The District Assembly
2. The Media
3. Citizens
4. Community-Based Organisations (CBOs)

The study had a focus group discussion with a group of community members and officers of the District Assembly. The participants in the focus group discussion included the District Chief Executive (DCE), Secretary to the DCE, District Coordinating Officer and Information Officer.

Group	Number of Participants
Community Members 1	10
Community Members 2	9
Officers of the District Assembly	9
PWDs	6

The Key informant interviews were held with the following respondents

Key Informant	Position
K1	Opinion Leader
K2	Opinion Leader
R1	Programme Host, Community Radio Station
C1	Officer, Community-Based Organisation

KEY FINDINGS

a) Extremely Large Number of Communities Constraining Effective Engagement

The Twifo-Atti-Morkwa District is made up of about 850 communities. Although many of these communities are villages, cottages, hamlets and small abodes of people, every community which is separated from another by distance and has a number of residents demand a form of attention in terms of participation, access to information and development needs.

The district assembly despite using representative systems of relying on the electoral areas are still unable to effectively engage all of these communities. They are unable to organise Local Governance Act-stipulated town hall meetings, forums and other mandated engagements in the local governance act in the various communities. The challenge is further worsened by the problem of poor feeder roads in the District as movement to these communities is very difficult.

b) Limited Resources for the Sub-District Structures

The sub-structures for a district like Twifo-Atti-Morkwa, with a huge number of the communities, must remain the livewire for citizens' participation, access to information and inclusion. Since the administration of the assembly cannot be regularly present in the many communities, the unit committee members, council members and the assemblymen must be the appropriate and assured means of ensuring participation in the many communities. This, the study found, is not the case as there are little or no resources for the proper functioning of the sub-structures of the assembly. Assembly members, for instance, are not able to organise the local meetings to keep community members informed.

One of the respondents from the focus group discussions at the assembly indicated that the assemblymen are failing on their responsibility of keeping their community members informed.

"...The assembly structures are there but the functioning is the problem. When the Assembly members come for general assembly meetings, whatever transpired over here, it is their duty to go back and relay it to the community people. But there is a challenge over here. They don't do it. The people don't know what happens at the assembly over here."

However, another respondent from the administration of the district assembly also responded acknowledging that there is lack of resources for the officers to deliver on their mandates.

"...The assemblymen, when you confront them and you want to know why they are not performing [relaying information] such activities, all that they talk about is finance...We don't give them monthly allowance. Even the motor bikes they are supposed to have is [are] not there for them...So it is always about money."

c) Low Understanding of the District Assembly Activities among Citizens

The study through the key informant interviews also realised that the citizens do not understand the structure of the assembly and sometimes misconstrue the roles of the authorities.

"There are certain things the community people do not know. In terms of finance they think the money is just in the DCE's office when they want the money they just go and spend and come put the rest back. They don't know they pass through a long system." C1

Further, an informant with the radio station explained that the authorities are very responsive to the media and often open up to the radio stations. However, they (Assembly officials) fail to hold

regular interpersonal or face-to-face interaction with community members, which are far more effective especially when it comes to education and sensitisation.

“I think there’s a gap in community engagement. When it comes to using of the media per our platforms, they have really utilised it. But when you take the media out of their engagement system, I don’t really see that community participation.” R1

Recommendation

Following the challenges identified, it is recommended that;

1. A district-wide sensitisation programmes are commenced to educate the community members on the district assembly system and the role citizens must play. This sensitisation exercise must employ both radio programming and interpersonal engagement with citizens.
2. The central government must also reconsider the demarcation and constitution of communities into districts to allow effective engagement. Having about 850 communities in one district is certainly not suitable for effective engagement.
3. Finally, the sub-district structures must be provided with institutional capacity and mechanisms that will ensure its effective operation.

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