



Policy Brief

No. 1, June, 2016

Promoting Accountable Governance through Professional Media and Citizens' Access to Information

Highlights of Development Challenges in Wa,
Nandom and Sissala-East Districts



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1. Introduction

Citizens' participation in governance is fundamental in promoting sustainable development and effective democracy. When citizens are empowered to assert their right to access public goods and services, and to demand accountability on the utilisation of their resources, it helps to ensure transparent and accountable utilisation of public resources. However, for these to happen, citizens have to have access to platforms or avenues that enable them to fully participate in governance processes.

In Ghana, despite the widely acknowledged need for participatory governance and its significance for development, citizens' participation in local governance processes at the various Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies (MMDAs) remains low. The situation is mainly attributable to a number of factors including limited advocacy and public education on the need for citizens to participate in the governance processes; the limited channels and avenues for citizens to engage with local authorities in policy and development dialogues; and limited voluntary information disclosure by local authorities.

To help improve the situation and promote inclusiveness, transparency and accountability in the local governance processes in Ghana, the Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA) has since 2011, harnessed the potential of local radio and other local governance dialogue platforms to promote open, sustainable and constructive governance conversations between local populations and their authorities at the local level. Implemented under the project title: ***"Promoting Participatory, Transparent and Accountable Local Governance in Ghana,"*** the project has so far been implemented in more than thirty (30) MMDAs across the country in partnering about 40 local-based radio stations.

With funding support from the Embassy of the United States of America in Ghana (EUSA -Ghana), the MFWA extended this project to three MMDAs in Upper West Region from September 2015. The Upper West region is the poorest region in Ghana with over 80% incidence of poverty in some districts according to a 2015 Ghana Poverty Mapping Report

by the Statistical Service . Thus, while development interventions are required across the country, the Upper West region perhaps remains the most critical region for such interventions.

This document presents highlights of the participatory governance intervention being implemented with the support from the EUSA-Ghana in three target MMDAs in the Upper West Region namely: Wa Municipal, Sissala-East and Nandom Districts.



Municipal Chief Executive of Wa Municipality, Hon. Issahaku Nuhu Putiaha (middle in smock) delivering his “State of the Municipality” with his team on a partner radio station in Wa

1.1 The Intervention

The project is focused on empowering local populations to actively participate in governance processes and creating avenues for local authorities to be more responsive to the development needs and questions of local populations. Enabling such inclusive and accountable governance environment required buy-in of key stakeholders to collaborate. It also required the creation and facilitation of channels for information sharing, for governance conversations and for feedback. Under the project, therefore, the MFWA discussed and signed a memorandum of understanding with each of the three target MMDAs. Similar collaborative partnership agreements were signed with one local radio station in each of the target districts. The project thus succeeded in bringing together local radio stations, communities and MMDAs to work together on governance and development issues facing the communities.

¹ The respective partner radio stations are as below:

- Wa Municipality - Radio Progress
- Nandom District - Radio FREED
- Sissala-East District - RADFORD FM



Group picture at the inception meeting in Sissala East District with the District Chief Executive, Hon. Johnson Saborh in the middle flanked by MFWA staff and representatives from project partners

The Project is also collaborating with three Community Based/Civil Society Organisations who are vibrant and influential in the project target districts. The respective organisations are:

- Wa Municipality - Centre for the Alleviation of Poverty, the Environment and Child Support (CAPECS)
- Nandom District - Partnerships for Local Development Action (PRUDA)
- Sissala-East District - Action for Sustainable Development (ASUDEV)



Group picture: Staff of Action for Sustainable Development (ASUDEV), and MFWA after inception meeting in Tumu



Group picture: Staff of Partnership for Rural Development Action (PRUDA), and MFWA after inception meeting in Nandom



Group picture: Staff of Center for Alleviation of Poverty, the Environment and Child Support (CAPECS), and MFWA after inception meeting in Wa

The following are the expected outcomes under the project:

- Enhanced collaboration among local authorities, local radio stations, traditional authorities and local populations on governance and development issues in target districts;
- Enhanced public access to information on issues of governance and utilisation of public resources
- Increased public participation in governance discourse and demand for accountability through Oestablished governance dialogue platforms on radio and through District Governance Forums (DGFs).

1.2 Activities have included:

- Interactive Weekly **Local Governance Radio Programmes** which feature assembly officials on air to discuss the work of the assembly and issues of local development;
- Quarterly **State of the District radio broadcasts** which feature the Chief Executive of District/Municipality to address citizens on the state of the district/municipality. Citizens are offered the opportunity to ask questions or engage the Chief Executive either via the phone-in segment, text messages and other online platforms like Facebook and Whatsapp;
- **District Governance Forums** which provide an opportunity for the citizens to directly engage their local leaders in a face-to-face interaction on pressing development issues for immediate responses and further action. These forums are amplified through live radio broadcast by the partner radio stations. The concerns raised by citizens are followed up by the partner radio station for the necessary actions by local assembly authorities.

This policy brief highlights the some of the most pertinent development challenges raised by community members at the various governance dialogue platforms held in the three districts in the Upper West region. The policy brief serves as reference for tracking the responsiveness of the local assemblies to concerns by the people.

2. The District Governance Forums

About 100 people from all walks of life participated in each of the District Governance Forums held in Wa Municipality, Nandom District and Sissala-East District. These participants included local community members (men, women, youth), Community Based Organisations, traditional leaders, District or Municipal Chief Executives, assembly officials (presiding members, co-ordinating directors and departmental heads). Assembly leaders of ten additional electoral areas were also specially invited.

The District/Municipal Chief Executives at each of the forums addressed participants on the work and tasks of the local assembly. Issues such as the Medium Term Development Plan, budgeting and financial administration of the assembly were highlighted. The Chief Executives also underscored the importance of the local governance radio programmes in facilitating interaction between citizen and local authorities on development issues.

Following the address by the Chief Executive was the question and answer session. Community members and participants at the forum used the platform to flag pressing development challenges. The challenges raised fell under four main categories: Health, Basic Infrastructure, Education and Information Gap.

i) Health

Health and Hygiene topped the list of the issues raised at the three forums. Key concerns focused on sanitation, water infrastructure and health units. Access to health infrastructure was identified as key to the community-members, especially pregnant women and children who are more vulnerable to Malaria and other water related diseases.

ii) Infrastructure

Another major issue was lack of basic infrastructure in the communities. This included markets, roads, bridges, electricity, telephone networks and a factory for processing Shea butter. According the community members, market and adequate roads are of paramount importance

as they enable the development of a local economy and help to reduce poverty among the communities.

iii) Education

Many community-members also raised the issue of basic education facilities/structures. Of significant mention was the challenge of limited and dilapidated schools, lack/ inadequate furniture and lack/ inadequate teachers in the communities.

iv) Information Gap

Community members across all the three forums expressed the concern that local Assembly authorities do not sufficiently involve them in development planning processes. Again, they have limited or no access to public information on the work of the local Assembly or development projects being carried out.

The following texts capture the community-specific challenges flagged at the governance forums held in the three project districts and municipality.

A) Governance Forum at Kpongu Electoral area in the Wa Municipality

The forum was held on Tuesday, April 26, 2016. The Municipal Chief Executive, Hon. Issahaku Nuhu Putiaha, addressed the people. The most pressing issues raised were:

- **Hygiene/Sanitation:** Community members reported that many households have their septic tanks full that needs draining and urged the local authorities address that immediately.
- **Health:** There was the concern that the maternity Clinic in the community lacks water and infrastructure.
- **Market:** The community members asked for a market to sell their products and thus raise income.

- **Schools:** Old and limited school infrastructure for schools in Kpongu Community was raised as posing serious challenges to students and pupils.
- **Notice boards in all electoral areas:** Community members requested Notice boards in order to keep citizens informed and involved in the governance process.



**Municipal Chief Executive of Wa Municipality, Hon. Issahaku Nuhu Putiaha
addressing concerns of the people**



Assemblymen and citizens at a governance forum held at Kpong in Wa, the Upper West regional capital



Assemblyman of Kpong, Hon. Yakubu Salia, presents development challenges of his electoral area



Cross-section of the community members at the forum in Kpongou Electoral Area in Wa Municipality

B) Governance Forum at Nandom Electoral Area in the Nandom District

The forum was held on Wednesday, April 27, 2016. The District Chief Executive (DCE) Hon. Cuthbert Baba Kuupiel addressed the people. The most pressing issues raised were:

- **Shea butter and groundnut processing factory:** The women at the forum asked for a factory to process Shea butter and groundnuts, since these are the main farm products. This according to them will lead to additional source of income of the population.
- **Potable water:** Community representatives from Tantuo and Tapelle communities raised the issue of very limited access to clean water the two communities have only two boreholes “*We suffer a lot to get water*” said Assembly man for Tantou electoral area, Hon. Dong Richard.
- **Health unit and better road network:** Community members requested better roads and improved health unit are needed to help convey the sick faster; According to them, this has been a huge problem on maternal health.

- **Market Space:** Participants mentioned that better market facilities are critical in order to boost economic power of the population. Furthermore, there was a call for reduction in the high market levies in the existing markets.
- **Support for rural teachers:** To ensure improved education, participants at the forum suggested that rural teachers are provided with motorbikes and fuel to facilitate their movement and contribute to enhancing education
- **Road and bridge construction:** Road and bridge construction was raised as a crucial need. In Walayir Area; children are unable to go to school as there is no bridge to cross the river to where the school is located.
- **School:** The people of TomKokduour reported that they need a school constructed for their children.



District Chief Executive of Nandom, Hon. Cuthbert Baba Kuupiel, gives overview of the Assembly's work in the District while answering questions from community people



Women of Nandom dance and enjoy music before the forum in Nandom Electoral Area starts



A cross-section of Assembly men of Nandom representing their Electoral Areas



Cross-section of the participants at forum in Nandom Electoral Area in the Nandom District

C) Forum at Sakai Community in the Sissala-East District

The Sakai Forum was held on Thursday, April 28 2016. The District Chief Executive (DCE), Hon. Johnson Saborh, addressed the people. The most pressing issues raised were:

- **Water and electricity supply:** Participants emphasised the need to improve access to water and electricity in the communities, this challenge was especially pronounced in the Sakai electoral area; Specifically Bujan where several schools are without adequate water for the students; and Wallembelle where some schools and clinics are also without water. *The DCE said payment has been done for a small town water project in Wallembelle.*
- **Health facility:** Community-members requested that the health facility be upgraded to a poly-clinic to improve the healthcare system in the community.
- **Roads and markets:** Improved roads and markets were mentioned as pressing to improve trade between the communities because most of the communities are isolated from each other.

- **Inadequate community teachers in schools:** Participants noted this as a serious challenge in the community schools which needs to be addressed.
- **Telephone network connection:** Community-members also raised the issue of very poor telephone network connections which negatively impact their daily lives. *The DCE promised that will be commenced in June.*
- **Allocation of LEAP Funds:** A woman from the Sakai electoral was concerned that funds allocated under the Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP) programme does not seem to reach the elderly people in the area.



District Chief Executive of Sissala East, Hon. Johnson Saborh, responding to concerns raised by assemblymen and citizens



The women and youth of Sakai express appreciation that the forum was held in their electoral area



Assemblyman of Sakai Electoral Area, Maau Baluri, highlights development challenges in his area



Sakai women presented their concerns to the DCE and Assembly staff for solutions

3. Conclusion:

The massive participation of citizens in the District Governance Forums no doubt underscores the need for such interactive platforms between citizens and local assembly authorities. The information sharing and responsiveness on the part local assembly officials empower citizens with knowledge on the goings-on within the assembly. Citizens by this, receive adequate information that also whips up their interest in governance processes and their civic responsibilities in supporting local development.

Access to such direct interactive platforms complemented by the influence of local-based radio enable citizens to fully participate in governance processes. The MFWA thus implore stakeholders

to improve proactive information disclosure, transparency and accountability in local governance. The MFWA specifically urges local assembly authorities in the target project municipality and districts - Wa, Nandom and Sissala-East - to be active and responsive to the pertinent development challenges raised by community members at the various governance dialogue platforms held in the respective districts.

As key stakeholders in information disclosure and the civic education of citizens, the MFWA also calls on partner radio stations to make vigorous and unrelenting follow-ups on the issues flagged by community members in this policy brief to ensure that local assembly authorities take the necessary actions and steps to address these challenges.



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