

## Policy Brief

No. 2, November, 2016

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



**“How a Visually Impaired Man’s Life was Transformed”**



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By



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My name is **Ibrahim Tafali Lukuman**. I am 47 years old and visually impaired. I come from Taffiasi in the Sissala East District, 15km from Tumu – the district capital.

I am an ardent listener of RADFORD FM. Despite my disability, I always have my radio set beside me. One day, I tuned in to the station and heard a discussion on the role of the District Assembly and its impact on development. During the discussion, I learnt

about some support for Persons With Disability (PWDs) available at the District Assembly.

Not long after the programme, the radio station organized a community forum in Taffiasi. The District Chief Executive (DCE) was present and I inquired from him about the District Assembly's support for Persons With Disability and how I can access it. He mentioned to me that the Assembly has a 2% budget allocation set aside from the District Assembly's Common Fund to assist Persons With Disability. He explained how the support works, who qualifies for it and how to access it.

Mohammed Balu, host of the district assembly radio programme on RADFORD FM, after the forum, asked me to come and see him in his office. He got a colleague to lead me to see the District Social Welfare Officer (DSWO), Mr. Sheriffdeen. The DSWO, asked me how much I needed. I mentioned six hundred Ghana Cedis (GHC600) and he asked that I keep checking with him. One day, DSWO asked me to come along with my voter's ID and Health Insurance cards; which I did and eventually, the six hundred Ghana Cedis was given to me.

**I was very happy. I used the money to buy a bag of gari, sugar and other things and decided to sell those things by myself. Since then, I have a means of sustenance to cater for my three children in school, two of whom are already in JHS.**

**If it had not been for that District Assembly radio programme (Masie) on RADFORD FM and the community forum in Taffiasi, I would not have known about such support for the disabled. It has brought happiness to my wife and children as I am now able to support them. I have also made efforts to tell my friends who are disabled about the availability of this support at the District Assembly.**

# 1. Introduction

Local government institutions constitute an important platform for citizens' participation in development and governance processes. Citizens, especially, the marginalized in society through such institutions can access useful information on local developments, participate and influence decisions that directly impact their lives.

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 attributable to a number of factors;

- limited advocacy and education on the relevance of citizens' participation in governance processes;
- limited voluntary information disclosure by local authorities and more importantly,
- limited channels and avenues for citizens to engage with local authorities in policy and development dialogues.

To address these limitations, citizens need to have access to platforms that facilitate participation in decision-making and implementation processes. When citizens are empowered to exert their rights to access public goods and services, and demand accountability on the use of these resources, it exposes corruption and ultimately results in the promotion of sustainable development and effective democracy.

In recognition of this, the MFWA instituted the project: **“Promoting Accountable Governance through Professional Media and Citizens' Access to Information”**. The project was informed by a study conducted by the MFWA, which assessed the “Current Level of Citizens-Local Authorities' engagement in selected districts in Northern Ghana”.

The study showed that despite the existence of other local substructures such as town hall meetings, visit of assembly authorities, debriefings by assembly leaders, use of information delivery vans, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), radio remained the most effective engagement platform within the local governance system in Ghana.

Thus, the MFWA project sought to promote inclusiveness, transparency and accountability through the creation of platforms for community citizens to engage in healthy dialogues with local authorities. The platforms were in the form of weekly local governance radio broadcasts that discussed local development and community governance; and district governance forums that brought together citizens, assembly members, unit committee members, traditional authorities, youth and women groups, Persons With Disability (PWDs) in the district in a face-to-face interaction on local development issues. On these platforms, citizens had the opportunity to directly ask questions while the local assembly officials were on hand to respond to their queries.

The MFWA constantly strives to bring about constructive social change through the several projects it implements. This Policy Brief presents highlights of the participatory governance intervention implemented with funding support from the Embassy of the United States in Ghana. The project was carried out in three target MMDAs in the Upper West region of Ghana; Wa Municipal, Sissala-East and Nandom Districts.

## 1.1 The Project

The MFWA's **Promoting Accountable Governance through Professional Media and Citizens' Access to Information project** is hinged on the belief that community citizens' participation in governance processes and development interventions is crucial to the overall development of the community. The initiative seeks to promote citizens access to information and grassroot participation in governance processes at the local level.

The project also emphasises the involvement of key stakeholders such as local assemblies, Community-Based Organisations (CBOs), and community citizens to work together. More importantly, it requires, the creation and facilitation of channels for proactive and reactive information sharing between the governed and their local assembly authorities.

For a successful execution of this project, the MFWA partnered three MMDAs, CBOs and local-based-radio stations in the Upper West region. The partnerships were formalized through the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU). The MoU stipulated the roles and responsibilities of partners towards achieving the project objectives and expected outcomes.

The table below shows the names of the MMDAs, CBOs and local-based radio stations partnered under the project.

**Table 1: Names of MMDAs, CBOs and Radio Stations under the Project**

No.	MMDAs	CBOs	Radio Stations
1	Wa Municipal	Centre for the Alleviation of Poverty, the Environment and Child Support (CAPECS)	Radio Progress
2	Nandom District	Partnership for Local Development Action (PRUDA)	Radio FREED
3	Sissala-East District	Action for Sustainable Development (ASUDEV)	RADFORD FM

## 1.2 Activities carried out under the Project:

The MFWA's intervention on participatory governance in the Upper West region of Ghana had key and innovative activities as follows:

**A) Creation of Local Governance Radio Programmes:** The local governance radio programmes, popularly known as **“Time with the Assembly”** were weekly interactive programmes aired on partner radio stations. The programmes featured officials from the local Assemblies to discuss topical issues on air. Some of the issues discussed were the work of the local Assemblies, the Assemblies' Common Fund, sources of funding to the assembly, local developments, budgets and financial administration and development challenges within the communities.

The table below shows the list of the partner local-based radio stations and the names of their local governance radio programmes.

**Table 2:** Names of Local Governance Programmes by Partner stations

No.	Radio Station	Name of Programme
1	Radio Progress	"Te District Assembly Yele" (Issues in Our District Assembly.
2	RADFORD Radio	Masie (Good Morning)
3	Radio Freed	Assembly Vuo (Time With the Assembly)



**Municipal Planning Officer, Mohammed A. Majeed, responding to some phone-in questions during the local governance radio programme "Te District Assembly Yele" on Radio Progress**

**B) Institution of "State of the District" Radio Broadcasts:** The "State of the District" radio broadcasts were sessions that improved information flow between the local assemblies and community citizens through radio. On these platforms, the Municipal or District Chief Executive was invited to the studios of the partner radio station and allotted at least one-hour to give the "state of the district" address. After the address, the phone lines are opened for community citizens to ask questions of concern and make suggestions.



**C) District Governance Forums:** These were face-to-face engagements organised to bring together the local Assembly officials' Assemblymen, Chiefs, Development Partners and Community Citizens to dialogue on issues such as basic social and infrastructural needs of the communities. These forums were broadcast live by the partner local-based radio stations to give the wider public access to information and interactions at the forums. The partner radio stations and the CBOs subsequent to the forums followed-up on discussions and action points reached at the forums to ensure that local authorities adhered to promises made.

The MFWA held two District Governance Forums under this phase of the project. Highlights of the first forum were presented in the first policy brief published. This second policy brief presents highlights of the second round of governance forums held in three communities in the project districts.

## 2. The District Governance Forums

The second round of district governance forums were held from **August 2 - 4, 2016**. The communities were Bujan in the Sissala East District; Jonga in the Wa Municipality and Koo in the Nandom District of the Upper West region. The forums brought together key stakeholders including community citizens, assembly members, unit committee members, traditional authorities, youth and women groups, faith based organizations, and other identifiable groups like Persons With Disability (PWD) to discuss pertinent development challenges in the communities. The second round of the governance forums saw the participation of the Embassy of the United States in Ghana represented by the Information Specialist, Ms. Zainab Mahama.

At the forums, the Chief Executive Officers of the local assemblies made presentations that touched on the work of the local assemblies, development projects ongoing and those that were about to start; the Assemblies' medium and long-term development plans, budgeting and financial administration as well as equitable distribution of resources to the different communities.

The Chief Executives acknowledged the importance of the local governance radio programmes in facilitating frequent proactive information disclosure and interactions between assembly officials and the community citizens.

Community members and participants in the governance forums raised various pressing developmental challenges. The challenges raised are categorized under the following.

### **a) Poor Information Exchange**

Community members expressed grave concern at the limited access to information on local development issues. They were worried that local authorities do not promptly and proactively engage or respond to the pressing needs of the community members and, consequently, provide services and infrastructure that are often not a priority for the citizens. They asked that such engagement platforms be improved to address this challenge.

### **b) Health and Sanitation**

Although several community members agreed that there have been improvements in the health sector such as the construction of additional Community-Based Health Planning and Services (CHPS) compounds, they raised issues with the availability of health officials. Particularly, issues of water and sanitation, ineffectiveness of the National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS), inadequate health assistants and insufficient boreholes were some of the major concerns.

### **c) Infrastructure**

Lack of adequate infrastructure was also discussed extensively at the governance forums. Issues raised included poor road networks, absence of communication networks, unstable power supply and absence of market outlets to sell goods. Community citizens complained about the difficulty in getting their agricultural produce to the big cities as a result of the limited supply of these relevant infrastructure.

#### **d) Education**

On education, the major concerns were dilapidated school buildings, absence of teachers, lack of teachers' bungalows, inadequate furniture and stationery.

#### **e) Security**

Safety on the roads was extensively discussed at the forums. Community citizens expressed worry over how they are constantly attacked and harassed on the roads especially on market days. They asked the District Police Commanders to deploy more security personnel on the roads to ensure their safety.

### **A. Governance Forum In Sissala-East District**

The community forum in the Sissala-East District took place on Tuesday, August 2, 2016 in the Bujan community. The District Chief Executive, Honourable Johnson Saborh, addressed the Community.



**Hon. Johnson Saborh, District Chief Executive of Sissala-East, addressing participants at the Forum in Bujan**



**Cross-section of participants at the Governance forum in Bujan in the Sissala-East District**



The following were some issues raised:

- Unfavourable farming conditions: Community citizens sought for Government's alternative mechanisms such as irrigation systems to support their farming activities.
- High rates of unemployment: Citizens expressed worry that they invest so much to put their children through education and they end up becoming a family burden because they cannot find jobs to support the home.
- Lack of educational logistics: The chief of Bujan appealed to the DCE to construct teachers' quarters (bungalow) for his community to boost teachers' morale to commit to their work.



**Community members presenting their concerns to the DCE and his officials for solution at the forum in Bujan**



**Ms. Zainab Mahama, Information Specialist at the US-Embassy in Ghana, making a remark at the Forum in Bujan**

**Ms. Abigail Larbi, Programme Manager at the MFWA, speaking on the Participatory and Accountable Governance Project at the Forum in Bujan**



## **B. Governance Forum in the Wa Municipality**

The forum in the Wa Municipality took place on Wednesday, August 3, 2016 in the Jonga community. The Municipal Chief Executive, Honourable Issahaku Putiaha, addressed the people.



**Hon. Issahaku Putiaha, Wa Municipal Chief Executive, highlights development achievements in his address at the Forum in Jonga**



**Cross-section of Participants at the Forum in Jonga in the Wa Municipality**

The following were the issues raised:

- Additional communication networks in the localities: Most citizens expressed frustrations they experienced when making and receiving calls as most of the communication networks do not have strong signals. They asked the municipal assembly to accelerate efforts to remedy the situation.
- Untarred road to the communities: Community members lamented the poor road networks connecting neighbouring communities and some major towns.
- Lack of employment: Community citizens in Jonga also expressed worry about the high rates of unemployment particularly among the youth. They asked the MCE to create more job opportunities for the youth to discourage them from leaving the communities to the big cities for menial jobs.



**Hon. Issahaku Putiaha, Municipal Chief Executive of Wa, noting down community members concerns at the Forum in Jonga.**



**Municipal Police Commander of the Wa Municipality, explaining security measures to safeguard citizens in Wa**



## **C. Governance Forum in Nandom District**

The forum in the Nandom District took place on Thursday, August 4, 2016 in the Koo community. The District Chief Executive, Honourable Culphert Kuupiel, addressed the people.



**Honourable Culphert Kuupiel, District Chief Executive of Nandom  
addressing participants at the forum in Koo**



**Cross-section of participants listening to the DCE's address at the Forum in Koo**

The following were the topical issues raised:

- Untarred roads to the communities: Community citizens in Koo also expressed concern about the poor road networks linking the communities. They asked the District Chief Officer to repair them to ease movements.
- Poor performance of BECE candidates: The chief of Koo was concerned about the poor performances recorded in the B.E.C.E. He blamed the lack of teachers as the main reason for the abysmal performances of the students and asked the Chief Executive Officer to address the problem.
- Lack of employment: Community citizens also expressed frustration on the lack of employment opportunities for their youth after school. This has caused the youth to move to the big cities in search of jobs.



**Some participants take turns to ask questions at the Forum**





**Community Chiefs seek solution to youth unemployment challenges in their communities**

### **3. Conclusion**

The huge turnout of community citizens at the district governance forums undoubtedly underscores the value placed on participatory governance. Information sharing and responsiveness from the Assembly deepened community citizens' knowledge on the work of the Assembly. The knowledge shared further whipped up their interest in the governance processes in the community.

The access to such direct interactive platforms complemented by the influence of the local-based partners (radio stations and CBOs) intensified and boosted community patronage of the project.

Following from the above, the MFWA urges the local assemblies, in the targeted municipality and districts to be active and responsive to the pertinent development challenges raised by their citizens.

As key stakeholders in information sharing and civic education, the MFWA also calls on radio stations to create such spaces for citizens-local authorities' engagements. This will ensure that the local assembly authorities take the necessary actions and steps to address the challenges of their people.



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