



Policy Brief

October, 2017

Promoting Citizens' Participation in Local Governance through Increased Access to Information

*Highlights of the Governance Practices
and Challenges in Tema Metropolitan, Wa Municipal,
Ellembelle and Twifo Atti-Morkwa Districts*



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Introduction

In Ghana, as in many other countries, local government is the vehicle through which grassroots democracy and development is brought to the average citizen. Metropolitan, Municipal, and District Assemblies (MMDAs) are the key local government bodies in Ghana. By actively participating in these institutions, the Ghanaian people directly manifest the democratic ideal of government of the people, by the people, and for the people.

The more open and inclusive a local government is, the more likely it is to deliver relevant development benefits to its people. It is in recognition of this need that the Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA) and its partners continue to monitor and work to improve citizens' access to information and participation at the local government level.

This policy brief therefore highlights the practices and the challenges to citizens' participation and access to information in the Twifo Atti-Morkwa, Ellebelle, Wa and Tema districts. It also highlights the interventions being implemented by the MFWA and DW Akademie to address such challenges in the four MMDAs.

The Policy brief concludes with a call for more local governance initiatives to bring meaningful governance and development to the doorstep of the average Ghanaian.

Economy:

The district's economy is primarily agriculture-based. Crop farming, livestock rearing and tree growing are some of the major agricultural activities that the people engage in. The district is particularly renowned for oil palm cultivation. The district boasts of a local palm oil production company called the Twifo Oil Palm Plantation (TOPP). This company is a major supplier of local palm oil to big industrial companies like Nestle Ghana Limited.

Literacy & Information Communication Technology:

In terms of literacy, that is the ability to read and write in any language, about 77.7 percent of the district's population who are 11 years and above are literate, while 22.3 percent are non-literate. There were about two times more non-literate females (6,371) than males (3,024).

The district enjoys good access to the major national telecommunication networks including MTN, Vodafone, Tigo, and Airtel. Linked to this, almost 4 out of 10 (38%) of the population (12 years and above) have mobile phones. Slightly more females tend to own phones (51.6%) than their male counterparts. Also, the district has 2.5 percent of its population, 12 years and older, using internet facilities. Again, just 3.4 percent of the total households in Twifo Atti-Morkwa have a desktop/laptop computer.

The district has an Internet Learning Centre which is used for distance learning and training, especially in the health and agriculture sectors.

Though the Akans are the predominant ethnic group (89%) in the district, some Ewe, Mole-Dagbani, and Ga-Adangme groups have also settled there. Nzema, together with its Evalue and Gwira dialects, are the most commonly spoken languages in the district. Fanti and Twi are also widely spoken.

Literacy & Information Communication Technology:

A little more than seven out of ten people (73.8%), 11 years and older, in the district can read and write at least one language while 26.2 percent is not literate. Slightly more than seven out of ten people (74.3%) could read and write in both English and a Ghanaian language.

Telecommunication in the district is mainly supported by MTN, Tigo, and to some extent Vodafone networks. However, the northern part of the district has very poor telecommunications coverage. In addition to commercial ICT centres in the district, government and donor agencies have set up some Community Information Centres.

Four out of ten persons in the Ellembelle District aged 12 years and older own a mobile phone while among the same age group, only 3.1 percent use internet facilities. Men make up the higher number of both phone owners and internet users. Similarly, just 3.1 percent of households in the district have desktop/laptop computers.

Wa Municipal Assembly

Context, Demography & Social Structure:

The Wa Municipality is one of eleven local authorities that make up the Upper West Region of Ghana. The city of Wa is also the regional capital, and serves as a major transportation hub to other areas in the region and beyond. Wa also has a airstrip.

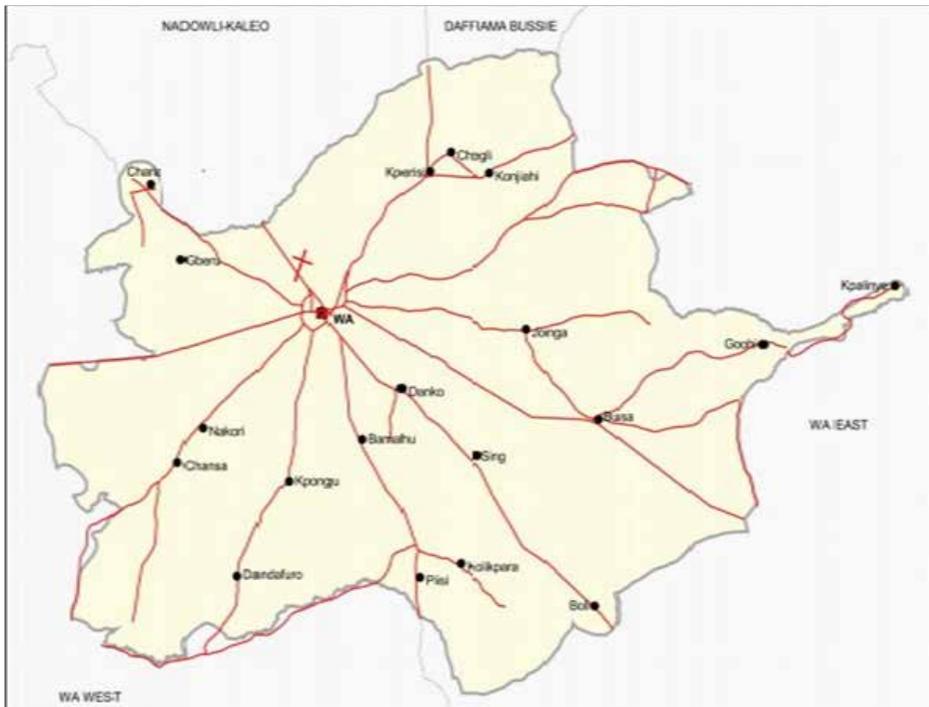


Figure 3: Location of Wa Municipality
Source: Ghana Statistical Service

According to the 2010 Population and Housing Census, the population of Wa Municipality is 107,214. Following the national trend, the Municipality has more females (50.6%) than males (49.4%). The population is largely peri-urban with just about 34 percent of the population residing in rural localities. The Municipality has a youthful population (35% of the population is below 15 years). Data from the Municipality shows that about eight

in ten people belong to the Mole-Dagbani group which is made up of the Waalas (the indigenous people), the Dagaabas and the Sissalas. These ethnic groups together with migrants from other regions and nationalities generally co-exist peaceably. The popular Damba festival is also celebrated by the people of Wa.

Economy:

Even though the Wa Municipality is categorised as an urban area, agriculture remains the biggest employer. The main crops are millet, corn, yam, okro and groundnuts. There is also a thriving service and sales sector that employs 25.7 percent of the economically active population.

Literacy & Information Communication Technology:

About 65.2 percent of the population, 11 years and above, are literates while 34.8 percent are non-literates. A bigger proportion of males are literate as compared to females. Also, 48 percent of persons, 12 years and older, in the district own mobile phones while 13.4 percent use internet facilities in the district. A further 12.9 percent of households in Wa Municipality have desktop / laptop computers. However, more men tend to use mobile phones and internet facilities in the district.

Tema Metropolitan Assembly

Context, Demography & Social Structure:

The Tema Metropolitan Assembly is an urban coastal district located about 30 km East of Accra, the Capital City of Ghana. It is made up of three Sub-Metropolitan Councils namely; Tema West, Tema East and Tema Central. The Metropolis is the biggest harbour settlement in Ghana and is spread over an area of about 87.8 km².

During the 2010 Population and Housing Census, the population of the Metropolis stood at 292,773, with males constituting 47.8 percent and females 52.2 percent. Persons under 15 years constitute 34.5 percent of the entire population, making the Metropolis quite youthful in population.



Figure 4: Location of Tema Metropolitan

Source: Ghana Statistical Service

Tema was created out of a group of small fishing villages, primarily inhabited by the Ga-Dangmes. After the construction of the Tema Harbour in 1961, these people were relocated to their present location at Tema Manhean. Since then, the area has

seen the influx of people from various ethnic groups. Currently, the dominant ethnic groups are the Akan, Ga-Dangme and Ewe.

Economy:

The Metropolis serves as the industrial hub of the country with several industries producing chemicals, clothing, consumer electrical equipment, furniture, machinery, petroleum products, steel and tools. Probably due to the harbour and the industrial nature of the Metropolis, about 31.5 percent of the employed population are engaged in the service and sales sector.

Literacy & Information Communication Technology:

The metropolis has a relatively high incidence of literacy. A little more than nine in ten of the population, 11 years and above, can read and write in at least one language. There are more literate males (94.8 %) than females (87.8%).

The Metropolis has access to all the major telecommunication networks, with 76.5 percent of the population, 12 years and above, owning mobile phones. There are slightly more men who own mobile phones than there are females. Also, a little over a quarter of the population in the Metropolis own computers and use internet facilities.

GOVERNANCE PRACTICES THAT CUT ACROSS THE TARGETED PROJECT DISTRICTS

The four target project District Assemblies (Twifo Atti-Morkwa, Wa, Ellembelle, and Tema) form part of Ghana's framework for a more participatory democratic governance system. The rationale, structure and functions of the District Assembly system is backed by the 1992 Constitution of the Republic of Ghana. Specifically, Chapter 20, Article 240(1) states that "Ghana shall have a system of local government and administration which shall, as far as practicable, be decentralized".

The four District Assemblies are the highest administrative and political authorities in their respective districts and are currently nonpartisan. Seventy percent of the assembly members are elected, thirty percent are nominated by the President, in consultation with local traditional authorities and organized groups.

The President also nominates District Chief Executives (DCEs) and Presiding Members (PMs) to head the District Administration and General Assembly, respectively. The Member(s) of Parliament from the districts are also members though they do not have voting rights.

Under the law, local authorities – District Assemblies – undertake executive, deliberative and technical support services to transform the articulated views and aspirations of local communities into physical and social development in their areas (Bandie, 2007). They carry out these functions through sub-district structures including Urban, Town/Area Councils, and Unit Committees.

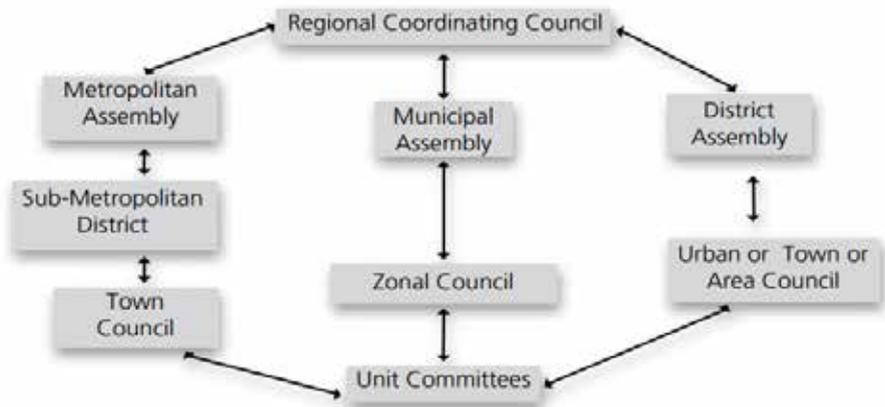


Figure 5: Local Government Structure in Ghana

District Assemblies also set up Executive Sub-Committees which according to Bandie (2007) broadly cover the following areas in the districts:

- **Physical Environment;**
- **Education, Social Welfare and Culture;**
- **Transport and Communication;**
- **Health and Hygiene;**
- **General Administration; and**
- **Security and Public Safety**

Aside from the Executive Sub-Committees, there is also the Public Relations and Complaints Committee. It is mandated to receive public grievances about the conduct of District Assembly staff members and officials, carry out investigations and make recommendations to the District Assembly. This committee helps local citizens to demand transparency and accountability in the dealings of local officials.

EXISTING PLATFORMS FOR CITIZENS' PARTICIPATION & ACCESS TO INFORMATION AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

The focus of Ghana's decentralised local governance system is to harness the collective effort of local citizens to bring about grass-root development. In the four target districts, as in all districts in the country, citizens' participation in local governance is intimately linked with their access to information. Citizens' participation is hollow without timely, accurate and accessible information. That is why both citizen's access to information and participation at the District Assembly level is supported by legal provisions (ILGS, 2013).

Some of these channels are highlighted below:

a) Participation in elections and referenda:

Local Citizens participate through the exercise of their constitutional right to elect 70 percent of their District Assembly Members. They also reserve the right to revoke the mandate of elected Assembly Members.

b) Citizens' consultation by Assembly Members:

Local electorate in the districts have the opportunity to access Information and participate in their governance during consultative meetings with their Assembly Members. These meetings are to take place both before and after every General Assembly meeting. Linked to this, citizens also have the right to contact their assembly members, observe Assembly meetings, and file petitions to the District Assembly for consideration at the Assembly meeting.

c) Participatory planning and budgeting:

Local citizens have the opportunity to factor their priority needs into the district's development plans and budgets. The unit committees, which form the basic structure of the District Assembly, are to be the first and primary avenue for discussions about the community's problems and needs. Together, local citizens and District Assembly officials are to come out with Community Action Plans (CAPs) and Area Level Plans (ALPs) at the unit committee level.

d) District Assembly public hearings/meetings:

These are also opportunities for public engagement on local development plans and issues. They could be called by either individual Assembly Members or the District Assembly.

f) Public Relations and Complaints Committee:

As indicated earlier, by submitting their grievances against district officials for investigation and redress to this committee, local citizens can ensure the accountability and openness of the district's operations.

Aside from the above channels which have their source in local governance laws, District Assemblies also adopt strategies or best practices that facilitate citizen's access to information and participation.

These include:

- Public education and communication campaigns
- Community or town hall meetings
- Local media (radio) interactions

CHALLENGES TO CITIZENS' ACCESS TO INFORMATION IN THE FOUR PROJECT MMDAs

Whether in developed countries or in developing ones like Ghana, several factors pose a challenge to effective citizens' access to information and grass-root participation. In the four project districts in Ghana, the below challenges have been identified.

Poverty:

The foremost challenge to citizens' access to information and participation in the four project districts is poverty. Across the four districts, a substantial number of people are unemployed or are engaged in low-earning, seasonal agricultural/artisanal activities. As such local citizens are often preoccupied with meeting their basic needs, their interest in participating in local governance processes is minimal at best.

Poor Road and Communication Networks:

Challenges with roads, railways, bridges, telecommunications, computer and internet access, and other communication infrastructure were highlighted in various degrees in all the project districts. This situation hampers the effective flow of information to local citizens as well the capacity of citizenry to actively participate in local governance processes. For instance, because the northern part of the Ellembelle District (New Aiyinasi Sub-District) has poor phone and road coverage, citizen's access to information and participation in local governance is difficult.

Illiteracy:

The fact that significant proportions of people living in the four target districts cannot properly read or write in any language is a major drawback in the quest to improve citizens' access to

information and local governance participation. This challenge has been found in several local governance studies (Ahenkan et al., 2013; Degraft, 2016). If a conscious effort is not made to reach the illiterate segments of the local populace they tend not to understand the workings of the District Assembly and end up on the fringes of local governance processes. Meanwhile, those Assembly Members in the four districts who are illiterate also find it difficult to review development documents, contribute during General Assembly or sub-committee meetings, or undertake effective advocacy and lobbying.

Inadequate Consultation by Assembly Members:

Though Assembly members are to meet their community members to effectively gauge and represent their views when they attend Assembly meetings, most do not perform this function. After the Assembly meetings, Assembly Members do not also meet and report back to their electorate. Poor accessibility and inadequate logistics sometimes contribute to this practice. Some of the Assembly Members even reside outside their electoral areas or districts.

Inadequate Information and Capacities of District Officials:

Citizens' access to information and participation does not occur in a vacuum. Information about the workings of the District Assembly must be readily available. For instance, information about the District Assembly Common Fund (DACF) and how it is utilised is often not readily available. Also, to carry the people along, district officials must be competent in participatory development planning (problem identification, analysis, prioritisation, documentation, etc.) and implementation. Unfortunately, such information and requisite skills are limited at the District Assembly level and lacking at both the Area Council and Unit Committee levels.

Dormant Area Councils and Unit Committees:

Though these sub-structures of the District Assemblies were set up to facilitate the decentralisation objective of the state, mobilise the local community and make local development plans, they have generally proved ineffective. Poorly motivated and skilled officials coupled with apathy among the local populace turn these normatively important structures into mere shadows of themselves.

Limited advocacy by the media especially local-based radio:

The increasing reach and pervasiveness of the media in several parts of the country make the media an important link between government officials and the people. This is especially true for radio stations that are based in local communities. Probably due to limited knowledge and resources, these local radio stations are unable to provide strong advocacy and programming on local governance issues. This leaves a wide information gap about the dealings of the District Assemblies and makes it easier for local officials to get away with resource wastage and corruption.

Poor Monitoring and Evaluation:

This is reflected in two main ways. The central government through the Ministry of Local Government and other agencies does not effectively monitor and supervise the District Assemblies and their sub-structures. This leads to a lackadaisical approach to providing citizens' access to information and participation. Also, the District Assemblies, on paper at least, have structures for promoting community engagement during the development planning process. However, there appears to be very little opportunity for local citizens to monitor and evaluate the development projects that have been initiated.

WHAT MFWA AND DW AKADEMIE ARE DOING TO ADDRESS SOME OF THE CHALLENGES

To help improve citizens' participation and access to information at the local level and ultimately promote inclusiveness, transparency and accountability in local governance processes, the MFWA and DW are implementing the project "*Promoting Citizens' Participation in Local Governance through Increased Access to Information*".

The project seeks to enhance local citizens' access to governance information and their active participation in governance processes in Wa, Ellembelle, Tema and Twifo Atti-Morkwa districts.

So far the following have been done:

- a. Fifty Assembly officials in the four project districts have received enhanced knowledge and skills on how to deal with citizens' requests and how to communicate professionally with media.
- b. Fifty Journalists in the four project districts have also received training on how to institute special programmes for dialogue, access to information and research on service delivery.
- c. Forty Young and vibrant youth (citizens' journalists) in the four project districts have also received training on how to use social and other media platforms to engage local authorities on local development issues.
- d. Media production (local base radio programming) on community development and governance issues.

CONCLUSION

Increasing access to information and participation at the local level has the potential to deliver governance and development that is inclusive, efficient and locally impactful. In Ghana's local governance structures and procedures, normative ways to improve community engagement exist: election of local officials, information sharing, community consultations, complaint redress, service access, development planning and budgeting, and community collaborations. In reality however, almost all these channels are not being effectively utilised.

The activities undertaken by the MFWA and its partners (town hall meeting, capacity building programmes for community members, local media and district officials) in the target districts have stimulated the culture of transparency and community engagement in local governance. More of such effort is required to bring meaningful governance and development to the doorstep of the average Ghanaian.

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