Political Decentralization and Local Participation in Ghana: Perspectives from the Upper West Region

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Abstract

The active participation of local people in development is the core of political decentralization. Drawing from both literature and empirical evidence from three districts in the Upper West region of Ghana, this paper examines the extent to which local people participate in District Assemblies' activities through interviews and focus group discussions.

It concludes that there is less citizenship participation in the District Assembly concept than is expected. This is because of low awareness among citizens, the poor remuneration of Assembly persons and ill-resourcefulness of the Area Councils and the partisanship and appointment of 30% of assembly persons to the Assembly.

The paper recommends the creation of more awareness among the citizens, election of district chief executives by universal adult suffrage and the resourcing of the area or zonal councils.

Key Words: Ghana, Political Decentralization, Participation, District Assembly.

1. Introduction

Decentralization is acknowledged to be one of the most acceptable forms of governance that allows for greater participation of the citizenry for good governance and participatory democracy (Offei-Aboagye, 2004; Ayee, 2003). The hallmark of decentralization as a strategy of governance is to ensure popular citizen participation and ownership of the governance system especially at the local level. After many forms of Governance and attempts to decentralize, Ghana embraced decentralisation in order to make its public sector more efficient, accountable and responsive to the local needs of her citizens (Ahoi, 2001; Ayee, 2003). As such, Ghana adopted the decentralisation policy by the promulgation of the PNDCL 207 (1988); which is further strengthened by the Ghana's 1992 Fourth Republican Constitution and various Acts and Legislative Instruments. Other main legislative Instruments made for effective decentralisation in Ghana are:

- Civil Service Law 1993 (PNDCL 327)
- District Assemblies Common Fund Act 1993 (Act 455)
- Local Government Act 1993 (Act 462)
- National Development Planning Commission Act 1994 (Act 480)
- Local Government Service Act (Act 656)
- Institute of Local Government Studies Act 2003 (Act 647)

Under the Local Governance Act 1993 (Act 462), Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies are key players of development at their respective local areas through an elaborate administrative structure to ensure popular and authentic participation of her constituents in the development process. Consequently, the Assemblies are entrusted with the political, administrative and legislative powers under the law to initiate, facilitate and execute development activities in their respective districts.

Participation become an essential ingredient of good governance and development and the consensus among major stakeholders is that people everywhere have a basic human right to take part in decisions that affect their lives (Ayee, 2000; Adams, 2003; Cheema, 2005; United Nations, 2008). According to Offei-Aboagye (2001:2) Ghana's decentralization aspired to

- Provide more responsive, equitable and participatory development
- Bring government and decision-making nearer to the people as well as quicken the process of decision-making
- Serve as a training ground for political activity

This paper sought to investigate whether over the three decades of operating; Ghana's local governance structure has been afforded local citizenry opportunities in the participation of development activities especially at the local district level.

2. The Problem in Context

Even though popular participation in local Governance is key to the realization of decentralized development (Ghana, 1992; Korkor, 2003); recent studies have revealed that there is still low local community participation in local governance processes (Ayee 1997; Gyimah-Boadi 1999; Ayee 2000; Ayee, 2001; and Crawford 2004). Participation increases the effectiveness and efficiency of development projects by enhancing coordination, transparency and accountability in action planning, priority setting, expenditure allocation and project implementation; and it serves as an instrument for empowering the local poor (Matovu, 2006). The reasons for low participation are mixed and contradictory. While some believe that the greatest cause of the problem is the attitude of the citizens, others have maintained that the district assemblies themselves make it difficult for participation by the majority of the local people (Ayee, 2000; 2003).

This study is aimed at generating information on the level of civic participation in public-policy making, development planning, public accountability and economic governance in the Upper West Region of Ghana. The study also sought to ascertain the effectiveness of the District Assemblies in the region in promoting participation in local governance decision making processes. Three out of the nine districts in the region were covered by the study and in each district, it

1. Sought to ascertain the extent to which the District Assembly (DAs) is able to promote citizenry participation in local governance decisions.
2. Examine the constraints on the District Assemby in promoting participation in local governance decisions.
3. Identify strategies that would enhance popular participation in local governance decisions.

Study districts are the Wa Municipal Assembly, Jirapa-Lambussie and Nadowli Districts[2]. Data was collected from 40 DAs members and 180 other people in these districts through structured interviews. This was supplemented by indepth interviews and focus group discussions.

3.Overview of Concepts

3.1 Decentralization and Participation

Decentralization is the transfer of authority and responsibility for public functions from a central government to subordinate governments (Smith, 1995:Ayee, 2003). It involves the transfer of fiscal, political and administrative powers to lower levels in an administrative and territorial structure (Duncan, 2007; Antwi-Boasiako, 2010). It has become a popular form of governance because of the need to reduce bureaucracy at central levels, to tailor development plans to specific local needs, ensure greater representation and public accountability (Manhood, 1993; Smith, 1996). Three main types of decentralization are commonly cited as

- Administrative Decentralization involving the re-location of branches of the state to local areas, entailing a transfer of powers to locally-based officials who remain part of, and upwardly accountable to, central government ministries and agencies. Also referred to as deconcentration or decongestion, Assibey (2000) notes that it is a power sharing strategy where power is transferred from central operating systems to regional ones. It is expedient to improve efficiency and effectiveness of delivering services to regional and local centers (Cheema and Rondinelli, 1983). Ahoi (2010:5) describes it as "system of field administration through which functions are transferred to field staff to make routine decisions and implement central directives at the local level".
- Fiscal decentralization involves the transfer of fiscal resources and revenue-generating powers, inclusive of authority over budgets and financial decisions, to either deconcentrated officials and/or central government central government appointees or elected politicians (Manor, 1995). Fiscal decentralization is key to all forms of decentralization and sometimes contested as being a separate form of decentralization because it entails a cross-cutting element in both political and administrative decentralization (Robit, 2001)
- Political Decentralization or democratic decentralization is the transfer of powers and resources to sub-national authorities which are largely or wholly independent of central government and democratically elected (Manor, 1995; Crawford, 2004). It is a form public administrative system which empowers citizens with greater insights and participation in the appointment of local level official and in planning and implementation of local development plans.

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[2] The Nadowli District has been currently split into Nadowli-Kaleo and Bussie-Daffiama-Issa Districts in June 2012. Primary data was collected between September and December, 2011.

Even though all the above forms of decentralization are entailed in Ghana's decentralization program, this paper focusses on political decentralization. It seeks to explore the extent to which the democratic principle participation is realized at the District Assembly levels in Ghana. This because, the cardinal principle of democratic decentralization is to afford citizens the opportunities to participate effectively in local governance. This was aptly put by Blair (1998:16) as follows:

> …the signal promise of decentralizing government authority is enhancing participation by encouraging more people to get involved in the politics that affect them, and making government more accountable by introducing citizen oversight and control through elections. If democracy lies in the rule by the people, the promise of democratic decentralization is to make that rule more immediate, direct, and productive.

Similarly, the term 'participation' has gained popularity in recent times, particularly in academics and development practice. Yet it defies any single universally accepted interpretation or definition. Some common and often interchangeable uses of the concept include; grassroots participation, community participation, local participation, popular participation, and citizen participation. Given the diversity of interest and background of individuals and groups involved in the debate on the subject, it is little surprising that the word means different things to different people and therefore the literature is full of several competing definitions of the term by different scholars (Ayee, 2000; Gaventa, 2002; Jeong, 2006; UNDP, 2008).

According to Gaventa (2002), though the term is mostly used to refer to participation in the social arena, in community or in development projects, it is also increasingly used in relation to rights of citizenship and to democratic governance. Viewed in this way, it implies that participation can be approached from either the social or political perspective. Gaventa and Valderrama (1999) assert that political participation on one hand, usually involves the engagement of citizens in traditional forms of political activities. It often focuses more on mechanisms of indirect participation like voting, political parties, and lobbying. Social participation on the other hand, is seen in the level of consultation or decision-making in all phases of a project cycle, from needs assessment, to appraisal, to implementation, to monitoring and evaluation. Corroborating Gaventa and Valderrama (1999), Amponsah and Boafo-Arthur (2003) conclude that participation in terms of development means the engagement of the greatest number of citizens in the formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of development programs and projects in order to uplift the living standards of those concerned. This differs from participation in governance which is the cornerstone of democracy. With respect to governance, participation implies a particular emphasis on the inclusion of people who are marginalized or excluded from conventional governance (United Nations, 2005). It means introducing or strengthening of mechanisms to encourage the direct involvement of those who do not find it easy to participate in state structures and processes. In local governance, however, the arena of action in participation goes beyond a specific project and involves government engagement with civil society groups. In that regard, it encompasses development and politics.

In the current local government system of Ghana for instance, participation is not only about politics but is also it is also about development or social participation. Article 240 (2) of the constitution provides that "to ensure the accountability of local government authorities, people in particular local government areas shall, as far as practicable, be afforded the opportunity to participate effectively in their governance". Strategies such as the requirement of an ordinary resident in the criteria for qualifying a candidate for local government elections; and the free, state-sponsored, and non-partisan nature of local government elections in Ghana were designed to ensure political participation (Ahoi 2010). Social participation is also made possible through the decentralized planning system. The National Development Planning (System) Act (Act 480) makes district assemblies the District Planning Authorities who are to "promote popular grassroots participation from the standpoints of planning, implementation, monitoring and delivery of those services through the Area/Zonal councils and Unit committees" (Mensah and Kendie, 2008: 309).
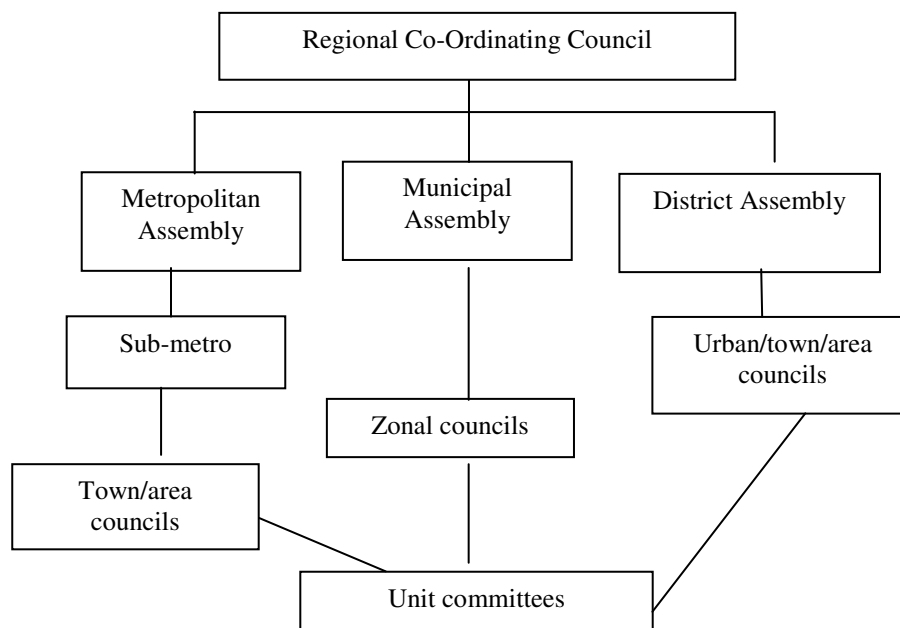
3.2 Ghana's Local Government Structure and Participation

Ahoi (2010:35) notes that Ghana's local government and decentralization program envisaged participation as summarized in Policy Guidelines in 1982 as follows:

I. "The urgent need for participatory democracy to ensure that the bane of remote government that had afflicted Ghanaians since independence is done away with effectively, to render government truly responsive and accountable to the governed.

II. The assumption of power by the people cannot be complete unless a truly decentralized government system is introduced, that is, the Central Government, in all its ministerial manifestations, should empower Local Government Councils to initiate, coordinate, manage and execute policies in all matters affecting them in their locality"

To bring live into this dream, a four tier metropolitan and three-tier Municipal/District Assemblies structure was adopted in 1988 by PNDCL 207. Local governments in Ghana, labeled as Assemblies, are called 'Metropolitan' (population over 250,000), 'Municipal' (one town Assemblies with population over 95,000), or 'District Assemblies' (population 75,000 and over). The emphasis of this study however lies with the DA because those sub-district structures are, as Ayee and Amponsah (2003:64) described them, "essentially consultative bodies with no budgets of their own and taxing powers". They only assist the DA to carry out its functions through delegated functions given to them by the DA. It is therefore the DA that is the key institution in promoting participation, especially the assembly member.

Fig. 1: Local Governance Structure in Ghana

Source: *Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA), 2007.*

One essential ingredient of every local government system and indeed, one reason for a lot of interest in it is to promote local participation. Participation is desirable because it is believed to enhance accountability, transparency, and responsiveness of local governments to the needs and development aspirations of local people. Similar objectives were therefore explicitly expressed in Ghana's Constitution and the various legislations on local government as empowerment, participation, accountability, effectiveness, efficiency, responsiveness, decongestion of the national capital and the checking of the rural-urban drift (Ayee and Amponsah 2003). Many scholars have re-affirmed the fact that, the current local government system provides an elaborate framework for the enhancement of popular participation at the local level as well as well as the promotion of development (Kyei, 2000; Offei-Aboagye, 2004)

Ahoi (2007) thus provides some specific strategies that were designed to achieve this objective of local participation. The requirement that one must be an "ordinary resident" to qualify for candidacy in local government elections; other features such as making local government elections free and state sponsored, the non-partisan character of local government elections and the local hearing requirements of the National Development Planning (System) Act, 1994 "are all designed to ensure not just participation, but participation by the people that decisions affect most directly" (Ahoi, 2007: 55). The National Development Planning (System) Act, 1994 (Act, 480) provides the legislative framework for decentralized planning in Ghana. Per this Act district assemblies are the District Planning Authorities and the function of development planning is transferred to them. They are also responsible for the implementation of development policies and programmes coordinated by the National Development Planning Commission. Mensah and Kendie, (2008:309) observed that, "the policy promotes grassroots participation in the administration of the district from the standpoint of planning, implementation, monitoring and delivery of services through the Area/zonal Councils and Unit Committees"

On the contrary however, Ayee (2003) believes that the District Assemblies have provided limited opportunities for formal participation. In his view, there are formal and informal procedures and opportunities for popular

participation in the local decision-making process through DA meetings and DA members meeting the electorate but these have been grossly inadequate and often irregular. Additionally, the composition of the DAs is rarely, if ever, representative of the populations they are governing. Tettey (2006:21) concords with Ayee and said, when the focus shifts to decision-making in particular, participation by citizens remains relatively stunted".

3.3 Structure of the Ghana's District Assemblies

The District Assembly (DA) consists of the District Chief Executive, seventy per cent of elected members in elections conducted by the Electoral Commission on the basis of universal adult suffrage and thirty per cent appointed by the president acting in consultation with traditional authorities and other groups in the district, and the member or members of parliament but without voting rights (Ahoi, 2010).

The composition of the District Assembly has attracted much criticism as not being democratic (Ahoi, 2010; Antwi-Boasako, 2010). The main criticism being that the position of the District Chief Executive is not elective by universal adult suffrage so as to make him/her more responsive to the people (Duncun, 2007; Debrah, 2009; Antwi-Boasiako, 2010). Antwi-Boasiako (2010) further calls for constitutional amendments to allow local citizens elect the local leaders on the same day as the parliamentary and presidential elections. This, it is hoped would not only ensure local participation and official accountability but would dispel the notion that favorites are nominated by the President.

The Constitutional provision that 30% of Assembly members should be appointed for purposes of affirmative action and the infusion of special skills, experience and knowledge into the Assembly does not only limit local decision making but has recently been muddled partisanship (Ahoi 2010;Gyimah-Boadi, 2010). These appointed members have no constituencies and are not accountable in any way to the citizens. As such, the crucial role of the Assembly member being a liaison between the local community and the Assembly is lost.

Other key officials in the Assembly includes the Presiding Member elected by both elected and appointed Assembly members and civil servants appointed by the state and whom local people cannot hold responsible.

Activities in the DA are through Committees, of which the Executive Committee (EXECO) consisting of a third of the Assembly Members is most significant. It has five statutory sub-committees, namely, planning, social services, works/technical infrastructure, justice and Security and finance and administration committees. At least every DA member belongs to a committee or sub-committee.

Important sub-structures include the Urban, Zonal and Town/Area Councils. These Councils are supposed to be the niching points of local development planning and action of the DAs. They are not elective but consist of representatives from institutions from the DA and from Unit Committee Members (UC). Ideally, development planning and action of the Assembly should emanate from these councils but they have since remained less functional largely because of budgetary reasons.

The functions of the DA as spelt out by the Constitution and Local Government Act of 1993 are as follows:

- To give political and administrative guidance , give direction and to supervise all other authorities in the District;
- To exercise deliberative, legislative and executive functions;
- To be responsible for the overall development of the District and ensure the preparation of (a) development plans of the District, and (b) the budget of the District related to the approved plan;
- Effective mobilization of the resources necessary for overall development of the District;
- Promotion of productive activity and social development;
- To co-ordinate, integrate and harmonize the execution of programmes and projects under approved development plans for the district and other development programmes promoted or carried out by the Ministries, Departments, Public Corporations and other Statutory Bodies and Non-Governmental Activities

  (Crawford, 2004:15;Ahoi 2010).

This study examines the involvement of local people in the execution of these functions under the DA structure in the Upper West region of Ghana.

4. FINDINGS
4.1 Extent of Promotion of Participation in Local Governance by District Assemblies

In examining the extent to which these assemblies are able to make local governance decisions participatory, specific points of interaction, information sharing and collective decision making between the DA and the local people among other variables were tested by the study. Apart from general interaction with the district assembly

officials, the people were also asked if they were involved in activities within the development project cycle – identification of problem, planning, implementation and monitoring, and evaluation.

4.1.1 Transmission of Information on Activities of DA constituents by Official of the DA

Even though the DA as a whole is accountable to the people, the assemblyman/woman, who is the direct representative of his/her constituents has a more critical role in terms of keeping his constituents informed about the decisions and actions taken by the DA to address the people's problems. Per the Local Government Act (Act 462) the assemblyman/woman is to keep close contact with his/her constituents so as to collate and present their views and concerns to the District Assembly. In the same vein, they are also to report back to their constituents the general decisions of the assembly including actions taken to address their concerns. This is intended to provide opportunity for local people to participate in the decision-making process of the district assembly through the assemblyman/woman. The assembly member's performance in terms of informing his people was therefore tested against the other district assembly officials.

First, community correspondents were asked which of the district assembly officials usually keep them informed about the development activities the assembly undertakes. Table 1 illustrates the percentages of respondents who indicated that a particular official keeps them informed.

On one hand, out of a total of 180 respondents, only the assemblyman/woman keeps most people (almost 42.8 percent) informed about district assembly's activities. If this is however examined in the context of the specific roles assigned to them as members of the assembly in section 16 of the Local Government Act (Act 462), the assembly members are not doing very well. This is because the remaining 57.2% of the respondents, who are in the majority, on the other hand, feel their assembly members do not get them informed about their respective District assemblies' decisions.

Apart from the assemblyman/woman, the Member of Parliament (MP) is the next official who recorded a significant number of the respondents (14 percent) who indicated that their MP inform them, the constituents, about activities of the assembly. The DCE and unit committee member are two officials who do little in terms of informing their people about the activities of the assembly. They both recorded less than five percent of the number of respondents. The data also provides evidence that a significant number of respondents (29.4%) believe that none of these officials keep them informed about the activities of the DA. A less than ten percent of respondents also agreed that all these officials keep them informed.

Table 1: Sources of information received by respondents

Description of DA Official	Number of Respondents	Percent
None	53	29.4
Unit Committee Member	4	2.2
Assembly Member	77	42.8
District Chief Executive	6	3.3
Member of Parliament	26	14.4
All	14	7.8
Total	**180**	**100.0**

Source: Field data, 2011

Assemblymen/women were similarly asked if they were able to keep the people in their areas informed about the decisions and activities of the assembly. Out of a total of 40 respondents, only four, representing ten (10) percent said no; meaning that they are not able to get the people informed. The majority, made up of 90 percent, said that they were able to keep their people informed. The position of the assembly members on the matter therefore did not agree so much with that of the majority of the community people. Most assembly members (90%) feel they are doing better than what majority of the constituents (57.2%) think about them. Discussions with various community focal groups also indicate that assemblymen/women, particularly those residing within or close to their electoral areas most often have frequent interaction with the people and therefore get them well informed

about the DA's activities. "In fact, assemblymen/women usually have a desire to perform their duties well so as to gain the trust and confidence of their people". This desire is attributable to the fact that the position of the assemblyman/woman is becoming more and more competitive and so substantive assemblymen/women want to get re-elected in subsequent elections.

4.1.2 Regularity of Meeting between DA Member and Constituents

The study further sought to know how the people participate in the DA's decision making process through meetings with their Assemblymen/women. As a conscious strategy to ensure that the local people participate in the DA decision making process, assemblymen/women have it as a duty to meet with their people, before and after each DA meeting to share their development concerns as well as get them know what actions the DA is taken to solve their problem. Section 18 of the Local Government Act and the Model Standing Orders for Assemblies issued by the Minister of Local Government under the authority of section 18(6) of the Local Government Act provide that District assemblies are to meet at least three times a year, excluding the Inaugural meeting (Local Government Act, 1993, Act 462). It stands to reason therefore that the assemblyman/woman who will afford his/her people the opportunity to participate effectively in the DA's decision making process will necessarily have to meet with the people for not less than six times a year. The findings in a survey of 40 assemblymen/women are presented in table 2.

Out of the total of 40 assemblymen/women interviewed, an overwhelming majority, making up 75% were able to meet with their constituents only once or twice officially in a year. It can be inferred from these findings that, majority of these assemblymen/women are not able to meet with the electorates before and after every DA meeting. This re-affirms the earlier findings that, in most cases, DA members are not able to meet the requirement that they should meet their constituents before and after DA meetings which was attributed to logistical problems (Ayee, 2003). Those who said they were able to meet more than twice in a year were only nine (9), representing 22.5 percent of the total respondents. Just one person indicated that he/she was able to meet with the people as many times as was necessary.

Table 2: Frequency of DA meetings with Assembly Members

Frequency of Meetings	No. of Persons	Percent
Once in a Year	12	30.0
Twice in a Year	18	45.0
More than Twice in a Year	9	22.5
As many Times as it is Necessary	1	2.5
Total	**40**	**100.0**

Source: Field data, 2011

Discussants on the issue believe that the fact that assembly membership is widely seen and rightly used by some people as entry point to national political leadership, makes it attractive to the influential and elites in the society. Most of these people, unfortunately do easily win the election with the promise of using their influence to bring development to the people. The major challenge they however face is how to keep regular contact with their electorates since they are also mostly in regular employment outside their electoral areas and more so given that the assembly member is not resourced to carry out his/her duties.

Assemblymen however believe their greatest problem with having regular contacts with their electoral areas is the lack of financial support from the DA or central government. They believe if they were equally given some kind of support as done for MPs, they would have been doing better in carrying out their responsibilities to their electorates.

4.1.3 Community Inputs into the District Planning Process

The National Development Planning System Act, Act 480 of 1994, through the guidelines provided by the National Development Planning Commission (NDPC) for the preparation of District Medium-Term Development Plan (DMTDP), offer yet another important opportunity for the local people to directly participate in very crucial decisions of the district assembly. The guidelines require the collection of disaggregated data in consultation with relevant stakeholders including traditional institutions, Civil Society Organizations (CSO), the

sub-district councils, communities among others as well as holding periodic public hearings to build consensus on issues (NDPC, 2006). In essence, District Planning Authorities are required to consider the views expressed at the hearing before the adoption of the proposed district development plans (Section 3(1) of Act 480). To ensure compliance, it is further required that members of the district assembly and sub-district councils take part in the final adoption of the DMTDP.

If this procedure is given practical meaning in planning development at the district level, the plans will reflect the needs and aspirations of the local people who are not only beneficiaries but also are affected by the development. How much patronage such consultations and hearings get from the local people could serve as a good indicator of their level of participation in the decision making process of the DA. Respondents were therefore asked to indicate if they have ever attended public hearings of the sort where they could make contribution to the planning process. It revealed that a great majority of about 69% of the respondents had never attended a public hearing session. One could possibly reason that these were people who probably were not willing to attend, even though they had the opportunity. The question was therefore asked if those who never attended were willing to attend such hearings if they were given the opportunity.

The majority of 115 respondents (92%) out of the 125 who responded said they were willing to attend if they were given the opportunity. The few (8%) who said they were not going to attend gave reasons other than lack of interest. These include the doubt in their own ability to make any meaningful contribution to the process and the belief that their assembly member understands all their development needs and therefore should be able to make them known to the DA.

In-depth interview with the district planning officers confirmed that the problem is not so much of the local people not having interest in attending, but that many people may never have the opportunity to attend these hearings. Out of the three districts, only one had documents indicating dates when such hearings were done at various zonal levels, the concerns raised and how they were addressed. The other two however explained that, in their last plans preparations these hearings were not organized due to financial and time constraints or they were poorly organized in the sense that many people did not know about them. Inadequate financial resources are usually committed by the DA to the drawing up of such plans and for that matter one is forced to leave out some of the processes to reduce cost. Additionally, the time limits that came with earlier district development plans preparation were rather too short to allow one to follow through the due process of holding wide public hearings and other requirements for participation.

Mere attendance at a public hearing session may not necessarily be interpreted as effective participation of local people. To ascertain if the few who had attended a public hearing before were able to express their opinions about the draft plans, they were asked if there was opportunity for them to make contributions to the draft plans presented during the forum. Out of the 55 respondents, a large percentage of 87.3 admitted that there was room for them to express their opinions.

4.1.4 Participation in Community Projects

The decentralization policy does not only promote grass roots participation from the standpoint of planning but also implementation, monitoring, and delivery of services through the Area/Zonal Councils and Unit Committees (Kendie and Mensah, 2008). In examining the promotion of effective participation by the DA, it is very much appropriate to take a look at the people's level of involvement in a particular community project execution and their knowledge in the details of projects that were being executed or one that has just been executed within the community. Lack of knowledge of such vital details as the cost of the project; the implementation agency; specification among others can be rightly understood either as no effective participation or no participation at all. Though everyone in the community may not be directly involved in the process, the assemblyman/woman who represents the people and whose duty it is to inform his electorates must understand such details.

Chiefs and other opinion leaders say they can remember their respective roles in identifying and acquiring land for projects. In some projects, especially District-Wide Assistance Projects (DWAP), a committee was formed to supervise the implementation of every community project. Members of each of these committees included a representative of the beneficiary community, nominated by the community; member(s) of the sector agency or agencies- like health, education, agriculture among others; the district engineer and the planning officer. Concerns the community had in relation to such projects were addressed through their representatives. Apart from that, it was also noticed that where a project was going to a community, the assemblyman/woman within whose electoral area the community was served with a copy of the contract where all the details of the projects were stated. Again, community projects that were found completed were mostly handed over to the community in an elaborate ceremony where a lot of other stakeholders were present. According to the district planning officer, the aim of handing over to the community is to demonstrate that such facilities after their completion belong to the community which they have to take ownership of.

It was however noticed that, majority of the local community people simply got contend with the news of a project to be cited in their community but did not take interest in the other details of the project that could help them participate meaningfully in monitoring and evaluating such projects. In the field survey, respondents who acknowledged that their communities were benefiting or had just benefited from a project were therefore asked to indicate if some of these details were known to them. The results give more credence to what has been said by the chiefs and others. In all, 138 respondents out of the 180 surveyed acknowledged that their communities had received or are currently receiving some form of development project as indicated on table 3.

Table 3: Knowledge of community Project Details

Project Detail	Total Respondents	Response			
		Yes	Percent	No	Percent
Cost of Project	138	25	18.1	113	81.9
Completion Schedule	138	31	22.5	107	77.5
Specification	138	43	31.2	95	68.8
Contractors	138	58	42.0	80	58.0
Funding Agency	138	70	50.7	68	49.3

Source: Survey data, 2011

The table provides more evidence to the fact that, most of the project details were not known by majority of the respondents. In all the details mentioned, except the funding agency, a number far less than half of the total respondents had no knowledge of them. For instance, only 31.2% of the respondents said they had knowledge of the specifications on their community projects. Also, a small percentage of 22.5% also had knowledge of their community projects completion times. The majority, made up of 77.7% did not have this knowledge. Even though many more respondents tended to know the various funding agencies of the projects than any other details (at least about 51% which is higher than that of any other detail), that is not high enough.

4.2 Constraints on Promoting Effective Participation Local Governance
Effective participation of local people undoubtedly is desirable in local governance not only because it has the ability to produce good outcomes, but also because it is one critical value of good governance. However, a host of constraining factors act against its achievement in Ghana.

4.2.1 Perception of Local People on Constraints to Participation
A number of problems make efforts at achieving effective local participation in decision making at the DA level not yield the desired results. During the field work, it came out that the people blamed their inability to participate effectively on a number of constraints which are detailed in Table 4.

Table 4: Perception of Constraints on Participation by Community People

Description of the Constraint	Details of Responses			
	Yes		No	
	Number	%	Number	%
Lack of interest	47	26.1	133	73.9
Lack of information	139	77.2	41	22.8
Low incentives	114	63.3	66	36.7
Lack of trust for DA official	63	35	117	65
Lack of formal education	91	50.6	89	49.4
Inadequate skills: communication, negotiation etc.	94	52.2	86	47.8
Low socio-economic status	60	33.3	120	66.7

Source: Field survey, 2011.

From the table, it is clear that the feelings about the type of constraint that individuals are confronted with are rather varied and mixed. They are mixed in the sense that there was no total agreement on any issue either as a constraint or not a constraint on participation. What however is evident is that, there are largely four issues which were widely perceived as problems to participation. One is the issue of lack of information to the local people. As many as 77.2% of all respondents agreed that, lack of information does serve as a constraint to participation. The second issue is that a little more than half (50.6%) of the total respondents perceived the lack of formal education among local people. The third is the issue of lack of incentives to which 63.3% of the respondents also admitted that it serves as a constraint to participation. This agrees very much with United Nation (2008) report which asserts that where there is an incentive gap, it serves as a barrier to participation. Finally, inadequate skills was also seen by 52.2% of respondents as a barrier to participation. The remaining 47.8% however say, that is not a constraint.

Rather contrary to Ayee (2000) however, the issue of lack of interest among people was seen by 73.9% respondents not to be a problem as indicated in the table. Other issues mentioned, which were however not considered as constraints by many respondents were lack of trust for officials of the DA and low socio-economic status of the people. Only 35% and 33.3% respectively said these were constraints to participation.

Discussions with other opinion leaders also confirmed some of these issues as posing challenges to effective participation. For instance, the greatest problem, in the estimation of a chief, is the fact that some of the assemblymen and women choose to deal with only a few 'favorite individuals' of theirs in the electoral areas to the neglect of the majority of the people. "In that circumstance, how will you expect to get information about development from the district assembly if you are not among those 'favorite individuals' they have?" He asked.

The lack of formal education among majority of the people, they believe is virtually the root cause of all other problems with their level of participation. The fact that lack of formal education breeds ignorance on a lot of issues including ones roles, responsibilities and even sometimes one's rights, DA officials, could always explore it to their advantage. To paraphrase a point made by one member of the discussion groups, the modern society is becoming more and more a literate society and for that matter, if unfortunately you lack literacy be sure you will be left out of many public discussions and decision making. It does not even matter if you are rich or not. He believes that is the plight of most of the local people. These expressions go to support the view of the World Bank (2001) that low educational levels were also obstacles to effective participation as most of the skills, managerial abilities and skills require some appreciable level of formal education to acquire.

4.2.2 Perception of DA Officials on Constraints to Participation.

Like the local people, the 40 assemblymen/women who were interviewed also had mix feelings about what constituted constraints to participation. Table 5 illustrates how they responded to the issues raised. While most of them share some of the views of the local people, there were also a few issues on which majority disagreed with the local people. Majority agreed, agreed with the local people that lack of information; lack of formal education; low incentives; and lack of skills are constraints on participation in local governance decisions. The greatest majority of 82.5%, among all the four issues which majority indicated as constraints, was recorded on the issue of low or lack of incentives. The least majority, constituting 55% was also recorded on the issue of inadequate skills.
Contrary to the local community people, however, a majority of 60% of assemblymen/women said lack of trust for DA officials is also a problem.

Table 5: DA officials' Perception of Constraints on Participation,

Description of the Constraint	Details of Responses			
	Yes		No	
	Number	%	Number	%
Lack of interest	17	42.5	23	57.5
Low of incentives	33	82.5	7	17.5
Lack of information	29	72.5	11	27.5
Lack of trust for DA officials	24	60	16	40
Lack of formal education	31	77.5	9	22.5
Low socio-economic status	9	22.5	31	77.5
inadequate skills: communication, negotiation etc.	22	55	18	45

Source: Field Survey, 2011

As table 5 above also depicts, majority of 77.5% and 57.5% respectively of the assemblymen/women respondents also disagreed with the assertions that, issues of low socio-economic status and lack of interest pose barriers to participation.
District planning officers concluded that lack of incentives, particularly for assemblymen/women, is the most serious constraining factor on promoting participation. As one of them put it, even the poor attitude of assemblymen and women towards their duties to community members and the district assembly are all attributable to the problem of lack of incentives. Currently, among the three districts the highest daily sitting allowance one pays to an assembly member is a mere twenty Ghana Cedis (Gh¢ 20 equivalent to about US$10). Considering such an amount, it does not motivate an assemblyman to even regularly attend district assembly sittings, much less to talk about going round to collate views from the people before assembly sittings and going back to give a feedback after the meetings. They also believe that, to a large extend, so far as the power to appoint and dismiss the political heads of the district- DCEs- is vested in the president, it makes the position highly unsecured and that goes a long way to affect how they look at local participation in decision making. Once as heads they feel rather more accountable and loyal to the president and to their political parties than just the local people, they may not attach importance to popular participation in decision making.

4.3 Suggested Strategies for Improving on Participation

Table 6 is a summary of respondents' suggestions on strategies of enhancing the participation of local people in DA activities.

Each respondent was asked to state his/her own views on key strategies that could be adopted to enhance local participation in local governance decision-making. A total of 246 suggestions were made by 163 out of the 180 respondents. Suggestions made were that citizens should be more assertive and more interested in local governance activities and the need to resource Assembly persons and Unit Committee members to enable them function effectively. There was a suggestion that local people should demand more accountability from the DAs and that will require local communities to become more interested in what their DAs do and regularly demand the DAs to report to them how much resources are available to the district and how they are used for the district's development. Again, the need for vibrant civil society organizations (CSOs) that will engage with DAs to ensure participation of local people is an action that largely demands civil society to take action. Majority of the suggestions however need the attention of central and local government. The issues of provision of incentives to motivate people to participate; making unit committees system functional; making formal education more accessible; carrying out more education on the functions of DAs; organizing regular forums on the assembly's activities; and the election of DCEs, as suggested by the respondents demand that government will have to take appropriate actions by providing the necessary funding and/or policy framework to address them.

The responses are summarized in Table 6 below:

Table 6: Recommendations by Respondents to enhance participation

S/N	Recommendation	Percentage (%)
1.	Sensitization of Citizens on Assembly's Activities	34
2.	More District fora, radio programs etc	27
3.	Resourcing Area Councils, Assembly and Unit Committee Members	17
4.	District Assembly Officials should be more transparent and responsible	12
5.	District Chief Executive should be elected	3
6.	District Assembly's Activities should be less partisan	3
7.	Deterring sanctions for non-accountable District Officials	1
	Total	*100*

Source: Field Survey, 2011.

Perhaps, the understanding one gets from these set of suggestions that place so much emphasis on things government needs to do is that, the respondents see central and local governments as having a greater role to play in order to improve local participation, even though they acknowledged that as citizens they also have a part.

5.0 Conclusion

From the above, participation in the DAs can best be described as tokenism on the Arnstein (1969) ladder of participation. More sensitization of local people to have interests in DA activities and get involved is needed. Impediments to local people's participation included the lack of remuneration for Assembly persons, the

appointment and not election of the District Chief Executive and 30% of Assembly members. Local people's civic awareness is poor and as such many citizens are not keen in the district assembly's activities.

The study recommends that structurally, all key officers of the District including the District Chief Executive and all Assembly members should elected by the universal adult suffrage. Technical expertise needed by the District could then be contracted on transparent basis to support the district assemblies. Area councils need to be supported as it is the basis of participatory planning and development under the DA concept.

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