

The Role of Municipal Assemblies' Sub Structures in Deepening Decentralization Democracy: Perspective From the Nanumba North Municipal Assembly in the Northern Region Of Ghana

Abdul - Razak Yakah
Municipal Coordinating Director
Nanumba North Municipal Assembly

Abstract

This paper examines the extent to which local people in the Nanumba North Municipality participate in the Municipal Assembly's activities using interviews and focus group discussions. In Ghana, political decentralisation has been ongoing since the 1980s, aiming to promote local participation in decision-making and improve service delivery at the local level. The decentralisation policy in Ghana is implemented through the Local Governance Act, 2016 (Act 936), which established local government structures at the district, municipal, and metropolitan levels. These structures provide essential services such as sanitation, health, education, and infrastructure. The active participation of the local people in development is at the core of political decentralisation. This paper concludes that there is less citizenship participation at the Municipal Assembly than is expected. This is because of low awareness among citizens, poor remuneration of Assembly persons, no resources for the Area Councils, partisanship and appointment of 30% of assembly persons to the Assembly. The paper recommends the creation of more awareness among the citizens, the election of Metropolitan, Municipal and District chief executives by universal adult suffrage and the resourcing of the area and zonal councils.

Keywords: Ghana, Political Decentralization, Participation, Municipal Assembly.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Political decentralisation is the process of redistributing power and decision-making authority from the central government to local or regional authorities (Debrah, 2014). Decentralisation is acknowledged as one of the most acceptable forms of governance that allow for greater citizenry participation for good governance and participatory democracy (Offei-Aboagye, 2004; Ayee, 2003). In Ghana, political decentralisation has continued since the 1980s, aiming to promote local participation in decision-making and improve service delivery at the local level ((Ahoi, 2001; Ayee, 2003). The decentralisation policy in Ghana is implemented through the Local Governance Act of 2016, Act 936, which established local government structures at the Metropolitan, Municipal, and District levels. These structures provide essential services such as sanitation, health, education, and infrastructural development (Ayee, 2000; Adams, 2003; Cheema, 2005; United Nations, 2008). According to Offei-Aboagye (2001:2). Under the Local Governance Act of 2016 (Act 936) Metropolitan, Municipal and Municipal Assemblies are critical development players in their respective local areas through an elaborate administrative structure to ensure popular and authentic participation of their constituents in the development process. Consequently, the Assemblies are entrusted with the law's political, administrative and legislative powers to initiate, facilitate and execute development activities in their respective administrative jurisdictions.

Political decentralisation in Ghana has contributed to the promotion of participatory democracy and the empowerment of local communities. It has also improved the effectiveness and efficiency of local government delivery systems. However, challenges remain, including limited financial autonomy for local governments and the need for local capacity-building. Overall, political decentralisation in Ghana is an ongoing process that seeks to address the challenges of centralisation and improve service delivery to the citizens at the local level. This paper examined whether Ghana's local governance structure, which has been operating for over three decades, allows the local citizenry to participate in its development activities, especially in the Nanumba North Municipal Assembly.

2.0 THE PROBLEM IN CONTEXT

Although participation is critical in the local governance system to ensure the realisation of development (Korkor, 2003), recent papers have shown that there is still low participation in the local communities within the 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. In addition, it serves as an instrument for empowering the local poor (Matovu, 2006). However, the reasons for low participation are mixed and contradictory. While some believe that the most significant cause of the problem is the attitude of the citizens, others have maintained that the Metropolitan, Municipal and District assemblies themselves make it difficult for the participation of the majority of the local people (Ayee, 2000; 2003).

This study aims to generate information on civic participation in public policy-making, development planning, public accountability and economic governance in the Nanumba North Municipal Assembly in the Northern Region of Ghana. The study also sought to ascertain the effectiveness of the region's Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies in promoting participation in local government decision-making processes. It also:-

- i. Sought to ascertain the extent to which the Municipal Assembly (MA) can promote citizenry participation in local governance decisions.
- ii. Examine the constraints on the Municipal Assembly in promoting participation in local governance decisions.
- iii. Identify strategies that would enhance popular participation in local governance decisions.

Nanumba North Municipal Assembly was the study Municipality, and data were collected from 40 MA members and 94 other people through structured interviews. In-depth interviews and focus group discussions supplemented this.

2.1 Decentralization and Participation

Decentralisation refers to transferring power, decision-making authority or control from a central source or government to lower-level entities such as local governments, organisations, or individuals (Smith, 1995; Ayee, 2003). It involves distributing fiscal, political and administrative power and responsibilities to lower levels in an organisational and territorial structure (Duncan, 2007; Antwi-Boasiako, 2010), allowing them more control over their lives and the decisions that affect them.

As a need to reduce the general bureaucracy that characterises the primary levels, ensure development plans to the needs of local constituents, and ensure greater involvement and public accountability, decentralisation has become a more acceptable form of governance. Decentralisation can take different forms, including political, administrative, and financial decentralisation. Political decentralisation involves the transfer of power from central authorities to elected representatives at the local level (Manor, 1995; Crawford, 2004), while administrative decentralisation refers to the devolution of administrative functions to local governments (Assibey, 2000). Finally, financial decentralisation involves the transfer of resources from central authorities to local governments to finance regional projects and programs (Manor, 1995). The decentralisation program in Ghana entails all the above forms of decentralisation, but this paper focuses on political decentralisation. It seeks to explore the extent to which the democratic principle of participation is realised at the Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assembly levels in Ghana.

Decentralising government authority promises to enhance participation by encouraging more people to get involved in the policies that affect them and making the government more accountable by introducing citizen oversight and control through elections. If democracy lies in the rule by the people, democratic decentralisation promises to make that rule more immediate, direct, and productive (Blair, 1998). Decentralisation has benefits, such as promoting democracy, efficiency, and accountability. In addition, it allows for more local participation in decision-making, encourages innovation and experimentation, and can lead to better service delivery (Hussain, 2003; Nasrin, 2013; Jahan, 1997). However, decentralisation can also have drawbacks, such as increasing fragmentation, decreasing policy coherence, and increasing corruption, if proper oversight mechanisms are not implemented. Nevertheless, participation is essential to democracy, allowing individuals to express their voices and

influence public decision-making. It also helps increase transparency, accountability, and diversity in decision-making (Ayee, 2000). Similarly, the term 'participation' has recently gained popularity, particularly in academics and development practice. However, 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 surprise that the word means different things to different people and therefore, the literature is full of several competing definitions of the term by other scholars (Ayee, 2000; Gaventa, 2002; Jeong, 2006; UNDP, 2008).

The participation of all stakeholders is a significant ingredient that drives decentralised local governance. The European Union (2006) identifies with strengthening citizen participation processes concerning how ordinary citizens exercise their voice through new forms of inclusion, consultation, and mobilisation designed to inform and influence larger institutions and policies. In the view of the World Bank (2003), participation is a process through which stakeholders influence and share control over development initiatives, decisions and resources which affect them. The extension of the concept of participation to citizenship implies a right to participate and to be an active part of the process of participatory governance, participatory planning and budgeting, citizen engagement in committees or monitoring public services. In the view of Reid (2000), community participation is necessary because communities that engage their citizens and partners deeply in community development agenda raise more resources, achieve better results and development holistically and beneficially. Viewing participation from another perspective, Abbot (1996) concluded that community participation is the key to sustainability, security, peace, social justice and democracy. The most effective means of sustaining decentralised local governance accordingly is through the active participation of all stakeholders (European Commission, 2006)

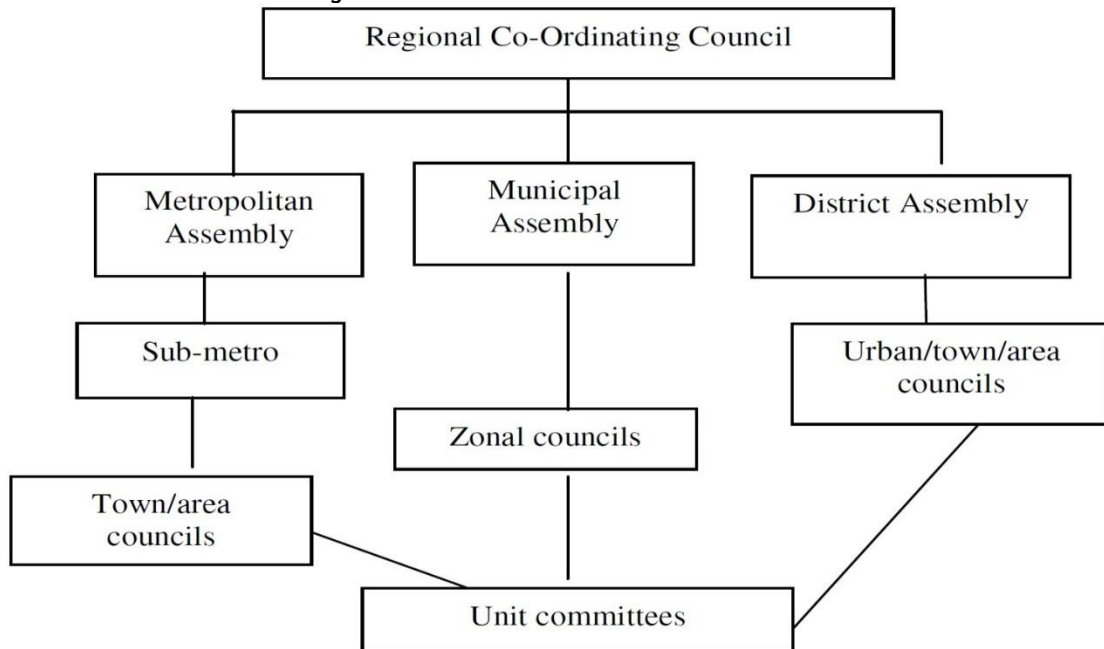
2.2 Ghana's Local Government Structure and Participation

Ahoi (2010:35) notes that Ghana's local government and decentralisation program envisaged participation as summarised in Policy Guidelines in 1992 as follows:

- I.
- II. "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.
- III. The assumption of power by the people cannot be complete unless a truly decentralised 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 life 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, labelled as Assemblies, are called 'Metropolitan' (population over 250,000), 'Municipal' (town Assemblies with a population over 95,000), or 'District Assemblies' (population 75,000 and over). However, the emphasis of this study lies with the MA because those sub-municipal 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 MA in carrying out its functions through delegated functions given to them by the MA. Therefore, the MA is crucial in promoting participation, especially among 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 one reason for much interest in it is to promote local participation. Participation is desirable because it enhances local governance's accountability, transparency, and responsiveness to local people's needs and development aspirations. 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 & Amponsah, 2003). Many scholars have reaffirmed that the current local government system provides an elaborate framework for enhancing popular participation at the local level and promoting development (Kyei, 2000; Offei-Aboagye, 2004).

Ahoi (2007) thus provides some specific strategies 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 accessible and state-sponsored, the non-partisan character of local government elections and the local hearing requirements of the Local Governance Act, 2016 (Act 936) "are all designed to ensure not just participation, but participation by the people that decisions affect most directly" (Ahoi, 2007, p. 55). The Local Governance Act, 2016 (Act 936) section 82 provides the legislative framework for decentralised planning in Ghana. Per this Act, Municipal assemblies are the Municipal Planning Authorities, and the development planning function is transferred to them. They are also responsible for implementing 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 Municipal from the standpoint of planning, implementation, monitoring and delivery of services through the Area/zonal Councils and Unit Committees."

On the contrary, Ayee (2003) believes that the Municipal Assemblies have provided limited opportunities for formal participation. In his view, there are legal and informal procedures and options for popular participation in the local decision-making process through MA meetings and members meeting the electorate. However, these have been grossly inadequate and often irregular. Additionally, the composition of the MAs is rarely, if ever, representative of the populations they govern. Tetey (2006:21) concurred with Ayee and said, when the focus shifts to decision-making in particular, participation by citizens remains relatively stunted".

2.3 Structure of Ghana's Municipal Assemblies

The Municipal Assembly (MA) consists of the Municipal Chief Executive, seventy per cent of elected members in elections conducted by the Electoral Commission based on universal adult suffrage and thirty per cent appointed by the president acting in consultation with traditional authorities and other groups in the Municipality and the member or members of parliament but without voting rights (Ahoi, 2010). The composition of the Municipal Assembly has attracted much criticism as not being democratic (Ahoi, 2010; Antwi-Boasako, 2010). The main complaint is that the position of the Municipal Chief Executive is not elective by universal adult suffrage to make them more responsive to the people (Duncan, 2007; Debrah, 2009; Antwi-Boasiako, 2010). Antwi-Boasiako (2010) further calls for constitutional amendments to allow local citizens to elect their local leaders on the same day as the parliamentary and presidential elections. This is hoped to ensure local participation and official accountability and dispel the notion that the President nominates favourites.

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 include 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 MA are through Committees, of which the Executive Committee (EXECO) is most significant and which consists of the Municipal Chief Executive, Chairpersons of the five statutory sub-committee of the EXECO, Chairperson of one ad hoc sub-committee of the EXECO and two other members elected by members of the Municipal Assembly, at least one of whom is a woman. The five statutory sub-committees of the Executive Committee are planning, social services, works/technical infrastructure, justice and Security and finance and administration committees. At least every MA 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 MAs. They are not elected but consist of representatives from institutions from the MA and Unit Committee Members (UC). Ideally, development planning and action of the Assembly should emanate from these councils, but they have since remained less functional mainly because of budgetary reasons. The functions of the MA as spelt out by the Constitution and Local Governance Act, 2016 (Act 936) are as follows: To give political and administrative guidance, give direction and supervise all other authorities in the Municipality;

- To exercise deliberative, legislative and executive functions;
- To be responsible for the overall development of the Municipality and ensure the preparation of (a) development plans of the Municipality and (b) the budget of the Municipality related to the approved plan;
- Effective mobilisation of the resources necessary for the overall development of the Municipality;
- Promotion of productive activity and social development;
- To co-ordinate, integrate and harmonise the execution of programmes and projects under approved development plans for the Municipality and other development programmes promoted or carried out by the Ministries, Departments, Public Corporations and other Statutory Bodies and Non-Governmental Activities (Crawford, 2004, p. 15; Ahoi, 2010).

This study examined whether Ghana's local governance structure, which has been operating for over three decades, allows the local citizenry to participate in its development activities, especially in the Nanumba North Municipal Assembly.

3.0 DISCUSSIONS & FINDINGS

3.1 Extent of Promotion of Participation in Local Governance by Municipal Assemblies

In examining the extent to which these assemblies can make local governance decisions participatory, the study tested specific points of interaction, information sharing and collective decision-making between the MA and the local people, among other variables. Apart from general interaction with

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

3.1.1 Transmission of Information on Activities of MA Constituents by Official of the MA

Even though the MA is accountable to the people, the assemblyman/woman, the direct representative of their constituents, has a more critical role in keeping his constituents informed about the decisions and actions taken by the MA to address the people’s problems. Per the Local Governance Act, 2016 (Act 936), the assemblyman/woman must keep close contact with their constituents to collate and present their views and concerns to the Municipal Assembly. Similarly, they must report the assembly’s general decisions to their members, including actions to address their concerns. This is intended to allow local people to participate in the decision-making process of the Municipal assembly through the assemblyman/woman. Therefore, the assembly member’s performance in informing his people was tested against the other Municipal assembly officials.

First, community members were asked which Municipal assembly officials usually kept them informed about its development activities. Table 1 illustrates the respondents’ percentages indicating that a particular official keeps them informed. On the one hand, out of 94 respondents, only the assemblyman/woman keeps most people (almost 72.34 per cent) informed about the Municipal assembly’s activities. Suppose this is, however, examined in the context of the specific roles assigned to them as community members in section 16 of the Local Governance Act, 2016 (Act 936). In that case, assembly members are doing very well. This is because the remaining 27.66% of the respondents, who are in the minority, on the other hand, feel their assembly members do not get them informed about the Municipal assemblies’ decisions.

Apart from the assemblyman/woman, the Municipal Chief Executive (MCE) was the next offollowingal who recorded a significant number of the respondents (14 per cent) who indicated that their MCE informed the constituents about the activities of the assembly. The Members of Parliament and unit committee members are two officials who do little to educate their people about the assembly's activities. They both recorded less than five per cent of the number of respondents. The data also provide evidence that none of the respondents believes that none of these officials keeps them informed about the activities of the MA. Moreover, less than five per cent of respondents also agreed that all these officials keep them informed.

Table 1: Sources of information received by respondents

Description of MA Official	Number of Respondents	Per cent (%)
None	0	0
Unit Committee Member	4	4.26
Assembly Member	68	72.34
Municipal Chief Executive	14	14.89
Member of Parliament	4	4.25
All of them	4	4.26
Total	94	100

Source: Field Data, 2023

Assemblymen/women were similarly asked if they could keep the people in their areas informed about the decisions and activities of the assembly. Out of 40 respondents, only four, representing ten (10) per cent, said no, meaning they could not inform the people. On the other hand, the majority, made up 90 per cent, said they could keep their people informed; therefore, the assembly members' position on the matter did not agree so much with that of the community. However, most assembly members (90%) feel they are doing better than the constituents (27.66%) think about them. Discussions with various community focal groups also indicated that assemblymen/women, particularly those residing within or close to their

electoral areas most often ha, often had frequent interaction with the people and, therefore, were informed about the MA's activities. "Assemblymen/women usually desired to perform their duties to gain their people's trust and conficidence people's desire is attributable to the fact that the position of the assemblyman/woman is becoming increasingly competitive, so substantive assemblymen/women want to get re-elected in subsequent elections.

3.1.2 Regularity of Meetings between MA Members and Constituents

The study further sought how the people participated in the MA's decision-making process through meetings with their Assemblymen/women. As a conscious strategy to ensure that the local people participate in the MA decision-making process, assemblymen/women have it as a duty to meet with their people before and after each MA meeting to share their development concerns as well as get them to know what actions the MA is taken to solve their problem. Furthermore, section 18 of the Local Governance Act, 2016 (Act 936) and the Model Standing Orders for Assemblies issued by the Minister of Local Government and Rural Development provide that Municipal assemblies are to meet at least three times a year, excluding the Inaugural meeting (Local Governance Act, 2016, Act 936). Therefore, it stands to reason that the assemblyman/woman who will afford their people the opportunity to participate effectively in the MA's decision-making process will have to meet with the people not less than six times a year. The findings of a survey of 40 assemblymen/women are presented in Table 2.

Out of the 40 assemblymen/women interviewed, the majority, making up 70%, could meet with their constituents only once or twice officially in a year. It can be inferred from these findings that most of these assemblymen/women cannot meet with the electorates before and after every MA meeting. This re-affirms the earlier results that, in most cases, MA members cannot meet the requirement that they meet their constituents before and after MA meetings which were attributed to logistical problems (Aye, 2003). Those who said they could meet more than twice a year were only three (3), representing 21.21 per cent of the total respondents. Seven individuals indicated they could meet with the people as often as necessary.

Table 2: Frequency of MA meetings with Assembly Members

Frequency of Meetings	Number of Respondents	Per cent (%)
Once a year	11	33.33
Twice a year	12	36.36
More than Twice a Year	3	9.09
As Many Times as it Is Necessary	7	21.21
Total	40	100

Source: Field Data, 2023

Discussants on the issue believe that the fact that assembly membership is widely seen and rightly used by some people as an entry point to national political leadership makes it attractive to the influential elites in the society. Unfortunately, most of these people easily win the election with the promise of using their influence to bring development to the people. The major challenge they face is keeping 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 their duties.

Assemblymen, however, believe their most significant problem with having regular contact with their electoral areas is the lack of financial support from the MA or central government. They think if they were equally given some consent for MPs, they would have done better in carrying out their responsibilities to their electorates.

3.1.3 Community Inputs into the Municipal Planning Process

The Local Governance Act, 2016 (Act 936), through the guidelines provided by the National Development Planning Commission (NDPC) for the preparation of District Medium-Term Development Plans (DMTDPs), offer yet another critical opportunity for the local people to participate in very crucial decisions of the Municipal assembly directly. The guidelines require collecting disaggregated data in consultation with relevant stakeholders, including traditional institutions, Civil Society Organizations (CSO), sub-Municipal councils, and communities and holding periodic public hearings to build consensus on issues (NDPC, 2006). In essence, Municipal Planning Authorities must consider the views expressed at the hearing before adopting Municipal development plan. To ensure compliance, it is further required that members of the Municipal Assembly and sub-Municipal councils take part in the final adoption of the DMTDP.

Suppose this procedure is given practical meaning in planning development at the Municipal level. In that case, the plans will reflect the needs and aspirations of the local people who are not only beneficiaries but also are affected by the story. Therefore, 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 MA. Respondents were therefore asked to indicate if they have ever attended a publisher they could contribute to the planning process. It revealed that the majority of about 75% of the respondents had never attended a public hearing session. One could reason that these people were probably unwilling to participate, even though they had the opportunity. Therefore, the question was whether those who never attended would participate in such hearings if given a chance.

The majority of 76 respondents (80%) out of the 94 who responded said they were willing to attend if they were given the opportunity. The 20 per cent who said they would not participate provided reasons other than lack of interest. These included the doubt in their ability to make any meaningful contribution to the process and the belief that their assembly member understands all their development needs and should be able to make them known to the MA. In-depth interviews with the Municipal planning officers confirmed that the problem is not so much the local people not having an interest in attending but that many people may never have the opportunity to participate in these hearings. Therefore, 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 could express their opinions about the draft plans, they were asked if there was an opportunity for them to contribute to the draft plans presented during the forum. Out of the 94 respondents, a large percentage, 76, admitted that there was room for them to express their opinions.

3.1.4 Participation in Community Projects

The decentralisation policy does not only promote grassroots participation from the standpoint of planning but also implementation, monitoring, and delivery of services through the Area/Zonal Councils and Unit Committees (Kendie & Mensah, 2008). In examining the promotion of effective participation by the MA, it is very much appropriate to look at the people's level of involvement in a particular community project execution and their knowledge of the details of projects being executed or that thaves ju has been completed within the community. Lack of understanding of such vital information as the cost of the project, the implementation agency, and specification, among others, can be rightly understood as ineffective or not participation. Though everyone in the community may not be directly involved in the process, the assemblyman/woman who represents the people and whose duty 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 Project (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, and agriculture, among others; the Municipal engineer and the Municipal planning officer. The community's concerns about such projects were addressed through their representatives. Apart from that, it was also noticed that where a project was going to a district, 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 completed mainly were handed over to the community in an elaborate ceremony where many

other stakeholders were present. According to the Municipal planning officer, the aim of handing over to the community is to demonstrate that such facilities belong to the community they have to take ownership of after their completion.

However, it was noticed that most of the local community got content with the news of a project to be cited in their community but did not take an 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 asked to indicate if some of these details were known to them. The results give more credence to what had been said by the chiefs and others. In all, 76 respondents out of the 94 surveyed acknowledged that their communities had received or are receiving some development project, as indicated in Table 3.

Table 3: Knowledge of Community Project Details

Project Details	Number of Respondents	Responses			
		Yes	Per cent (%)	No	Percent (%)
Cost of Projects	76	5	6.58	71	93.42
Completion Schedule	76	5	6.58	71	93.42
Specifications	76	5	6.58	71	93.42
Contractors	76	3	3.95	73	96.05
Funding Agency	76	5	6.58	71	93.42

Source: Field Data, 2023

The table provides more evidence that most of the respondents did not know most of the project details. In all the points mentioned, fewer than half of the respondents did not know them. For instance, only 6.58% of the respondents said they knew the specifications of their community projects. Also, a small percentage of 6.58% knew their community projects' completion time. The majority, made up of 93.42%, did not have this knowledge.

3.2 Constraints of Promoting Effective Participation in Local Governance

Effective participation of local people undoubtedly is desirable in local governance not only because it can produce good outcomes but also because it is one critical value of good governance. Unfortunately, however, many constraining factors act against its achievement in Ghana.

3.2.1 Perception of Local People on Constraints to Participation

During the fieldwork, it came out that the people blamed their inability to participate effectively on several constraints detailed in Table 4.

Table 4: Perception of Constraints on Participation by Community People

Description of Constraints	Details of Responses			
	Yes		No	
	Number	Percent (%)	Number	Percent (%)
Lack of Interest	6	7.89	70	92.11
Lack of Information	63	82.89	13	17.11
Low incentives	44	57.89	32	42.11
Lack of trust for MA officials	26	34.21	50	65.79
Lack of Formal Education	39	51.32	37	48.68
Inadequate skills: communication, negotiation etc	27	35.53	49	64.47
Low Socio-Economic Status	38	50.00	38	50.00

Source: Field Data, 2023

From the table, it is clear that the feelings about the type of constraint individuals are confronted with are varied and mixed. They are mixed in that there was no total agreement on any issue, either as a constraint or not a participation constraint. What was evident is that there are essentially four issues widely perceived as problems with participation. One was the issue of lack of information to the local people. 82.89% of all respondents agreed that lack of knowledge does serve as a constraint to participation. The second issue was that more than half (51.32%) of the respondents perceived the lack of formal education among locals. The third was the lack of incentives, to which 57.89% of the respondents also admitted that it is a constraint to participation. This agrees very much with United Nations (2008) report, which asserts that where there is an incentive gap, it serves as a barrier to participation. Finally, inadequate skills were also seen by 35.53% of respondents as a barrier to participation. The remaining 49%, however, said that was not a constraint. Somewhat contrary to Ayee (2000), however, the issue of lack of interest among people was seen by 70% of respondents as not a problem, as indicated in the table. Other matters mentioned, which were not considered constraints by many respondents, were a lack of trust for MA officials and the people's low socio-economic status. Only 34.21% and 50%, respectively, said these were constraints to participation.

Discussions with other opinion leaders also confirmed some of these issues as challenges to effective participation. For instance, the most significant problem, in the estimation of a chief, was that some of the assemblymen and women chose to deal with only a few 'favourite individuals' of theirs in the electoral areas to neglect the majority of the people. "In that circumstance, how will you expect to get information about development from the Municipal assembly if you are not among those 'favourite individuals' they have?" He asked. The lack of formal education among most people, they believe, was virtually the root cause of all other problems with their level of participation. The lack of formal education breeds ignorance on many issues, including one's roles, responsibilities, and even sometimes one's rights; MA officials could always explore it to their advantage. To paraphrase a point made by one member of the discussion groups, modern society is becoming increasingly literate; for that matter, if 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.

3.2.2 Perception of MA Officials on Constraints to Participation.

Like the local people, the 40 assemblymen/women interviewed also had mixed 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 the majority disagreed with the local people. Nevertheless, the majority agreed with the local people that lack of information; lack of formal education, low incentives, and lack of skills constrain participation in local governance decisions. A majority of 72.73%, among all the four issues which the majority indicated as constraints, was recorded on the issue of low or lack of incentives. The least, constituting 15.15%, was also recorded regarding inadequate skills. Contrary to the local community, however, 63.64% of assemblymen/women said lacking trust in MA officials is also a problem.

Table 5: MA Officials' Perception of Constraints on Participation

Description of Constraints	Details of Responses			
	Yes		No	
	Number	Percent (%)	Number	Percent (%)
Lack of Interest	6	18.18	27	81.82
Lack of Information	21	63.64	12	36.36
Low incentives	24	72.73	9	27.27
Lack of trust for MA officials	5	15.15	28	84.85
Lack of Formal Education	14	42.42	19	57.58

Inadequate skills: communication, negotiation etc	12	36.36	21	63.64
Low Socio-Economic Status	17	51.52	16	48.48

Source: Field Data, 2023

Municipal planning officers concluded that lack of incentives, particularly for assemblymen/women, was the most severe constraint in promoting participation. As one of them put it, even the poor attitude of assemblymen and women towards their duties to community members and the Municipal assembly is all attributable to the problem of lack of incentives. For example, the daily sitting allowance one pays an assembly member is sixty Ghana Cedis (Gh¢ 60, equivalent to about US\$5). Considering such an amount, it does not motivate an assembly member regularly to attend Municipal assembly sittings, much less to talk about collating views from the people before assembly sittings and going back to give feedback after the meetings. They also believe that, so far as the power to appoint and dismiss the political heads of the Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assembly- MMDCEs- 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 more accountable and loyal to the president and their political parties than just the local people; they may not attach importance to widespread participation in decision-making.

3.3 Suggested Strategies for Improving Participation

Table 6 summarises respondents' suggestions for enhancing local people's participation in MA activities. Each respondent was asked to state their views on critical strategies that could be adopted to improve local participation in local governance decision-making. A total of 178 suggestions were made by 82 out of the 94 respondents. Recommendations 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 to function effectively. In addition, there was a suggestion that local people should demand more accountability from the MA, and that will require local communities to become more interested in what their MAs do and regularly demand the MAs to report to them how much resources are available to the Municipality and how they are used for the Municipality's development.

Again, the need for vibrant civil society organisations (CSOs) that will engage with MAs to ensure the participation of local people is an action that demands civil society to take action. Most of the suggestions, however, need the attention of central and local governments. The issues of provision of incentives to motivate people to participate; making the unit committees system functional; making formal education more accessible; carrying out more education on the functions of MAs; organising regular forums on the assembly's activities; and the election of MCEs, as suggested by the respondents demand that government will have to take appropriate actions by providing the necessary funding and policy framework to address them. The responses are summarised in Table 6 below:

Table 6: Recommendations by Respondents to enhance participation

S/N	Recommendation	No. of respondents	Percent (%)
1	The Municipal Assembly should motivate Assembly members and unit committee members to work. Unit Committee members should be recognised by inaugurating and given orientation to better understand their specific roles as representatives of their units and issued with ID Cards and incentives such as motorbikes, fuel, ex-gratia, hampers during festive seasons (Christmas, New Year, Ramadan etc.). In addition, assembly members and unit committees should be kept on monthly salary.	22	20.95
2	The MA should take timely action on the decision(s)/resolution(s) taken at general assembly meetings. Timely execution of a project to curtail existing perception that the Municipal Assembly officials and Assembly members are liars and other misconceptions.	5	4.76

3	The Need for close collaboration (in the form of engagements/frequent meetings) between Assembly members and unit committee members. Assembly members should be financially resourced to organise meetings with the unit committee and community members. In addition, unit committee members should be invited to participate in general assembly meetings.	12	11.43
4	The MA should provide more infrastructure facilities such as water, electricity, street lights on principal streets, classroom blocks, road networks and speed ramps/humps on roads, information centres, etc. should be provided to communities in need etc.	10	9.52
5	The MA should upscale popular participation, participatory planning (need for proper needs assessment), social accountability and effective communication via public/stakeholder engagements and sensitisations such as town hall meetings, durbars, radio discussions etc. In addition, women should be empowered to ensure participation.	37	35.24
6	The MA should intensify supervision, monitoring and evaluation with special recognition of the role of the unit committee members. In addition, teachers should be effectively supervised.	4	3.81
7	The MCE/MP should intensify citizen engagement, especially in rural and remote communities.	5	4.76
8	A Police Station should be established at Bakpaba to intensify security responsiveness to possible disturbances	2	1.9
9	The MA should improve and implement revenue mobilisation strategies and the need for rotation of revenue collectors. Politicians' selfish and personal interference in revenue collection incapacitates supervisors in sanctioning revenue collectors. A revenue task force should be constituted in various markets.	3	2.86
10	The MA should make Municipal sub-structures/zonal councils functional. Ceded revenue should be of ratio 50:50 for Municipal sub-structures and MA. Office Accommodation for zonal councils/Municipal sub-structures should be provided and furnished, and meetings regularly organised.	5	4.76
		105	

Perhaps, the understanding one gets from this set of recommendations places so much emphasis on things the government needs to do that the respondents see central and local governments as having a more significant role to play in improving local participation, even though they acknowledged that as citizens they also have a part to play to the ensure deepening of decentralisation and participation.

4.0 CONCLUSION

From the above, participation in the MAs can best be described as tokenism on the Arnstein (1969) ladder of participation. Therefore, more sensitisation of the local people to be interested in MA activities and get them involved is needed.

Impediments to local people's participation included the lack of remuneration for Assembly persons, the appointment and non-election of the Municipal Chief Executives and 30% of Assembly members. In addition, local people's civic awareness is poor, and many citizens are not keen on the Municipal assembly's activities.

The study recommends structurally that all key Municipality officers, including the Municipal Chief Executive and all Assembly members, be elected by universal adult suffrage. Technical expertise needed by the Municipality could then be contracted transparently to support the Municipal assembly. In addition,

area councils need to be kept as it is the basis of participatory planning and development under the MA concept.

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