



NOPOOR POLICY BRIEF



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INVOLVEMENT OF CITIZENS IN POLICY MAKING AT THE LOCAL LEVEL IN GHANA: AUTHENTIC OR SUPERFICIAL?

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Citizen's voices are very crucial in democratic and developmental processes. In Ghana, this has been made possible through the decentralization process introduced in the 1980s, which attempts to create space for citizen participation in decision-making process. The policy brief brings out the polarity between implementers of local governance system and the citizens who are been served on the availability of such spaces and effectiveness of the decentralized structure in creating space for participation and in meeting the needs of the people.

INTRODUCTION

In Ghana, the need to create space for citizen participation in decision-making was initiated through decentralization process over three decades ago with the Provisional National Defense Council Law (PNDC Law) 207 in 1988 giving it the necessary legal backing. The 1993 Local Government Act (Act 462) replaced PNDC Law 207. The law, Act 462, reinforced the decentralization provision of the 1992 Fourth Republican Constitution, which states:

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“The state shall take appropriate measures to make democracy a reality by decentralizing the administrative and financial machinery of government to the regions and the districts and by affording all possible opportunities to the people to participate in decision making at every level in national life and in government”.

The Act 462 also led to the creation of various decentralized structures, such as the Regional Coordinating Council (RCC), Metropolitan or Municipal or District Assemblies (MMDAs) and Unit Committees to aid holistic approach to decentralization. Like the Constitution, some provisions of Act 462 also placed citizens’ participation in local governance at the center of local development efforts to ensure that citizen views are incorporated into development agendas, policies and programs and also, the public sector becomes efficient, accountable and responsive to the needs of citizen.

Ghana’s decentralization program has been touted as a viable option for ensuring popular participation in local decision-making and opportunity for local folks to apply their knowledge to address local development challenges at local levels. In as much as the legal, policy and institutional frameworks permit citizens’ participation in local governance, the extent to which these frameworks have been operationalize at the local level for effective participation in decision-making remain a challenge. Certainly, the degree to which citizens themselves take advantage of these opportunities also remain a challenge.

This policy brief draws from a study to explore how effective the policy space and structures provided by the 1992 Ghana Constitution and Local Government Act (Act 462) have effectively been utilized by local authority decision-makers and citizens at the grassroots. The brief establishes that the political space accorded citizens to participate in local level development decision-making processes have not been effectively operationalized to generate the expected benefits.

EVIDENCE AND ANALYSIS

- ***Elected members, technocrats and citizens’ perception of the space for participation in local governance***

Evidence from the focus group discussions (FGDs)² point to a divergence in opinions of Assembly representatives and citizens’ views regarding the effectiveness of those political spaces. Most of the elected members and technocrats of the Assemblies demonstrated sound knowledge of various regulations on policy space for citizen consultation and the rationale for such provisions. They made references to relevant sections of the 1993 Local Government Act, (Act 462), which spells out the duties of an Assembly member, particularly, those that require that they maintain close contact with people in their electoral area; consult with people on issues to be discussed at the Assembly’s meetings and collate their views, opinions and proposals before such meetings; and report to electorates the general decisions arrived at meetings of the Assembly and its Executive Committee as well as actions taken with respect to those decisions.

The elected local representatives, together with the technocrats, argued that though challenges exist, the local governance system has been effective in creating space for citizens, particularly the poor and vulnerable in decision-making at the local level citing the processes for the preparation and implementation of the District Medium Term Development Term Plan (DMTDP), which involve the collation of citizens’ views and needs through the Assemblies’ sub-committees, Assembly members, District radio stations, durbar, and town hall meetings. They further alluded to spaces provided for

² Focus group discussions were held with sections of District Assembly Technocrats, Assembly Members, representatives of CSOs and citizen groups in Jaman North District in the Brong Ahafo Region, Saboba District in the Northern Region and Ahanta West District in the Western Region.

citizens to participate at the implementation stage citing Town Hall Meetings where citizens are able to determine/evaluate the status of implementation of a project or policy despite the low participation by citizens at times.

Representatives of citizen groups involved in the FGDs disagreed with the assertion of assembly members and technocrats. They accused local government bodies and officials of not demonstrating enough commitment towards grassroots involvement in local level decision making and having failed to create effective opportunities for real citizen-government engagement as required by the constitution and Act 462.

Generally, citizens think central government, with tacit support of District Officials has a blueprint of what projects or programs it intends implementing across the country, which come in the mould of development plan guidelines. Citizens say they are hardly informed of such plans, never given the opportunity to make input or be part of the implementation processes. More worrying is citizens position that even their elected representatives are only called upon to endorse the blueprint and its accompanying budget. In fact, citizen groups described efforts to supposedly offer citizens space in local development processes as nothing but camouflage because local community needs are made subservient to national priorities.

“Our District Assembly assumes that they already know our problems and for that matter they do not see the need to interact with us. They don’t meet us. How then can they pick our views on policies and programs and articulate our needs and concerns and report back to us on issues that concern us”. A Citizen’s view

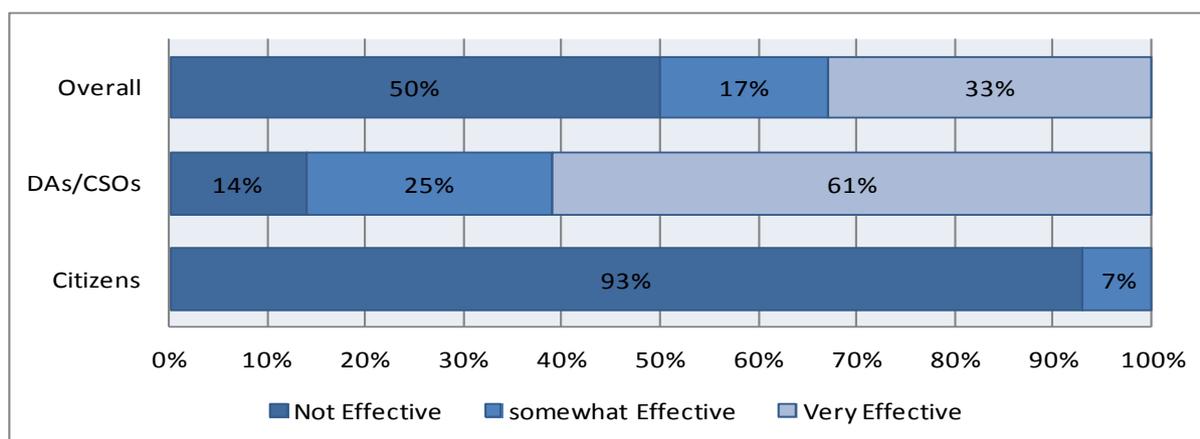
The views of representatives of citizen groups corroborated similar findings of a CDD-Ghana survey on citizen participation in local governance in 2012 where at least six in every ten respondents said their elected representatives never (a) gathered their opinion on issues slated for discussions at Assembly meetings(66%); (b) never informed grassroots about efforts being made to address their concerns (66%); (c) never informed citizens about development projects to be undertaken in their communities (65%); and (d) never gathered citizens’ views on issues to be discussed by the Assemblies (63%).

Large majorities also reported that the Assemblies do not meet with the grassroots to build consensus on how they intend to allocate internally generated funds (75%), the District Development Facility (75%) and the District Assembly Common Fund (74%) to projects. Similarly, at least seven in ten respondents (74%) said the Assemblies do not consult citizens to build consensus on proposed local rates and taxes; and budgets for development projects (72%). Indeed, trend data from Ghana Afrobarometer surveys show that popular evaluation of elected local leaders (i.e. Assembly representatives) worsened. Respondents who do not approve the way their elected assembly members performed their jobs increased from 26% in 1999 to as much as 58% in 2014.

- ***Ineffectiveness of governance structures in meeting the needs of the ‘poor’***

Similar to the observed non-convergence in opinions above, there is some level of dissonance in the views of Assembly members and citizens on the performance of the District Assemblies. Cumulatively, of the 66 participants representing various groups that took part in the FGDs, 50% (including 33% very effective) assessed the current local governance structures as having been effective in meeting the needs of citizens, particularly the poor, while 50% emphatically said they have not been effective. The split in effectiveness rating masks some differences in opinions held by the different categories of participants. For instance, while 61% of District Assemblies and civil society organizations (CSOs) participants said local governance structures have been effective in meeting the needs of citizens, an absolute majority of participants from citizen groups (93%) think otherwise (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Effectiveness of local governance structures in meeting the needs of the poor



Source: CDD-Ghana focus group discussions with stakeholders in selected districts.

According to the FGD participants, logistic constraints facing the Assemblies; Assembly members lack of relevant skills to organize interactive sessions with their constituents; the lack of incentives for Assembly and Unit Committees Members to organize meetings with their constituents, and Assembly and Unit Committee members expectation financial remuneration for responsibilities they accepted to discharge on voluntary basis are among the factors responsible for the low utilization of policy spaces available for citizens' participation in local governance. Officials of the Assemblies also made reference to the low community appreciation of the duties of the Assemblies and the apathy on the part of citizens/communities where local governance matters as constraining factors limiting the Assemblies' effectiveness in engaging fully with the people.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Evidence from the analysis shows that the Constitution and the provisions in Act 462 that grant citizens' policy space to participate in local level development decision-making processes have not been effectively operationalized to generate the expected benefits. To address the observed gaps in local participation this paper recommends the following:

1. There should be an increase in civic rights and responsibility education across the country to enlighten citizens to understand that a) their active engagement with their local government bodies is the key to the development outcomes they so desire to see in their communities and b), how they can exact transparency and accountability from duty bearers at the local level.
2. There is the need to strengthen the District Assembly and its sub structures through the provision of adequate and timely resources and skills needed for the functioning of these structures. There is the need for political commitment to strengthen the Assemblies to be able to monitor and assess the activities of the sub-structures. The strengthening of skills of especially the Assembly Members in engaging citizens for inputs and feedback will enhance their engagement with citizens
3. There may be the need to introduce some form of remuneration system for Assembly Members and Members of the Unit Committee. The system of remunerations should be based on the number of engagements Assembly Members have with citizens. The remuneration system will encourage Assembly Members to engage their citizens of their electoral are for their inputs into the decision-making process and give feedback on assembly proceedings.

RESEARCH PARAMETERS

Data collected for the study was through Focus Group Discussion (FGDs) with representatives drawn from civil society organizations, citizen groups, technocrats as well as elected and appointed members of District Assemblies in three local government areas (districts) located in three regions in Ghana. In each district, two sessions of FGDs were held. Overall, there were 66 participants who participated in the FGDs. The analysis in this paper also draws on previous studies carried out by the Ghana Center for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana), notably the survey on citizens participation in local governance in 2012 covering 17 districts in all 10 regions in Ghana which was funded by the European Union Delegation in Ghana; and the Ghana Afrobarometer surveys (1999 to 2014), particularly the findings on popular assessment on the performance of elected local government officials.

FURTHER READINGS

Mavis Zupork Dome, Awal Mohammed, & Franklin Oduro (Forth coming, 2017), Involvement of Citizen in policy making at local level: Authentic or superficial.

Ayee, J.R.A. (2003), Decentralization and Local Governance: The Ghanaian Experience, in Nicholas Amponsah & Kwame Boafo-Arthur (eds.) *Local Government in Ghana, Grassroots Participation in the 2002 local Government Elections*, Livog Limited, Accra.

Institute of Local Government Service, A Guide to District Assemblies in Ghana.

The Constitution of the Republic of Ghana 1992, Chapter 6: The directive Principles of the State Policy.

PROJECT IDENTITY

PROJECT NAME	NOPOOR – Enhancing Knowledge for Renewed Policies against Poverty
COORDINATOR	Institut de Recherche pour le Développement, Paris, France
CONSORTIUM	CDD The Ghana Center for Democratic Development – Accra, Ghana CDE Centre for Development Economics – Delhi, India CNRS (India Unit) Centre de Sciences Humaines – New Delhi, India CRES Consortium pour la Recherche Économique et Sociale – Dakar, Senegal GIGA German Institute of Global and Area Studies – Hamburg, Germany GRADE Grupo de Análisis para el Desarrollo – Lima, Peru IfW Kiel Institute for the World Economy – Kiel, Germany IRD Institut de Recherche pour le Développement – Paris, France ITESM Instituto Tecnológico y de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey – Monterrey, Mexico LISER Luxemburg Institute of Socio-Economic Research – Esch-sur-Alzette, Luxemburg OIKODROM - The Vienna Institute for Urban Sustainability – Vienna, Austria UA-CEE Université d'Antananarivo – Antananarivo, Madagascar UAM Universidad Autónoma de Madrid – Madrid, Spain UCHILE Universidad de Chile – Santiago de Chile, Chile UCT–SALDRU University of Cape Town – Cape Town, South Africa UFRJ Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro – Rio de Janeiro, Brazil UNAMUR Université de Namur – Namur, Belgium UOXF-CSAE University of Oxford, Centre for the Study of African Economies – Oxford, United Kingdom VASS Vietnamese Academy of Social Sciences – Hanoi, Vietnam
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